

基于生理信号的自闭症儿童烦躁情绪及其调节策略研究

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收稿日期: 2024年9月23日; 录用日期: 2024年10月29日; 发布日期: 2024年11月13日

摘要

自主神经系统的失调可以通过心率变异性来表征, 已被认为是导致自闭症谱系障碍(ASD)核心特征的原因之一。烦躁情绪在ASD群体中极为常见, 且与自我/他人伤害和自杀风险相关, 在该负性情绪下受到关注的两种情绪调节策略是认知重评和表达抑制。本研究从生理层面出发探索了ASD儿童烦躁情绪及其调节策略之间的关系。可知, 较大的心率变异性是适应性情绪调节和减轻精神负荷的生理指标。当个体面临引发烦躁的事件时, 认知重新评估可能会提供更大的自主灵活性。因此, 通过使用更为灵活适应的情绪调节策略(如重新评估), 提高自主神经的灵活性, 可以使ASD儿童能够将引发烦躁的事件视为非威胁性事件。

关键词

心率变异性, 自闭症谱系障碍, 烦躁, 情绪调节策略

A Study on Irritability and Its Regulation Strategies in Children with Autism Based on Physiological Signals

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Received: Sep. 23rd, 2024; accepted: Oct. 29th, 2024; published: Nov. 13th, 2024

Abstract

Dysregulation of the autonomic nervous system (ANS), which can be characterized by heart rate variability (HRV), has been suggested to contribute to the core features of autism spectrum disorders

(ASD). Irritability is extremely common in the ASD population and is associated with self/other harm and suicide risk, and two emotion regulation strategies that have received attention in the context of this negative mood are cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression. The present study explored the relationship between irritability and its regulation strategies in children with ASD on a physiological level. It is known that greater heart rate variability (HRV) is a physiological indicator of adaptive mood regulation and reduced mental load. Cognitive reappraisal may provide greater autonomic flexibility when individuals are faced with events that trigger irritability. Thus, increasing autonomic flexibility through the use of more flexible and adaptive emotion regulation strategies (e.g., reappraisal) may enable children with ASD to perceive irritability-provoking events as non-threatening.

Keywords

Heart Rate Variability, Autism Spectrum Disorders, Irritability, Emotion Regulation Strategy

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1. 引言

自闭症谱系障碍(Autism Spectrum Disorder, ASD)的特点是社交沟通障碍以及非典型受限和重复性行为(American Psychiatric Association, 2013)。有观点指出, ASD 的这些核心特征可以通过自主神经系统(Autonomic Nervous System, ANS)的失调来解释, 可能会导致对外部刺激产生非典型性反应(Porges, 2005)。失调的表现包括情绪识别和调节方面的缺陷(Bal et al., 2010; Chang et al., 2012)以及难以容忍情境变化而导致的重复刻板性行为(Bachevalier & Loveland, 2006)。心率变异性(Heart Rate Variability, HRV)可以作为衡量 ANS 灵活性的指标, 反映个体根据环境需求调节情绪的能力(Beauchaine & Thayer, 2015)。烦躁是儿童精神病理学中的一种损伤性症状, 在 ASD 群体中十分常见。先前研究表明, 烦躁的增加可能与生理唤醒模式紊乱有关。尽管 ANS 对环境压力源的反应已被广泛探索, 但烦躁情绪及其调节策略与生理机制之间的关系尚未得到充分研究, 特别是在 ASD 这一特殊群体中(Bujnakova et al., 2016)。从生理层面理解负面情绪能够更有针对性地进行诊断和干预, 同时考虑到与烦躁相关的情绪调节策略, 以促进 ASD 群体更为积极灵活的适应社会。

