

Characterising the Processes Underlying Emotion Recognition Deficits in Adolescents with Conduct Disorder

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Abstract : Children and adolescents with Conduct Disorder (CD) have been shown to demonstrate impairments in emotion recognition, but it is currently unclear whether this deficit is related to specific emotions or whether it represents a global deficit in emotion recognition. An emotion recognition task with concurrent eye-tracking was employed to further explore this relationship in a sample of male and female adolescents with CD. Participants made emotion categorization judgements for presented dynamic and morphed static facial expressions. The results demonstrated that males with CD, and to a lesser extent, females with CD, displayed impaired facial expression recognition in general, whereas callous-unemotional (CU) traits were linked to specific problems in sadness recognition in females with CD. A region-of-interest analysis of the eye-tracking data indicated that males with CD exhibited reduced fixation times for the eye-region of the face compared to typically-developing (TD) females, but not TD males. Females with CD did not show reduced fixation to the eye-region of the face relative to TD females. In addition, CU traits did not influence CD subjects' attention to the eye-region of the face. These findings suggest that the emotion recognition deficits found in CD males, the worst performing group in the behavioural tasks, are partly driven by reduced attention to the eyes.

Keywords : attention, callous-unemotional traits, conduct disorder, emotion recognition, eye-region, eye-tracking, sex differences

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