Towards operationalising internal distractibility (Mind Wandering) in adults with ADHD

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Abstract

To investigate whether specific symptoms of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) can help identify ADHD patients with mind wandering. Subjects were adults ages 18–55 of both sexes (n=41) who completed the Mind-Wandering Questionnaire (MWQ) and the ADHD module of the Schedule for Affective Disorders and Schizophrenia for School-Age Children Epidemiologic Version. We used Spearman’s rank correlation and Pearson’s $\chi^2$ analyses to examine associations between the ADHD module and the MWQ and receiver operator characteristic (ROC) analyses to evaluate the diagnostic efficiency of the ADHD module.

Out of the three ADHD domains, the inattentive ADHD scores had the strongest association with the MWQ (total: $r_s=0.34$, df=39, $p=0.03$; inattentive: $r_s=0.38$, df=39, $p=0.02$; Hyperactive: $r_s=0.17$, df=39, $p=0.28$). Correlation analyses between individual items on the ADHD module and the MWQ showed that two inattention items (“failure to pay attention to detail” and “trouble following instructions”) were positively associated with total scores on the MWQ ($p=0.02$). These two inattention items had the strongest association with the MWQ ($r_s=0.45$, df=38, $p=0.004$). ROC analyses showed that the combined score of the two significant inattention items had the highest efficiency (AUC=0.71) in classifying high-level mind wanderers as defined by scores greater than the median split on the MWQ. The combined score of the two inattention items best identified high-level mind wanderers.

Results suggest a way to operationalise mind wandering using the symptoms of ADHD.