

1st International Sensitivity Meeting

18th of May, 2023

G. d'Annunzio University of Chieti-Pescara, IT
Campus of Chieti, Rettorato Auditorium

BOOK OF ABSTRACT



SUMMARY

The 18th of May 2023 took place at G. d'Annunzio University of Chieti – Pescara the 1st international meeting on Environmental Sensitivity. At the event subscribed more than 300 participants, including PhD students, clinicians and senior scholars, from all over the world.

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Federica Galli, La Sapienza University, Roma
Giusy Valentin, Sonia Ingoglia, Alida Lo Coco, University of Palermo,
Irene Leo, Ughetta Moscardino, Maja Roch and Sara Scrimin, University of Padova Elena
Nava, University of Milano Bicocca,
Annalaura Nocentini, University of Firenze,
Elena Lupo (Associazione PAS, Italia)

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INVITED TALK

Environmental Sensitivity: past, present and future

Michael Pluess

University of Surrey, Guildford, UK

The notion of sensitivity as a relevant human trait has received a lot of attention in recent years. However, the historical foundation go back at least 100 years. In my presentation, I will introduce how our understanding of sensitivity has developed over time and resulted in the current broad and integrative conceptualisation of Environmental Sensitivity. I will then discuss the specific scientific contributions from the more recent past (1995-2015), the present (2015-2020), and what research should focus on in the future (2020-2030).

Environmental Sensitivity and association with mental and somatic health

Corina Greven

Radboud University Medical Center, The Netherlands

Environmental factors may play a role in how the personality trait sensory processing sensitivity (SPS) relates to different health-related outcomes. Based on the empirical investigation of associations between SPS and stress-related and neurodevelopmental disorder traits, well-being, and somatic health in a population-based of adults findings supported the notion that in unfavorable environments, higher SPS related to worse health while, in favorable environments, it related to better health, supporting the theory of SPS as a factor for differential susceptibility to environments.

The Highly Sensitive Brain: Where we are Heading

Bianca P. Acevedo

University of California, Santa Barbara

Sensory processing sensitivity (SPS) is a trait associated with greater responsiveness to the environment and to social stimuli. Individuals with high SPS process information more deeply; and are more aware of and affected by their environmental stimuli. Recent neuroimaging investigations of SPS show how the brain mediates the cardinal features of SPS. In this presentation, I will review the main features of SPS and the brain regions that support these processes; as well as probing discussions for future directions.

Is the Highly Sensitive Person an environmentalist?

Annalisa Setti, PhD

Cork University, Ireland

Little attention has been devoted to study the association between a heightened sensitivity to the environment trait and the response to nature and animals, despite the potential benefits of the natural environment for highly sensitive individuals and their appreciation for beautiful stimuli, potentially also the natural environment. In the present contribution associations between Environmental Sensitivity and connectedness to nature and animals are discussed based on recent empirical evidences of new ongoing studies.

Environmental Sensitivity in parents: experimental evidence and practical implications

Francesca Lionetti

G. d'Annunzio University of Chieti-Pescara, Italy

Empirical findings suggest that parents with an increased Environmental Sensitivity are more likely to adopt negative parenting behaviors. However, these evidences are based on self-report and general retrospective memories. The current contribution presents empirical findings on the association between SPS and parenting behaviors, observed longitudinally during the first year of the child's life. Findings suggested that ES is not for worse, unless the parent has experienced traumatic events in her childhood, but can also predict a better capacity of attunement to the child with time passing by. Applied implications and future directions of research are discussed.

ROUND TABLE

Dario Bacchini and Concetta Esposito, University of Naples Federico II

Topic discussed: Relevance and implications of ES for the socio-emotional adjustment of the adolescent in at risk context

Luciana Castelli, SUPSI, Locarno

Topic discussed: Relevance of developing training for teachers to explain how individual differences in ES influence child's academic achievement and adjustment

Federica Galli, La Sapienza University, Roma

Topic discussed: Potential associations between SPS, somatic complaints and recurrent headache in children

Giusy Valentin, Sonia Ingoglia, Alida Lo Coco, University of Palermo,

Topic discussed: The potential of ES for civic engagement and prosocial behaviours in adolescence

Maja Roch and Irene Leo, University of Padova

Topic discussed: Cognitive and motor aspects related to ES from early childhood

Ughetta Moscardino, University of Padova:

Topic discussed: The role of ES across different cultural contexts including immigrants and refugees

Sara Scrimin, University of Padova:

Topic discussed: The assessment of ES in children at an observational and physiological level (RSA)

Elena Nava, University of Milano Bicocca,

Topic discussed: Physiological correlates of ES (skin conductance) and emotion regulation in children

Annalaura Nocentini, University of Firenze,

Topic discussed: ES in relation to reduce and prevent bullying; intervention and vantage sensitivity

Elena Lupo (Associazione PAS, Italia)

Topic discussed: how research on ES inform clinical practice in relation to emotion regulation and coping strategies

FLASH TALK

Environmental Sensitivity and Stress at Work

Gianni Onesti, Francesca Lionetti, Francesca Bellante, Riccardo Palumbo
Università G. d'Annunzio, Chieti-Pescara, Italy

The relationship between environmental sensitivity and well-being at work is a novel stream of research that holds promise for practical implications in organizational management and human resources (Evers et al. 2008; Vander Eist et al. 2019). Our study investigates this interplay utilizing a comprehensive questionnaire on job stressors, general well-being, individual sensitivity, and leadership style. Preliminary results found that job stressors exerted an adverse effect on the overall well-being of all participants, but democratic and laissez-faire leadership styles appeared to mitigate this negative impact, particularly among highly sensitive individuals. Our findings align with the vantage sensitivity framework and underscore the importance of cultivating positive work climates to enhance workers' ability to cope with stressors and improve their global well-being, with particular relevance for highly sensitive individuals.

