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# Callous-Unemotional Traits, Proactive Aggression, and Treatment Outcomes of Aggressive Children with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder

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## Objective

Stimulant treatment improves impulse control among children with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Decreased aggression often accompanies stimulant pharmacotherapy, suggesting that impulsiveness is integral to their aggressive behavior. However, children with high callous-unemotional (CU) traits and proactive aggression may benefit less from ADHD pharmacotherapy because their aggressive behavior seems more purposeful and deliberate. This study's objective was to determine if pretreatment CU traits and proactive aggression affect treatment outcomes among aggressive children with ADHD receiving stimulant monotherapy.

## Method

We implemented a stimulant optimization protocol with 160 6- to 13-year-olds (mean [SD] age of 9.31 [2.02] years; 78.75% males) with ADHD, oppositional defiant or conduct disorder, and significant aggressive behavior. Family-focused behavioral intervention was provided concurrently. Primary outcome was the Retrospective Modified Overt Aggression Scale. The Antisocial Process Screening Device and the Aggression Scale, also

completed by parents, measured CU traits and proactive aggression, respectively. Analyses examined moderating effects of CU traits and proactive aggression on outcomes.

## Results

82 children (51%) experienced remission of aggressive behavior. Neither CU traits nor proactive aggression predicted remission (CU traits: odds ratio=0.94, 95% CI=0.80–1.11; proactive aggression, odds ratio=1.05, 95% CI=0.86–1.29). Children whose overall aggression remitted showed decreases in CU traits (effect size=-0.379, 95% CI=-0.60 to -0.16) and proactive aggression (effect size=-0.463, 95% CI=-0.69 to -0.23).

## Conclusions

Findings suggest that pretreatment CU traits and proactive aggression do not forecast worse outcomes for aggressive children with ADHD receiving optimized stimulant pharmacotherapy. With such treatment, CU traits and proactive aggression may decline alongside other behavioral improvements.

Clinical trial registration information— Medication Strategies for Treating Aggressive Behavior in Youth With Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder; <http://clinicaltrials.gov/>; NCT00228046; and Effectiveness of Combined Medication Treatment for Aggression in Children With Attention Deficit With Hyperactivity Disorder (The SPICY Study); <http://clinicaltrials.gov/>; NCT00794625.

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