Personality traits in adults with attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder and their unaffected first-degree relatives

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Abstract

Background
Attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) shows clear, albeit heterogeneous, cognitive dysfunctions. However, personality traits are not well understood in adults with ADHD, and it is unclear whether they are predisposing factors or phenotypical facets of the condition.

Aims
To assess whether personality traits of impulsivity, sensation seeking and sensitivity to punishment and reward are predisposing factors for ADHD or aspects of the clinical phenotype.

Method
Twenty adults with ADHD, 20 unaffected first-degree relatives and 20 controls completed rating scales assessing traits of impulsivity, sensation seeking and sensitivity to punishment/reward.

Results
Compared with relatives and controls, individuals with ADHD showed increased impulsive personality traits, were more susceptible to boredom and presented hypersensitivity to reward but normal sensitivity to punishment.

Conclusions
High impulsivity traits, heightened sensitivity to reward and boredom are associated with the phenotype of ADHD, rather than being predisposing factors, as these traits were not shared between ADHD probands and their relatives.