

2018 Talent Development Competition Awardees

Title: Stress, rumination and reward function: An exploration of the relationships between vulnerability factors for depression recurrence

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Abstract: Recurring depression causes significant burden on society and is therefore a major health issue. Symptoms which remain in patients even after recovery may be risk factors for recurrence and better understanding of these factors can help to identify ingredients for continued health. Promising risk factors include sensitivity to stress, repetitive negative thinking, and decreased reward functioning, and recent research suggests they may interact to predict depression. Indeed, individuals exposed to long term stress as well as brief stressors show impaired reward function. In addition, stress leads to increased levels of repetitive negative thinking which in turn has been shown to influence reward function. However, few studies have explored the precise relationships between these risk factors in individuals who have recovered from depression. A better understanding of these pathways in this population can help clarify how the experience of stress can result in decreases in behaviours which make someone more vulnerable for another depressive episode, including lower engagement in pleasurable activities. In this current study, we will use well-validated laboratory tasks to uncover these relationships in individuals who have recovered from depression. It is hoped that study findings will eventually advance targeted treatment development to reduce the burden of this disease.