2. 心率变异性

2.1. 概述

心率变异性(Heart Rate Variability, HRV)是指连续心跳间期的波动水平, 一般通过计算逐次心跳间隔时间的变化来获取。从解剖学上讲, 心脏由自主神经系统的两个分支——交感神经系统和副交感神经系统所支配(Jindal et al., 2016)。在身心经受压力期间, 交感神经系统发挥主导作用, 通过调动生理资源来应对具有挑战性的环境, 此时生理唤醒度将会升高(如心率和血压升高)。相反, 副交感神经系统在放松或稳定期间占主导地位, 并减少生理唤醒(如心率和血压降低)。考虑到两个分支在心跳动态上的相互作用, 大多使用 HRV 来估计心脏的自主灵活能力, 较高的 HRV 体现了心脏较好的自主灵活性。除此之外, HRV 还反映了中枢自主网络的瞬时输出以及个体通过交感神经和副交感神经的活动进行情绪调节的能力(Thayer & Siegle, 2002)。

HRV 的测量指标通常根据分析方法的不同可以划分为时域指标和频域指标。常用的时域指标有：反映自主神经系统总张力的全部正常 R-R 间期的标准差(Standard deviation of the duration of all normal R-R-intervals, SDNN)、反映迷走神经张力的全程相邻 R-R 间期之差的均方根(Root mean square of successive differences, RMSSD)。常用的频域指标有：高频功率(High-Frequency (HF), 0.15~0.40 Hz)、低频功率(Low-Frequency (LF), 0.04~0.15 Hz)和低频高频比(LF/HF)。这些指标已被广泛用作情感识别的标记特征(Shi et al., 2017)。

2.2. 在不同情绪中的表现

多样的情绪由于各自不同的目标,需要不同的自主神经活动模式来保护身体和做出行为准备。因此,在不同的情绪下,HRV 指数也会表现出不同的情况。

Shi 等(2017)研究了 48 名健康被试在快乐和悲伤时 HRV 的差异。结果显示,快乐时的平均心率、SDNN、LFn 和 LF/HF 均高于悲伤时的,HF_n 则表现出相反的结果,这表明快乐时交感神经活动较强,而副交感神经活动较弱。Valderas 等(2015)报告了诱导情绪实验中记录的 25 名被试在放松、快乐和恐惧时的 HRV 均存在显著差异。与平静 - 中性状态的放松相比,积极诱发状态快乐时,HF_n 明显下降,LF/HF 上升;消极诱发状态恐惧时,平均心率提高。此外,与恐惧状态相比,快乐状态下的 LF/HF 更高,HF_n 更低。这表明,与放松和恐惧状态相比,快乐时自主神经系统的平衡度更高。

众多研究表明,低 HRV 与伴随的心理障碍(尤其是焦虑和抑郁)之间存在联系。关于 HRV 与焦虑(Chalmers et al., 2014)、抑郁(Kemp et al., 2010)之间关系的综合荟萃分析。研究结果表明,较低的静息 HRV 与抑郁和焦虑相关。除了焦虑和抑郁之外,Alvares 等(2016)进行的一项荟萃分析表明,与对照组相比,患有多种精神疾病(情绪、焦虑、精神病和药物依赖性障碍)的患者 HRV 降低。

2.3. 作为情绪调节的生物标志物

有效的情绪调节是由灵活的自主神经系统提供支持的,个体可以根据情境需求快速调整生理唤醒,故缺乏自主灵活性会导致对环境变化的情绪反应能力降低。根据多迷走神经理论(Porges, 1997),心血管控制与情绪调节能力相关,进而决定了社会交际行为。因此,HRV 越来越被视为调节情绪能力的新兴生物标志物(Beauchaine & Thayer, 2015)。一些实证研究表明,较高的静息 HRV 与更好的情绪调节和使用更具建设性的应对策略相关(O'Connor et al., 2002),而较低的静息 HRV 与使用较少建设性策略有关(Pauls & Stemmler, 2003)。综上,理论和研究均表明,较高的 HRV 可以作为有效调节情绪的生理指标(Thayer & Lane, 2009)。

