

# The Phenomenology and Antecedents of Verbal Auditory Hallucinations in Everyday Life after First Episode Psychosis: A Contemporaneous Diary Study

Ms. Emily Hickson<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Lia Kvavilashvili<sup>2</sup>, Dr. Andrew Laughland<sup>2</sup>, Ms. Aslihan Apat<sup>1</sup>, Ms. Alexandra Keene<sup>1</sup>, Ms. Monica Leverton<sup>1</sup>, Mr. Marvin Iroegbu<sup>1</sup>, Ms. Saira Mohammed<sup>1</sup>, Ms. Natasha Lyons<sup>1</sup> & Dr. David Raune<sup>1\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Harrow & Hillingdon Early Intervention in Psychosis Service, CNWL <sup>2</sup>Department of Psychology, University of Hertfordshire

## INTRODUCTION

- Much is still unknown about Verbal Auditory Hallucinations ('Voices') content in everyday life
- Voices are not usually active all the time, yet little is known about what actually triggers them day to day
- Studies investigating Voice phenomenology have almost always used *retrospective* methods, so may be more prone to measurement error
- The present study measured Voices contemporaneously in everyday life
- Aiming to explore:
  - 1) Phenomenological aspects of Voices
  - 2) Antecedents of Voices

## METHOD

- 18 male and 7 female participants aged 19-35 years ( $M=25$ ,  $SD=5$ ) who were diagnosed with psychotic spectrum disorders and were experiencing Voices at the time of the study were recruited
- Participants were given a paper diary to record their Voices for a one week period. Participants recorded aspects of the Voice experience such as content, antecedent cognitive load, cognitive focus, emotional load, and the surrounding situation
- Participants attended three sessions, one week apart, to complete the Psychotic Symptom Rating Scale (PSYRATS-Voices), which measures the frequency and phenomenological aspects of hallucinatory experiences, and the Hospital Anxiety and Depression scale (HADS). Participants also completed debriefing questionnaire about their experience of keeping diary
- 2 researchers examined reported voice content and identified themes and emotional valence of Voices
- Frequencies of reported triggers examined

When did you hear a Voice? Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_ AM/PM  
When did you record it here? Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_ AM/PM  
Describe the content of the voice in exact words used, tone of voice and identity:

Was the Voice triggered by something? (tick)  
 In your thoughts  In your environment  There was no trigger

If a trigger, what was it?

Where were you and what were you doing when you heard the Voice?

How mentally demanding/challenging was this activity for you? (tick one)  
 Very easy  Quite easy  Neither easy nor difficult  Quite difficult  Very difficult

How mentally focused were you on this activity? (tick one)  
 Thinking about something else during the activity  Slightly focused  Moderately focused  Very mentally focused  Totally mentally focused on the activity

What was your emotional state immediately before the voice? (tick one)  
 happy  sad  angry  anxious  disgusted  numb  No emotion

Have you recently thought about/seen/heard etc. the content of your voice?  
Yes / No (circle one)

If yes, specify when and where and what the content was:

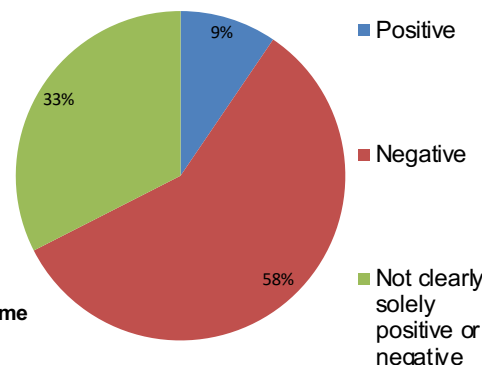
The paper diary. Participants filled in one page per Voice

## PRELIMINARY RESULTS

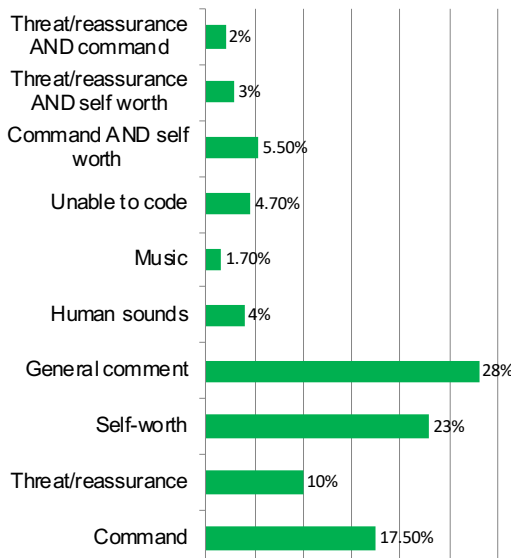
### 1) PHENOMENOLOGY

- Large variability among participants in terms of the number of recorded entries ( $M = 11$ ,  $SD = 9$ , range 1 – 40 across the one week), as well as the content of Voices and the conditions and antecedents of their occurrence
- The majority of participants had Voices with negative content, manifesting as commands or comments, from unfamiliar male voices
- General comments mostly neither positive nor negatively emotionally valenced, all other categories predominantly negatively valenced

### Emotional Valence of Voices



### Percentage of voices containing theme



### 2) ANTECEDENTS

- Negative emotions
- Majority of Voices were also reported at home, and occasionally while travelling
- **Antecedent categories were provided for 294 out of 298 reported voices**
  - On 48% ( $N=142$ ) participants stated that there was no trigger
  - On 26% ( $N=76$ ) participants reported a trigger in their thoughts
  - On 24% ( $N=72$ ) participants reported a trigger in their external environment
- **Nature of ongoing activities at time of Voice**
  - In 75% of cases participants were engaged in attentionally undemanding activities, requiring low to medium levels of concentration

## DISCUSSION

- Data on the triggers to Voices can inform early intervention CBT to reduce Voice frequency and improve subjective belief of control over the Voices in everyday life
- Data on the content of Voices can inform empathic CBT attempts to reduce the negative content and associated distress dimensions

### Findings consistent with previous research:

- Voices preceded by cognitively undemanding activities and negative emotions (Bernsten, 1998; Ball & Little, 2006; Delespaul & Van Os, 2002)
- Voice content primarily negative, predominantly comments or commands (McCarthy-Jones et al., 2012; 2014)
- Majority of voices male (Nayani & David 1993; Corstens & Longden, 2013; & McCarthy-Jones et al., 2014)

### Novel findings:

- Majority of voices unfamiliar
- Location voices heard in – majority reported at home
- Diary method informative about phenomenology and triggers of Voices and did not cause any negative effects
- The fact that in 48% of cases participants could not specify a trigger is very interesting and makes them more similar to semantic mind pops than autobiographical memories or trauma memories
- In contrast, findings concerning attentional demand of activities or how focused participants were on the task at hand are in line with findings on involuntary autobiographical memories and mind wandering (Kvavilashvili & Mandler, 2004). It appears that performing attentionally demanding activities can reduce people's chances of experiencing Voices.

## CONCLUSION

- In everyday life after first episode psychosis Voices have important commonalities in content and are anteceded by emotional, locational, and cognitive factors.
- This information can be used for early intervention CBT to target triggers and Voice content in order to reduce voice frequency and associated negative consequences.
- This feasibility study shows that diary method can be used for larger scale studies in the future

Scan QR for digital copy:



View PDF

Scan QR for references:



View PDF



\*Contact details:

Dr David Raune

david.raune@nhs.net

IRAS: 137258

: 07851428916



Promoting the best in research