

Steph Suddell

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Winner of the BAP Poster Prize

I am a second year PhD student in the School of Psychological Science at the University of Bristol, where my research is supervised by Profs Ian Penton-Voak and Marcus Munafò. Prior to studying at Bristol, I completed an undergraduate degree at the University of Southampton and an MSc in Cognitive Neuroscience at UCL. I have also previously been based at the Clinical Informatics Research Unit (University of Southampton), where I worked on projects concerning the development of digital healthcare technologies for the NHS.



My current research focusses on the role of cognitive biases in mood disorders. Specifically, I am investigating how individuals affected by anxiety and depression differ in their processing of social information, such as emotional facial expressions. I am particularly interested in whether we can use emotional processing as a target for intervention, in order to speed up recovery from mood disorders. I am using a range of methods to study this area, including experimental, observational and genetic techniques, in order to strengthen the evidence base of my findings.

The poster I presented at the BAP 2019 summer meeting displayed the initial findings from the epidemiological branch of my work. I have been very lucky to have access to the Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children (ALSPAC), a prospective birth cohort from the early 90s. ALSPAC has a wealth of behavioural and genetic data, and I investigated the relationship between mental health and three cognitive measures: working memory, impulsivity and emotion recognition, at the age of 24. We found evidence of small differences in cognitive functioning for individuals affected by mental illness. I am now following up this initial observational work with prospective and genetic analyses.

After my PhD I hope to continue a research career in the broad area of cognitive functioning in emotional disorders.