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Correlation Between Clinical and Drinking Variables, and Psychophysiological Processes Involved in Alcohol Dependence

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Background:

Alcoholics show attentional bias when viewing alcohol-related pictures, a low magnitude of the startle response when viewing alcohol-related cues, and a poor inhibitory control. However, it has not been studied which clinical and drinking variables modulate these paradigms.

Objectives:

To explore which clinical and drinking variables modulate attentional bias, affective modulation of the startle reflex and behavioural inhibition in alcoholics.

Methods:

127 alcoholics were tested with 3 psychophysiological tasks: the dot probe task (attentional bias), the startle response when viewing alcohol cues (affective modulation of the startle reflex) and the Stop Signal Task-Modified (behavioural inhibition). Clinical variables were evaluated using the Barrat Scale (BS), the Hamilton Anxiety Scale (HAS) and the Hamilton depression Scale (HDS). Drinking variables were assessed with the Timeline follow back (TLF).

Results:

Attentional bias correlated with the number of drinking days, mean intake of alcohol and score of the HDS. Affective modulation of the startle reflex correlated with mean intake of alcohol, scores of the HDS and the BS. Behavioural inhibition correlated with scores of the HDS, the HAS and the BS.

Conclusions:

Psychophysiological tasks correlated with drinking variables (mean intake of alcohol and the number of drinking days) and clinical variables (impulsivity, anxiety and depression). Clinicians should take these variables into account when treating alcoholics because they can be controlled with appropriate pharmacological treatment and it is well known that attentional bias, affective modulation of the startle reflex and behavioural inhibition are implicated in maintaining alcohol consumption and increasing the risk of relapse.

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