Facial emotion recognition in children with or without Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder: Impact of comorbidity

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Abstract

Objectives
This study sought to assess facial emotion recognition deficit in children with Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and to test the hypothesis that it is increased by comorbid features.

Method
Forty children diagnosed with ADHD were compared with 40 typically developing children, all aged from 7 to 11 years old, on a computerized facial emotion recognition task (based on the Pictures of Facial Affect). Data from parents’ ratings of ADHD and comorbid symptoms (on the Conners’ Revised Parent Rating Scale) were also collected.

Results
Children with ADHD had significantly fewer correct answer scores than typically developing controls on the emotional task while they performed similarly on the control task. Recognition of sadness was especially impaired in children with ADHD. While ADHD symptoms were slightly related to facial emotion recognition deficit, oppositional symptoms were related to a decrease in the number of correct answers on sadness and surprise recognition.

Conclusion
Facial emotion recognition deficit in children with ADHD might be related to an impaired emotional process during childhood. Moreover, Oppositional Defiant Disorder seems to be a risk factor for difficulties in emotion recognition especially in children with ADHD.