The Function of Reward Sensitivity and Temporal Discounting in the Relationship between Risk and ADHD in Adults

Mairin R. Taylor, Joseph M. Boden, Julia J. Rucklidge, Richard R. Farmer

New Zealand Journal of Psychology Vol. 46, No. 1, April 2017

Objective:
To explore risk behaviours in adults with ADHD, testing the possible mediating role of reward sensitivity and temporal discounting.

Method:
66 adults (43 men, 23 women; 18-65 years) completed clinical interviews and self-report measures of ADHD symptoms, risk-taking behaviours/risky experiences and experimental measures of temporal discounting and reward sensitivity.

Results:
ADHD symptom severity in adults was significantly associated with self-reported lifetime histories of risk-taking behaviours, including alcohol abuse, nicotine abuse, illicit drug abuse, and perpetration of violence; as well as the experience of risky sexual situations and violence victimisation (all p values <0.05). The relationships between violence, nicotine use and ADHD symptom severity were significantly and differentially mediated by motivational variances (p values < .05), including temporal discounting and reward sensitivity.

Conclusions:
The results of this study suggest that motivational variances (reward sensitivity; temporal discounting) may provide a mechanism for understanding the greater risk of harm to adults with ADHD.