

Emotional identification in binge drinking, tobacco use disorder and their comorbidity: a multimodal approach

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Context and Aims: Binge drinking (BD) and Tobacco use disorder (TUD) are highly prevalent, especially in youths. Their psychological and cognitive consequences are well established, but research on emotional impairments in this population is scarce. We thus explored emotional identification deficits in BD, TUD, and their comorbidity, aiming to disentangle their isolated versus combined effects.

Methods: Four groups (BD, TUD, comorbid BD/TUD, controls) performed five emotional identification tasks divided into two blocks. The first block assessed emotion identification across modalities (faces, body postures and voices). The second block examined unimodal versus cross-modal contexts, including “congruent” and “incongruent” conditions. Stimuli from validated databases featured seven emotions (anger, disgust, fear, happiness, neutral, sadness, surprise). Accuracy and response times were recorded.

Results: Regarding emotion identification across modalities, no group differences were found on accuracy, while TUD and comorbid participants responded significantly quicker than BD and controls. Regarding the unimodal/cross-modal block, significant group differences appeared for response times in unimodal conditions, with comorbid participants being the quickest. Importantly, in the cross-modal task, comorbid participants presented a specific deficit for the processing of incongruent cross-modal stimuli.

Implications and limitations: While BD and TUD are not related to emotional identification deficits when isolated, their comorbidity is associated with emotion identification deficits during complex and ambiguous interpersonal situations (i.e., incongruent cross-modal stimuli). Further data collection is required to confirm findings and better understand comorbidity effects on emotional identification, but our results indicate that sub-clinical populations with addictive disorders already present emotional deficits, potentially favouring the persistence and development of addiction.

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