2.4. 与自闭症严重程度和情绪调节的关系

先前的研究表明,相对于典型发育(TD)的个体,ASD 患者的自主灵活性(以静息 HRV 为指标)似乎有所降低(Guy et al., 2014; Thapa et al., 2019)。自主神经系统的低灵活性与 ASD 的症状严重程度和情绪调节障碍有关(Cai et al., 2019)。较高的静息 HRV 表明自主神经系统能够更有效地控制对环境的生理唤醒,从而实现更好的情绪调节,从而使个体对环境刺激做出更与情境相关且适当的行为反应(Thayer & Brosschot, 2005; Wang et al., 2016)。相反,较低的 HRV 表明自主神经失衡,可能导致对外部刺激的社交、情感、注意力和行为反应的调节受损。ASD 患者总体 HRV 降低,表明其存在自主神经系统失调。

针对 HRV 与 ASD 症状严重程度的关系研究来说,Neuhaus 等(2014)发现,较低的 HRV 与 ASD 儿童较高的内化和外化症状以及较严重的症状有关。Cai 等(2019)研究同样证实了该观点,即 ASD 症状严重程度与 RMSSD 和 HF 相关。

针对 ASD 的情绪调节能力,Cai 等(2019)的最新研究报告指出,在患有和不患有 ASD 的成人组合样

本中,习惯性使用认知重新评估与较高的静息 HRV 有关。ASD 患者经历更多的情绪调节困难,并且会自我报告或表现使用适应性较差的情绪调节模式(Bruggink et al., 2016)。根据对情绪调节实证研究的回顾,ASD 内化症状的高发似乎与习惯性使用适应性或/和适应不良的 ER 策略有关(Cai et al., 2018)。

综上所述,ASD 症状的严重程度、情绪调节策略的使用或这些因素的组合都与静息 HRV 有关。虽然这些发现支持了自主神经的灵活性有可能反映出 ASD 患者共存的内外化症状的严重程度以及使用适应性 ER 策略的倾向这一观点,但很少有研究探讨 ASD 儿童心率变异与症状严重程度、情绪失调水平之间的关联。

3. 自闭症儿童的烦躁情绪

3.1. 概述

烦躁是青少年寻求心理健康评估和治疗的最常见原因之一(Evans et al., 2022),也是日后抑郁、焦虑和自杀的危险因素(Brotman et al., 2017)。在 Karloviche 等(2023)的一项针对青少年大型流行病学研究的估计,一生中烦躁的患病率高达 79.5%。烦躁的临床表现包括攻击性、脾气爆发的行为成分和沮丧、不满或烦恼的情绪成分(Avenevoli et al., 2015; Moore et al., 2019)。严重的烦躁与家庭、学校和同伴关系受损有关,它是《精神疾病诊断和统计手册》(DSM-5)三种诊断(DSM-5 及更高版本)的核心症状,也是一种跨诊断的维度结构,在注意力缺陷多动障碍(ADHD)、自闭症谱系障碍(ASD)以及焦虑和情绪障碍中最为常见(Conner et al., 2021; Laporte et al., 2021)。

ASD 患者的特点是社会沟通能力受损,重复刻板行为和兴趣活动的模式受限。其发病率为 1/36,支持 ASD 患者需要高昂的社会和私人治疗和康复费用(Maenner et al., 2023)。情绪失调和烦躁在 ASD 患者中很常见(Cai et al., 2018),至少 50% 的 ASD 儿童表现出攻击性、发脾气、情绪快速变化或其他严重的行为失调等,这是 TD 儿童的两倍(Kaat & Lecavalier, 2013)。此种状况会严重损害 ASD 患者的社会功能(Wieckowski et al., 2020),限制其更好地融入社会,并给家庭和精神科服务带来沉重负担(Conner et al., 2021)。

3.2. 机制

虽然儿童时期的烦躁相对常见,并可能与不良的并发症和纵向发展结果相关,但相关研究较少,直到最近,研究者才试图了解烦躁发展的潜在过程。除了适应性研究之外,异常的威胁和奖励处理已被认定为是烦躁情绪的关键心理机制。Brotman 等(2017)提出的烦躁转化模型首先让人们了解了儿童烦躁的威胁和奖赏加工的相互作用和基础。之后,Kircanski 等(2019)将抑制控制纳入治疗模型中,进一步深入了解了导致烦躁的因素。还有一些研究(Brænden et al., 2022)从研究领域标准(RDoC)的角度探讨了烦躁性。尽管近期的研究在理解烦躁的相关机制和潜在治疗目标方面取得了进展,但对于未来的治疗模式来说,仍然存在着差距。特别是,对威胁和奖励偏差的认知控制过程、“设置场景”并触发这些威胁和奖励偏差过程激活的邻近条件,以及它们如何与烦躁的表达和发展的差异相关联仍然知之甚少。

