P1-10: Elder Risk Behavior: Psychometric Evaluation of Tower of Hanoi and Balloon Analogue Risk Task in an Aging Sample

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Abstract:
Introduction: Recent evidence suggests that risk behaviors among the aging population are traceable to the same brain regions associated with adolescent risk behavior. Elder risk behaviors
present as: smoking, drinking too much, casual unprotected sex, not wearing a seatbelt, using medications not prescribed, not exercising regularly, and not having a yearly mammogram or prostate exam. Scores on behavioral measures of risk-taking propensity, in adolescent research, have predicted actual risk behavior engagement; while behavioral measure scores on adolescent impulsivity or planning ability have correlated with executive cognitive function level. No neurobiological correlates or behavioral instruments have been identified in elder risk behavior research. The aim of this study is to examine the usefulness of two behavioral measures: the Tower of Hanoi (TOH), a measure of impulsivity, and the Balloon Analogue Risk Task (BART), a measure of risk-taking propensity, in an elderly sample. Research questions include: (1) Are scores obtained from the TOH and BART reliable and valid in elders?; (2) Are scores obtained from the TOH and BART reliable and valid in elder subgroups: age, ethnicity, gender, education level, and cognitive status?

**Method(s):** In this non-experimental descriptive design, a convenience sample of 50 participants, at least 65 years or older, able to read and write English, will be recruited from multiple independent living sites. The participants will complete an informed consent, a demographic form which includes screening for cognitive status with the MiniCog, the Eysenck Impulsivity Subscale, a self-report elder risk behavior measure, the TOH, and BART (both computer tools)—estimated 30 minutes. Data analysis includes: (1) internal consistency reliabilities on both paper-and-pencil measures, and (2) convergent validity between TOH and impulsivity subscale and between BART and risk behavior measure.

**Results:** Pending data collection, Fall, 2009.

**Discussion & Conclusions:** If these behavioral measures are valid and reliable in this population, researchers will have instruments to identify elderly individuals who are impulsive and risk-taking. The data from this study will provide preliminary data for future large-scale research across the lifespan.

**Abstract History:**

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