AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES OF ADULTS IN AMBIGUOUS SITUATIONS

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ABSTRACT

Research has shown that aggressive children demonstrate a bias toward attributing hostility to peers in unwarranted circumstances. This bias has been found to be associated with speed of responding and recall of hostile cues. This study aimed to develop a scale to investigate the role of similar cognitive biases in the decision-making processes of adult psychopaths. The development of the scale to measure the decision-making processes involved in adults when dealing with ambiguous situations is described, and normative data provided for 56 normal adults. The role of recall of hostile information in the decision-making process is examined, as are the effects of the amount of information used to make a decision. The results show the presence of similar biases to those found in children, namely - those individuals who encode and thus recall more hostile information tend to interpret ambiguous situations in a more hostile manner and make more unwarranted hostile decisions, especially when they make their decisions quickly and based on little information. Although in adults it seems this process is not related specifically to hostile individuals, when high levels of hostility are combined with quick responding this leads to these individuals making the most unwarranted hostile decisions of all. It is also shown that slowing down the decision-making process and instructing individuals to attend to all available information before making a decision results in marked improvements in accuracy of decisions made and reduces the number of unwarranted hostile decisions made. The results are discussed in relation to Dodge's (1986) social information processing model, and implications for treatment are highlighted.

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