

A Neuropsychological Investigation of the Relationship between Anxiety Levels and Loss of Inhibitory Cognitive Control in Ageing and Dementia

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Abstract : Non-clinical anxiety may be comprised of state anxiety - temporarily experienced anxiety related to a specific situation, and trait anxiety - a longer lasting response or a general disposition to anxiety. While temporary and occasional anxiety whether as a mood state or personality dimension is normal, nonclinical anxiety may influence many more components of information processing than previously recognized. In ageing and dementia-related research, disease characterization now involves attempts to understand a much wider range of brain function such as loss of inhibitory control, as against the more common focus on memory and cognition. However, in many studies, the tendency has been to include individuals with clinical anxiety disorders while excluding persons with lower levels of state or trait anxiety. Loss of inhibitory cognitive control can lead to behaviors such as aggression, reduced sensitivity to others, sociopathic thoughts and actions. Anxiety has also been linked to inhibitory control, with research suggesting that people with anxiety are less capable of inhibiting their emotions than the average person. This study investigates the relationship between anxiety and loss of inhibitory control in younger and older adults, using a variety of questionnaires and computers-based tests. Based on the premise that irrespective of classification, anxiety is associated with a wide range of physical, affective, and cognitive responses, this study explores evidence indicative of the potential influence anxiety per se on loss of inhibitory control, in order to contribute to discussion and appropriate consideration of anxiety-related factors in methodological practice.

Keywords : anxiety, ageing, dementia, inhibitory control

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