Attentional training may reduce emotional biases and stress responses in anxious children

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1. INTRODUCTION

Attentional biases (AB) towards threat in anxiety

Anxiety : A body and mind disease

- Numerous behavioral and electrophysiological evidences (Bar-Haim et al., 2007; Cisler & Koster, 2010);
- Involved in the development and maintenance of anxiety;
- Authors have developed paradigms to reduce these biases in adults patients (Brosan et al., 2011; Heeren et al., 2012);
- Few studies in children (Bar-Haim et al., 2011; Cowart and Ollendick, 2011; Eldar et al., 2012) and no model of attentional biases mechanisms in developmental psychopathology.

2. OBJECTIVES

- Is there AB towards threat in socially anxious children?
- Can we retrain attention to reduce AB?
- Is there an effect of the training on behavioral symptoms of anxiety?

3. POPULATION

- 17 socially anxious children
- 8 to 12 (mean age=10,3) (11 ♀)
- Anxiety measures :
  - Children Behavior Checklist (CBCL - Achenbach et al., 2000)
  - Multidimensional Anxiety Scale for Children (MASC- March et al., 1997)
  - State-trait Anxiety Inventory for Children (STAI-C - Spielberger et al., 1973)
  - Behavioral Assessment of Speech Anxiety (BASA- Mulac, & Sherman, 1974)

4. DESIGN

- Day 1 : AB and anxiety measures Pre test = Baseline
- Day 4 - 8 : Training
- Day 8 : AB and anxiety measures Post test
- Day 15 : AB and anxiety measures Follow-up 1
- Day 22 : AB and anxiety measures Follow-up 2

5. RESULTS

- Effect of training on attention
- Increased attentional bias index over time
- Decreased attentional engagement towards threat
- Decreased reaction times at posttest in valid conditions
- Reduced symptoms of anxiety
- Somatic and cognitive complaints on the CBCL and the MASC;
- Anxious behaviors as measured by the BASA.
- Persistance of positive effects until 15 days after the session.
- Possible effect of the psychological support ?
- Measure of neural correlates of behavioral changes
- Group with non-anxious children

6. DISCUSSION

- Reduced symptoms of anxiety
- Somatic and cognitive complaints on the CBCL and the MASC;