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Predicting Stress-induced Anhedonia: The Role of Cortical Dynamics and Facial Expression Analysis

Isolde Valen*
Department of Applied Science, University Malaysia Sabah, Malaysia

DESCRIPTION

Stress-induced anhedonia is a condition marked by a loss of pleasure or interest in activities once considered enjoyable, often triggered by prolonged or intense stress. It is a significant symptom of mood disorders such as depression and is increasingly recognized for its potential to contribute to the onset and progression of these conditions. Predicting the future development of stress-induced anhedonia is crucial for early intervention and effective treatment, as it can help prevent the full onset of mood disorders. One emerging approach to predicting the development of this condition lies in the analysis of cortical dynamics and facial expressions, both of which offer valuable insights into an individual's emotional and psychological state. Cortical dynamics refer to the activity and patterns of neural oscillations in the brain, which can be measured through techniques like Electroencephalography (EEG) or functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging (fMRI). These neural oscillations reflect the brain's processing of information, emotional regulation, and responses to stress. Different brain regions are involved in emotional processing, and alterations in the dynamics of these cortical areas can indicate heightened vulnerability to stress-induced psychological disturbances like anhedonia. For example, studies have shown that individuals under chronic stress often exhibit dysregulated neural activity, particularly in areas related to reward processing, such as the prefrontal cortex and ventral striatum. These areas are responsible for the ability to experience pleasure and motivation, both of which are diminished in anhedonia. Therefore, by monitoring the brain's cortical dynamics in response to stress, researchers can identify individuals at higher risk of developing anhedonia. Facial expressions, on the other hand, are a direct reflection of emotional responses and can be used to assess an individual's affective state in real time. When stressed, individuals may display certain facial movements that reflect negative emotions like sadness, frustration, or anger. In the context of anhedonia, a person might show diminished facial expressivity or a reduced ability to engage in positive emotional expressions, such as smiling. Researchers often use facial action coding systems to systematically assess and quantify these facial movements, linking them to underlying emotional states. Studies have shown that individuals who exhibit reduced facial expressiveness in response to positive stimuli are more likely to experience depression and anhedonia in the future. Combining facial expression analysis with cortical dynamics could, therefore, provide a more comprehensive prediction of anhedonia development, as both systems reflect distinct but complementary aspects of emotional regulation. The predictive potential of combining cortical dynamics and facial expression analysis lies in their ability to detect early signs of stress-induced anhedonia. Cortical dynamics, particularly within the brain's reward circuitry, can show changes before behavioral symptoms like anhedonia fully manifest. For example, a decrease in neural oscillations in reward-related brain regions following stress exposure may be an early indicator of anhedonia. At the same time, facial expressions provide a more immediate measure of emotional responses to stress, highlighting shifts in an individual's ability to respond to pleasure or joy. Together, these methods could allow for the identification of individuals who are not only experiencing stress but also showing early signs of neural and behavioral dysregulation indicative of anhedonia.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares there is no conflict of interest in publishing this article.

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Corresponding author Isolde Valen, Department of Applied Science, University Malaysia Sabah, Malaysia, E-mail: IsoldeValen66356@yahoo.com

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