

The Coffy Test in the Assessment of Mental Representations of Children Underwent to Adverse Life Events

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Introduction

Adverse childhood experiences (ACE) have been shown to be associated with negative outcomes in adulthood and risk factors for psychopathology.

Objectives

To assess mental representations of children underwent to ACE administering a recently developed semi-projective method: the Coffy Test.

Aims

To compare mental functioning of children who underwent to one or several adverse life events with the one of a control sample of non referred children.

Methods

The sample, recruited at the Neuropsychiatry Unit after adverse life events occurred, was composed of 40 children (21 male, 19 female) ($M_{age} = 108.10$ months; $SD = .26$).

The control sample was composed of 160 children (86 males, 74 females) ($M_{age} = 108.80$ months; $SD = 21,10$). Children were administered the Coffy Test, which is a new projective method focused on assessing possible elements of distortion in emotional processing within the relationship with parental figures in middle and late childhood (Cardi, Leonardi, D'Amico, Battista, 2012).

Results

Coffy Test scores of the sample underwent to ACE and the control sample did not differ significantly neither for gender nor for age. However, the differences of the Coffy Test scores between the two groups were statistically significant ($U = 1.26$, $p < .0001$). Only 4 children in the ACE sample reported a score higher than the median of the control one.

Conclusions

The Coffy Test score suggested that children underwent to ACE had a worst mental functioning and thus may be exposed to the risk of developing psychopathology in adulthood.