Self-protective strategies of parents with ADHD and their children as mediated by sensitivity – a multiple-case study.

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Topic: Research

The multiple-case study focused on the transmission of the self-protective strategies of parents with ADHD to their child, looking at parental sensitivity as a mediator. Firstly, the self-protective strategies of adults with ADHD were assessed. The sample consisted of nine adults (females=5; males=4; mean age 29.7 years; range 22.7-37.3). Respondents were recruited from Helsinki University Central Hospital, Department of Psychiatry, Clinic for Neuropsychiatry during a certain time period on the basis of the exclusive ADHD diagnosis, given by a psychiatrist. The goal was to ensure that the sample would exemplify ADHD and that the conclusions would not be inflected by other comorbid disorders. The adults were interviewed using the modified Adult Attachment Interview (AAI). Secondly, six adults (five mothers, one father) of the sample, who had children, were scrutinized. The sensitivity of these parents was assessed using the Infant and Frustration CARE-Index. Thirdly, the self-protective strategies of the children were assessed with the Infant Strange Situation Procedure (SSP) or the Preschool Assessment of Attachment (PAA).

How it used the DMM and what it can contribute to the DMM

The DMM assessment methods were used. The study showed a variation of the self-protective strategies of the adults with ADHD as well as those of their children as mediated by the degree of risk in the dyadic synchrony between the parents and their children. Three subgroups were formed on the basis of risk as indicated by Crittenden's (2016) gradient of transformation of information. The more complex the parent’s self-protective strategy was, and the more it was modified by disorientation, the less sensitive was the interaction. All parents displayed indications of unresolved traumas, which impaired their sensitivity to the signals of their child and ability to engage in mutual regulation of arousal and emotion with their child as assessed by the CARE-Index. Some parents’ need for self-protection undermined their ability to protect their child and decreased their sensitivity to their child. Treatment of ADHD should take into account the self-protective strategies of the parents and that of their child, the traumas of the parents and modifiers, in particular, disorientation. All families would benefit from a family psychological assessment, assessments of the self-protective strategies of both the parents and children and a treatment tailored to the unique family needs.