The Association between Sleep and Theory of Mind in School Aged Children with ADHD

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Abstract

Theory of Mind (ToM) is defined as the ability to infer a range of internal mental states of others, including beliefs, intentions, desires, and emotions. These abilities are associated with children’s ability to socialize effectively with peers. ToM impairments are associated with peer rejection and psychiatric disorders such as Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). Previous studies have found poor sleep negatively impacts executive functioning (EF) and emotional information processing, which are essential for the effective use of ToM. Youth with ADHD have EF deficits and sleep problems. However, the relationship between sleep, executive functioning, and ToM in children with ADHD has not been studied. In this review, we propose that the poor social and interpersonal skills characterizing individuals with ADHD could be explained by the impact of poor sleep on the emotional and cognitive mechanisms underlying ToM.