Risky Behavior in Gambling Tasks in Individuals with ADHD – A Systematic Literature Review.

Groen Y, Gaastra GF, Lewis-Evans B, Tucha O

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Objective

The aim of this review was to gain insight into the relationship between Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and risky performance in gambling tasks and to identify any potential alternate explanatory factors.

Methods

PsycINFO, PubMed, and Web of Knowledge were searched for relevant literature comparing individuals with ADHD to normal controls (NCs) in relation to their risky performance on a gambling task. In total, fourteen studies in children/adolescents and eleven studies in adults were included in the review.

Results

Half of the studies looking at children/adolescents with ADHD found evidence that they run more risks on gambling tasks when compared to NCs. Only a minority of the studies on adults with ADHD reported aberrant risky behavior. The effect sizes ranged from small to large for both age groups and the outcome pattern did not differ between studies that applied an implicit or explicit gambling task. Two studies demonstrated that comorbid oppositional defiant disorder (ODD) and conduct disorder (CD) increased risky behavior in ADHD. Limited and/or inconsistent evidence was found that comorbid internalizing disorders (IDs), ADHD subtype, methylphenidate use, and different forms of reward influenced the outcomes.

Conclusion

The evidence for increased risky performance of individuals with ADHD on gambling tasks is mixed, but is stronger for children/adolescents with ADHD than for adults with ADHD, which may point to developmental changes in reward and/or penalty sensitivity or a publication bias for positive findings in children/adolescents. The literature suggests that comorbid ODD/CD is a risk factor in ADHD for increased risky behavior. Comorbid IDs, ADHD subtype, methylphenidate use, and the form of reward received may affect risky performance in gambling tasks; however, these factors need further examination. Finally, the implications of the findings for ADHD models and the ecological validity of gambling tasks are discussed.

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