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EMOTION REGULATION IN ADHD CHILDREN IN FACE©-PERSPECTIVE: FROM THEORY THROUGH RESEARCH TO FACILITATING ADJUSTMENT OF COGNITION AND EMOTION

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Background: Clinical and neuroscientific insights suggest that emotion regulation (ER) is a core challenge for children with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). Relatively few empirical studies yet explicitly address ADHD children's ER. The conceptual and practical underpinnings of ER for ADHD youth's wellbeing also remain to be fully established.
Objectives and aims: To assess basic and contextual emotion recognition in children with ADHD. To advance conceptual and practical insights into ADHD children's emotional development.
Method: Operationalising the FACE©-model (Facilitating Adjustment of Cognition and Emotion), an ongoing research compares children with ADHD and matched non-referred controls (currently n=68, ages 7-12, mean age 10, 80% boys) on ER components, including facial (FER) and verbal emotion recognition, Theory-Of-Mind, attentional, and behavioural functioning.
Results: A subsample of ADHD children (n=15) with comorbid learning problems and autism spectrum symptoms (ASS) made significantly more FER errors (t (26) = -2,578, p = 0,016), especially for happiness and anger, and doubted more their choices (t (26) = -2,147, p = 0,041). Another subsample of learning disordered ADHD children without ASS (n=20) did not differ in basic FER compared to controls (n=20) but was less efficient in contextualising emotions, especially anxiety, and in Theory of Mind. ADHD children's behavioural problems were inversely proportional to their emotion recognition skills.
Conclusions: Children with ADHD as a group appear differentially inclined to experience emotion processing difficulties compared to peers. Fine-grained FACE© risk-resiliency mapping helps identifying individual ADHD children in need of training in emotional adjustments to routine contextual demands.

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