



PhD student:

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Research project:

The paranoid dimension in a rehabilitation perspective

Abstract:

Paranoia, suspiciousness, and distrust are transdiagnostic phenomena that exist along a dimensional continuum, ranging from subclinical interpersonal mistrust to fully developed persecutory delusions. This PhD project aims to investigate the Paranoia, Suspiciousness and Distrust Continuum (PSMD), with a dual focus: (1) to examine the associations between PSMD symptoms, personal functioning, cognitive performance, and social factors; and (2) to identify potential rehabilitation targets within a public mental health framework.

The project is structured in three phases: (1) a systematic review of the literature using qualitative methodologies to identify how the experience of paranoid ideation (examined along the continuum from the general population to clinical populations) is represented, perceived, and impacts individual functioning; (2) an observational online study in the general Italian population, aimed at developing and validating the Ferrara Worry Questionnaire, a novel multidimensional screening tool for PSMD; and (3) a clinical study involving patients recruited from community and institutional mental health services, designed to examine the interaction between PSMD symptoms, cognitive variables (including neurocognitive performance), and social determinants (such as deprivation, social cohesion, family structure, and substance use history).

The statistical approach includes exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis, linear and Bayesian multivariate regression models, and cluster analysis to identify distinct symptom and functioning profiles. Artificial intelligence methods—specifically supervised and unsupervised machine learning techniques—will be applied to support the classification of clinical profiles and to predict individual functioning based on cognitive and social predictors.

Expected outcomes include the identification of clinically meaningful subgroups with varying PSMD profiles and associated patterns of functioning and vulnerability. In particular, the project aims to determine which social factors (e.g., deprivation, social isolation, family instability) are correlated with or predictive of PSMD symptoms and functional impairment in both general and clinical populations. Furthermore, by analyzing the joint contribution of cognitive and social variables, the project will explore their independent and interactive predictive value for individual outcomes. These findings are expected to inform the development of sensitive assessment tools and personalized rehabilitation pathways, with potential implications for early intervention, prevention strategies, and community-based mental health care.