The relationship between ADHD traits and sensory sensitivity in the general population.

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Abstract

Preliminary studies in children and adults with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) report both hypo-responsiveness and hyper-responsiveness to sensory stimuli, as well as problems modulating sensory input. As it has been suggested that those with ADHD exist at the extreme end of a continuum of ADHD traits, which are also evident in the general population, we investigated the link between ADHD and sensory sensitivity in the general population. Two online questionnaires measuring ADHD traits and sensory responsivity across various sensory domains were administered to 234 participants. Results showed a highly significant positive correlation between the number of ADHD traits and the frequency of reported sensory processing problems. An increased number of sensory difficulties across all modalities were associated with the level of ADHD. Furthermore, ADHD traits predicted sensory difficulties and exploratory factor analysis revealed a factor that combined ADHD trait and sensory processing items. This is the first study to identify a positive relationship between sensory processing and ADHD traits in the general population. Our results suggest that sensory difficulties could be part of the ADHD phenotype.