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# **Children's Attitudes Towards Peers with ADHD: The Effect of Causal Information**

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# **Societal View of Psychological Disorders**

**'Psychological abnormality holds a great fascination in the public mind. People regard the mad, the odd, the miserable, and the intemperate with a mixture of amusement, alarm and repugnance. We gossip about them, demonise some and romanticise others, stare or avert our eyes, show concern or contempt'**

**(Haslam, 2003; pg 1).**

# **Children's Views of Psychological Disorders**

- **Children hold negative views of peers with atypical behaviour (Whalen, et al., 1983).**
- **Emotional / behavioural problems are regarded as less acceptable than other disability types (Alder & Wahl, 1998; Smith et al., 2003).**

# What influences children's attitudes?

- **Nature of problem**
  - **Visibility**
  - **Social consequences**
    - **Aggression**
- **Socio-demographics**
  - **Age**
  - **Gender**
  - **SES**
- **Contact / familiarity**
- **Controllability / responsibility**

(Coie & Pennington, 1976; Gash & Coffey, 1995; Gite, Walker, Smith & Garber, 2000; Roberts, Johnson & Beidleman, 1984).

# Perceived responsibility & Attitudes

- **Perceived responsibility influences affective responding & in turn behavioural intentions (Weiner, 1993).**

# **Effectiveness of Information Provision**

- **Inconsistent results regarding the impact of explanatory information (e.g. Bell & Morgan, 2000; Campbell, 2004; Swaim & Morgan, 2001).**

# Aim

- **To examine the effect of different types of causal information on children's behavioural intentions towards a hypothetical child with ADHD.**

# Method

- **Cross-sectional Design**
- **203 participants ranging in age from 7yrs 11mths to 13 yrs 8 mths**

	Number	Males	Females	ADHD Descriptive Info	ADHD Causal Info	ADHD Causal & Non-causal info
Mean age 9 yrs 1 mth	77	35	42	24	30	23
Mean age 12 yrs 3mths	125	64	62	41	37	48

# Procedure

- **Each child read two vignettes**
  - **ADHD (Jake) & Non-ADHD Condition (David)**
- **Children were randomly allocated to different versions of the questionnaire**
  - **3 versions of the ADHD story**
    - **No Causal information**
    - **Causal information (neurotransmitter functioning)**
    - **Causal information & outline of non-causal factors**
- **Measure of behavioural intentions**
  - **Shared Activity Questionnaire (Morgan et al., 1996).**

# **ADHD Vignette**

## **No Causal Information**

**Jake finds it very difficult to pay attention to what the teacher says and he finds it difficult to concentrate on doing sums or reading or other work that the teacher gives him. Jake also finds it hard to stay sitting down when he is supposed to and often gets up or fidgets a lot.**

**Often he has trouble waiting his turn in games and he often interrupts when other people are doing things.**

# Additional Causal Information

## Biomedical Causal Information:

Jake acts this way because the chemicals in his brain work differently than in other children.

## Biomedical Causal & Non-Causal Information:

**Jake does not act this way because he wants to.**

He acts this way because the chemicals in his brain work differently than in other children.

# **Non-ADHD Condition**

**David is very good at most of his work in school. He is always one of the first people to answer his teacher's questions and he always gets good marks for his homework and in tests. David really enjoys reading and spends lots of time reading and doing puzzles.**

# ADHD versus Non-ADHD

	Mean	SD
<b>ADHD SAQ</b>	<b>51.36</b>	<b>10.93</b>
<b>Comparative Condition SAQ</b>	<b>58.40</b>	<b>9.79</b>

[t (202) = -8.29, p<.000]

## ADHD Shared Activity Questionnaire Total Scores

<b><i>Type of Information</i></b>	<b><i>Age groups</i></b>	<b><i>Mean</i></b>	<b><i>Std Dev.</i></b>
<b>Descriptive</b>	<b>9 year olds</b>	<b>45.46</b>	<b>12.41</b>
	<b>12 year olds</b>	<b>51.93</b>	<b>8.40</b>
	<b>Total</b>	<b>49.54</b>	<b>10.45</b>
<b>Causal Info</b>	<b>9 year olds</b>	<b>49.83</b>	<b>21.25</b>
	<b>12 year olds</b>	<b>54.32</b>	<b>10.87</b>
	<b>Total</b>	<b>52.31</b>	<b>11.63</b>
<b>Causal &amp; Non-Causal Info</b>	<b>9 year olds</b>	<b>50.00</b>	<b>12.44</b>
	<b>12 year olds</b>	<b>53.17</b>	<b>9.60</b>
	<b>Total</b>	<b>52.14</b>	<b>10.61</b>

# Effect of Age & Causal Information

- **3 x 2 Anova**
  - Causal information (3 levels)
  - Age (2 levels)
- **Main effect for age**  
[F (1, 197) = 9.08, p <.005]
- **No main effect for causal information**  
[F (1, 197) = .37, P>.05]
- **No interaction between age & Causal information**  
[F (2, 197) =.367, P>.05]

# Developmental Differences & Attitudes



# Summary

- **Less positive behavioural intentions towards children with ADHD than those without.**
- **Developmental differences in attitude**
  - **Older children more positive attitudes towards the child with ADHD.**
- **No effect for information provision on behavioural intentions.**

# Implications

- **Development of educational programmes to enhance peer acceptance for children with psychological difficulties**
  - **Need to consider carefully the type of information to provide**
  - **Effectiveness of an educational approach.**