

Risk Tolerance in Youth With Emerging Mood Disorders

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Abstract : Risk-taking behaviour is common during youth. In the time between adolescence and early adulthood, young people (aged 15-25 years) are more vulnerable to mood disorders, such as anxiety and depression. What impact does an emerging mood disorder have on decision-making in youth at critical decision points in their lives? In this article, we explore the impact of risk and ambiguity on youth decision-making in a clinical setting using a well-known economic experiment. At two time points, separated by six to eight weeks, we measured risky and ambiguous choices concurrently with findings from three psychological questionnaires, the 10-item Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K10), the 17-item Quick Inventory of Depressive Symptomatology Adolescent Version (QIDS-A17), and the 12-item Somatic and Psychological Health Report (SPHERE-12), for young help seekers aged 16-25 (n=30, mean age 19.22 years, 19 males). When first arriving for care, we found that 50% (n=15) of participants experienced severe anxiety (K10 \geq 30) and were severely depressed (QIDS-A17 \geq 16). In Session 2, taking attrition rates into account (n=5), we found that 44% (n=11) remained severe across the full battery of questionnaires. When applying multiple regression analyses of the pooled sample of observations (N=55), across both sessions, we found that participants who rated severely anxious avoided making risky decisions. We suggest there is some statistically significant (although weak) (p=0.09) relation between risk and severe anxiety scores as measured by K10. Our findings may support working with novel tools with which to evaluate youth experiencing an emerging mood disorder and their cognitive capacities influencing decision-making.

Keywords : anxiety, decision-making, risk, adolescence

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