Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

- A developmental disorder.
- Symptoms are characterized by inattention, impulsivity, and hyperactivity (American Psychiatric Association, 2000).
- Causes of the disorder have not yet been fully determined.
- Biological explanations are currently predominant in the etiological literature (Lahat et al., 2011; Masuo et al., 2012; Stergiakouli et al., 2012).
- Research has begun to investigate potential psychosocial contributions to the disorder (e.g., Halasz & Vance, 2002).
- Environmental factors can influence atypical development (Clarke et al., 2002; Sonuga-Barke & Balding, 1993).

ADHD and Attachment Styles

- Speculation that ADHD symptoms strongly correspond with insecure attachment styles (Clarke et al., 2002; Rochford, 2005).
- ADHD as a diagnosis cannot exist as a separate entity from a child’s attachment type (Erdman, 1998).

Attachment Styles

- Mary Ainsworth studied the quality of parent-child attachment relationships (e.g., Finzi-Dottan et al., 2006; Labavev, 2003).
- Categorized behavior into 2 broadly labeled groups
  1. Secure attachment
  2. Insecure attachment

Method

- A meta-analysis was conducted
- Literature search
  Database: PsycINFO, Medline, ERIC, and ProQuest Dissertations and Theses, Google Scholar
  Limits: English-language articles only
- Search results combined (k=155)
- Included (k = 41)
  - No direct measure of attachment: 19
  - Multiple publications: 20
  - Manuscript review and application of inclusion criteria
- Included (k = 18)
  - No direct measure of attachment: 7
  - Did not meet criteria for attachment style: 2
  - Full text not available: 2
  - Not an eligible comparison of outcomes presented: 3

Results

1. Based on seven different effect sizes, there was a moderate relationship between ADHD and insecure attachment (r = 0.37).
2. Seven different effect sizes established that the overall effect size for the relationship between ADHD and insecure attachment compared to individuals without ADHD was medium (d = 0.52).
3. For the comparison between Hyperactivity-Impulsive/Combined subtype of ADHD and Inattentive subtypes the effect was medium based on one effect size (d = 0.57).
4. Based on three effect sizes, individuals with ADHD have 5.64 times the odds as individuals without ADHD of having an insecure attachment.
5. Two effect sizes indicated that individuals with co-occurring conduct problems have 1.91 times the odds as individuals with ADHD only of having a higher rating of insecure attachment.

Discussion

- Majority of the studies included were unpublished reports.
- The evidence supports a connection between an insecure attachment and ADHD symptoms.
- Individuals with ADHD are much more likely to have an insecure attachment compared to individuals without ADHD.
- Individuals with co-occurring conduct problems are also more likely to have an insecure attachment compared to individuals with only ADHD.
- This result may suggest implementing a stronger emphasis on attachment-focused therapies to treat this population.
- Directions for future research
  - Explore possible differences in attachment insecurity between ADHD subtypes.

Research Questions

1. To what extent is ADHD and insecure attachment related?
2. Are individuals with ADHD more likely to have an insecure attachment in comparison to individuals without ADHD?
3. Is there a difference in attachment insecurity between the subtypes of ADHD (Inattentive Type, Hyperactivity-Impulsive Type, Combined Type)?
4. What are the odds of an individual with ADHD having an insecure attachment compared to individuals without ADHD?
5. Do individuals with co-occurring conduct problems have a higher rating of insecure attachment?

References


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Correspondence

Kristene.Cheung@umanitoba.ca or Jen.Theule@umanitoba.ca