Using the Method of Loci to improve episodic memory in psychosis: a feasibility study
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Learning Goal:
To investigate the effectiveness and feasibility of the Method of Loci (MoL) for improving episodic memory in psychosis.

Abstract Text:
Episodic memory (EM) is severely impaired in psychosis, compromising daily living activities and psychosocial functioning. Despite being one of the strongest predictors of psychosocial functioning, EM performance shows only small to moderate improvement following psychosocial interventions. The use of elaborative encoding strategies results in a richer memory-trace that increases recall when compared to shallow encoding strategies or simple repetition. However, people with psychosis tend not to spontaneously generate efficient strategies to facilitate recall. When trained in these, they tend to show better outcomes in EM performance.

We investigated the effectiveness and feasibility of a visuospatial mnemonic strategy, the method of Loci (MoL), for improving EM in psychosis. MoL uses mental visualization to facilitate encoding of disparate pieces of information, by relying on the “mental” allocation of the items to be memorized in several places. Its efficacy and superiority over other mnemonics have been demonstrated in healthy subjects, older adults and depression; however, no study to date has evaluated MoL use in psychosis.

We investigated whether MoL could improve EM performance in psychosis. The intervention involved learning of two 20-item lists, MoL training, then learning of two new lists using MoL. Five psychosis patients completed the study. We found no significant effect of MoL on recall (MD = 1.1, SD= 3.1; t(4) = -0.77, p > .05). Participants reported difficulty remembering their loci or their loci order during the post-test. The complexity of MoL, along with its heavy reliance on working memory and mental visualization, might have hindered mastering the strategy, resulting in fatigue and consequent stagnation or decrease in EM performance during the post-test. Future research should investigate MoL’s efficacy across a range of cognitive capacity in psychosis and assess less complex strategies (e.g. unitization), which are effective in populations with similar severity of cognitive deficits as those found in psychosis.