3.3. 生理信号

烦躁是发育性精神病理学中一种复杂的跨诊断症状,其严重程度具有连续性(Vidal-Ribas et al., 2016),只有少数研究调查了儿童青少年烦躁的心理生理唤醒情况,结果不一。有两项研究(Leno et al., 2020)表明,患有高功能 ASD 的青少年对烦躁情绪唤醒的心血管反应模式有所减弱。其他研究发现,患有轻度和重度注意力缺陷/多动障碍(Karalunas et al., 2014)的烦躁青少年和其他亚型青少年在心血管状况方面没有差异。值得注意的是,只有这些研究考察了烦躁青少年的心血管唤醒情况;然而,烦躁并不是这些研究的明确目标,而且临床上以长期烦躁为主要关注点的青少年的心血管唤醒情况也有待考察。

早期证据表明,烦躁情绪增加可能与生理唤醒模式紊乱有关。一项研究发现,烦躁可以预测 ASD 青少年对压力的生理反应(皮质醇和心率)(Mikita et al., 2015),烦躁程度高的 ASD 青少年对压力的生理反应较弱。研究发现心血管反应性与报告的较高烦躁水平相关,在调整了运动活动和年龄等潜在混杂因素后,这种关联仍然显著。这说明了 HR 和 HRV 作为烦躁的外周生理生物标志物的潜在优势,心血管反应可能是与负性情绪唤醒状态和相关临床表型相关的潜在生理机制。

4. 自闭症儿童的情绪调节策略

4.1. 概述

情绪调节(Emotion Regulation, ER)是一个复杂的过程,涉及监测、评估和修改个人的情绪反应,以通过生理、行为和认知领域的动态相互作用来实现个人目标(Eisenberg & Spinrad, 2004)。这些过程的功能受损,例如难以识别他人的情绪、自我情绪意识、观点采择和社交沟通,都会增加 ASD 患者情绪失调的可能性(Mazefsky et al., 2013)。

在对日常生活中经历的情绪进行修改和反应的过程中,有一系列的情绪调节策略可供选择和实施,但每个人调节情绪的能力和策略偏好有所不同(Sheppes et al., 2014)。研究最深入的两种情绪调节策略分别是认知重新评估和表达抑制,前者涉及重新解释情境以改变对它的感受(Lazarus & Alfert, 1964),后者涉及抑制情绪的表达(Gross & Levenson, 1993)。习惯性地使用重新评估和抑制已被证明与幸福感的积极和消极方面有关。研究人员对这两种策略的后果进行了广泛研究,总体上得出的结论是,重新评估是一种比抑制更具适应性的情绪调节策略(Richards & Gross, 1999; Campbell-Sills et al., 2006; Ehling et al., 2010)。因此,习惯性地使用重新评估来调节情绪比使用抑制策略更有利于改善心理健康。

大多数研究表明,与 TD 相比,ASD 个体较少使用适应性的情绪调节策略且灵活性较差(Brugink et al., 2016),倾向于依赖潜在的适应不良策略,例如沉思、回避和否认(Mazefsky et al., 2014)。针对 ASD 中使用重新评估和抑制策略的研究比较了患有和不患有 ASD 个体之间策略使用的频率。ASD 患者往往习惯性地使用较少的重新评估和较多的抑制(Samson et al., 2015)。

