Similarities between emotional dysregulation in adults suffering from ADHD and bipolar patients

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Abstract

Background
Emotional dysregulation in subjects with attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is a topic of growing interest among clinicians and researchers. The present study aims at investigating components of emotional dysregulation in adults ADHD compared to subjects suffering from bipolar disorder (BD).

Methods
A total of 150 adults ADHD, 335 adults BD subjects and 48 controls were assessed using the Affective Lability Scale (ALS) and the Affect Intensity Measure (AIM), measuring respectively emotion lability and emotion responsiveness.

Results
ADHD and BD subjects scored significantly higher on the ALS compared to controls (p=0.0001). BD subjects scored above ADHD ones (3.07 (SD=0.66) vs. 2.30 (SD=0.68); p<0.0001). The average total scores achieved on the AIM were significantly different for the three groups (p=0.0001) with significantly higher scores for ADHD subjects compared to BD ones (3.74 (SD=0.59) vs. 3.56 (SD=0.69); p<0.0001).

Limitations
Suspected cases of ADHD in the BD and control groups were derived from the Wender Utah Rating Scale (WURS). This study is a retrospective one.

Conclusion
Our study thus highlights the importance of emotional dysregulation in adults suffering from ADHD, showing that they display higher emotional intensity than bipolar disorder subjects and controls. Although the current diagnostic criteria of ADHD do not contain an emotional dimension, a better recognition of the significance of emotional responsiveness in ADHD patients can improve the care afforded to these patients, beyond the inattentive and hyperactive/impulsive components.