4.2. 生理信号

HRV 增加作为适应性情绪调节和心血管健康的生物标志物之一,更高频的 HRV 反映了对环境需求的适应性更强、更灵活。较高的静息 HRV 与自我报告更好的情绪调节相关(Fabes & Eisenberg, 1997)。相反,较低的 HRV 与情绪调节不良的心理健康问题相关。重新评估作为一种适应性的情绪调节方式,因此相对于抑制等以反应为中心的情绪调节策略,应该与 HRV 的增加相关。

有两项研究(均以女性为样本)检验了 HRV 与重新评估和抑制策略的使用之间的关系:Butler 等(2006)发现,被要求使用抑制或重新评估自己情绪的被试比像往常一样反应的被试表现出更高 HRV 的增加。第二项研究让被试观看引发烦躁的视频,并要求使用相关调节策略。在观看视频前被要求重新评估情绪的被试显示出 HRV 的增加,而那些被要求抑制或仅仅观看视频的被试则没有显示出 HRV 的增加(Denson et al., 2011)。根据上述研究可知,在引发烦躁的情况下,使用重新评估可能使自主神经更加灵活,因此有必要描述习惯性使用重评和抑制与静息 HRV 之间的关系。然而,很少有研究探讨这一问题。Cai 等(2019)的初步结果表明,静息 HRV 是更多使用重新评估(或是适应性情绪调节策略)的预测因子。Pinna 和 Edwards (2020)的报告称,HRV 的增加与有效的情绪调节策略以及被试在多种认知任务中更好地调节情绪有关。

4.3. 在缓解烦躁方面的作用

当个体处于负性情绪状态时,可以采用一系列认知策略。Gross (2001)的情绪调节过程模型将情绪调

节策略分为在情绪诱发事件之前(以前因后果为中心)和之后(以反应为中心)使用的策略。重新评估是以前因为中心的一个例子,它需要在事件发生前对情境采取中立的观点,以减轻其对情绪的影响,是一种适应性情绪调节策略,因为它能防止负性情绪和适应不良的心血管反应被完全激发(Ray et al., 2008; Memedovic et al., 2010)。相反,抑制是以反应为中心,在情绪产生过程的后期使用(即在激发出完整的情绪反应之后)。抑制涉及压抑所有情绪表达的外在迹象,被认为是适应不良的,因为它可能导致生理反应增加,甚至会增加烦躁(Quartana & Burns, 2010)。

有证据表明,在某些情况下使用重新评估可以调节心血管反应。Mauss 等(2007)使用多种心血管反应性测量方法(非 HRV)研究了重新评估对挑衅后对心血管结果的影响。与重评较低的被试相比,重评较高的被试报告烦躁程度较低,心血管反应的适应性较强(即心输出量和心室收缩力增加,总外周阻力降低)。Memedovic 等(2010)研究了重评和抑制对直接激怒后自我报告的烦躁和血压的影响。即使在控制了负性情绪存在个体差异的情况下,重评较高的被试对激怒的血压和烦躁反应都有所减弱。而特质抑制对这两个变量都没有影响。综上所述,这些研究结果初步证明了情绪调节策略在决定遭遇和回忆烦躁事件时的情绪和生理影响方面的重要性。

5. 小结与展望

HRV 反映了参与心脏调节的交感神经和副交感神经的灵活性,并受到调节情绪反应和生理唤醒的中枢自主神经网络的调节。较高的静息 HRV 表明自主神经系统能够更有效地控制对环境的生理唤醒,从而实现更好的情绪调节,可以作为有效调节情绪的生理指标。ASD 儿童的静息自主灵活性较低且自主神经恢复能力较差,这与情绪调节困难的严重程度较高有关。通过使用更为灵活适应的情绪调节策略(如重新评估),提高自主神经的灵活性,可以使 ASD 儿童将能够引发烦躁的事件视为非威胁性事件。因此,将提升情绪调节能力(如重新评估培训)纳入治疗 ASD 儿童烦躁的干预措施,不仅可以促进心理健康,而且还可以促进心血管健康。

高度烦躁的 ASD 群体对情境中适应不良的情绪反应和生理唤醒更为敏感,未来研究可更为深入地探讨 ASD 烦躁的机制,以及寻找利用生理指标和情绪调节策略最有效的干预方法。

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