Environmental sensitivity as a moderator of intervention efficacy: Evidence from the Italian Identity Project

Chiara Ceccon, Maja K. Schachner, Francesca Lionetti, Massimiliano Pastore, Adriana J. Umaña-Taylor, Ughetta Moscardino
University of Padova, Italy

The Identity Project (IP) is a school-based curriculum designed to engage diverse adolescents in reflections and activities concerning their heritage cultures (Umaña-Taylor & Douglass, 2017). Several studies demonstrated efficacy of the IP in the US (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2018a, 2018b) and its implementation in Germany yielded promising results (Juang et al., 2020). This preregistered study aimed to 1) evaluate the efficacy of an adapted version of the IP in Italy, and 2) explore the role of students' immigrant background and environmental sensitivity (Pluess, 2015) in moderating intervention efficacy. Participants included 747 adolescents (Mage = 15 yrs) attending 45 multiethnic classrooms in 6 secondary schools in Italy. Students completed measures of cultural identity and environmental sensitivity 1 week prior to the intervention (T0, pretest), 9 weeks after baseline (T1, posttest), and 13 weeks after baseline (T2, follow-up). Exploration increased among students in the intervention (vs control) group, while the expected ripple effect on resolution was not found. More sensitive students reported greater exploration at posttest than their less sensitive counterparts.

Sensitive Students: Another Angle of Twice-Exceptionality

Sandra Clifton

Bridges Graduate School of Cognitive Diversity

Clifton Corner: A Private Practice

During this presentation, I will present initial findings from my qualitative study of adults who are both HSPs and twice-exceptional individuals. Because I have just begun my research study, I can provide a more detailed abstract in another month, once several interviews have been conducted.

Environmental sensitivity, COVID-19 pandemic and internalising disorders. A study with adolescents

Alessandra Colella, Concetta Esposito, Grazie De Angelis, Mirella Dragone, Dario Bacchini

University Federico II, Naples, Italy

Guided by Differential Susceptibility Theory (Belsky, 1997, 2005; Belsky & Pluess, 2007), we investigated how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected adolescents' lives and their symptomatology of anxiety and depression, considering their levels of environmental sensitivity. Results showed that participants with high environmental sensitivity - compared with the groups with low and medium sensitivity - reported greater negative impacts related to the pandemic and higher levels of anxious and depressive symptoms, both in their current situation and as perceived in comparison to their pre-pandemic state. The study sheds light on the importance of considering environmental sensitivity as a factor that influences mental health outcomes during challenging times such as the COVID-19 pandemic, and have significant implications for interventions and policies.

High Sensitivity and Adolescence: Associations with Parental Emotional Availability, Loneliness, COVID-19 Anxiety, and Emotional, Conduct, and ADHD Problems

Valeria Crisumma, Alessandra Babore

G. d'Annunzio University of Chieti-Pescara, Italy

The present study, conducted between March and April 2022 on the end of the covid-19 emergency, aimed to investigate sensory processing sensitivity (SPS) during adolescence. A sample of 250 adolescent participants (mean age 15.77, SD 1.147) completed a battery of questionnaires. The goal was to better understand the SPS trait in adolescence, particularly by examining its connection with perceived parental emotional availability, feelings of loneliness towards parents and peers, anxiety about COVID-19, and emotional, conduct, and inattention/hyperactivity problems (ADHD). Statistical analyses revealed no correlation between SPS and perceived parental emotional availability, SPS and feelings of loneliness towards parents, or SPS and conduct problems. However, a positive correlation was found between SPS and feelings of loneliness towards peers, fear of COVID-19, emotional problems, and ADHD. Ultimately, the results obtained were significant in that they provided insight into the trait of sensory processing sensitivity during the adolescent period.

Growing up in violent contexts and risk behaviors: the moderating role of environmental sensitivity

Mirella Dragone, Concetta Esposito, Alessandra Colella, Dario Bacchini

University Giustino Fortunato, Benevento, Italy

Consistent with the basic postulate that violence breeds violence, growing up in violent contexts make youth at risk for involvement in rule-breaking behaviors with some differential effects of the more proximal (the family) and distal (the neighborhood/community) microsystems. Guided by the Environmental Sensitivity meta-framework, this study aims to evaluate whether the effects of violence exposure, within the family and the community, vary depending on the individual trait of environmental sensitivity. A path analysis showed highly sensitive adolescents being more susceptible to the negative environmental influences of the community, but not of the family, compared with low- and medium- sensitivity. These findings highlight the need to pay attention to this dispositional trait in planning prevention programs in high-risk violent contexts.

The role of sensitivity in addiction to psychoactive substances (alcohol and tobacco)

Elisa Laya

University of Lorraine, France

Substance addiction is characterized by repeated use leading to loss of control over use, and is based on risk factors such as emotional dispositions. High Sensitivity is a personality trait that manifests itself as increased sensitivity to internal and external stimuli, sometimes resulting in a feeling of being overwhelmed by an overly intense experience. In response to this emotional distress, substance use may be motivated by a desire to alleviate emotions and an attempt at short-term emotional regulation. Thus, this thesis aims to identify the factors related to high sensitivity or added to it and their link to addictive behaviors (risk and protective factors) in order to analyze the particularity of this trait in relation to the use of psychoactive substances. To do so, we have chosen a mixed methodology combining online questionnaires and semi-directive clinical interviews in order to collect information on the motivations of use and interpersonal factors of individuals. The clinical aim is to improve therapeutic care by a better understanding of high sensitivity in order to fight in a preventive and curative way against addiction disorders.

Differential susceptibility to peer acceptance and rejection in preadolescents – A within-subjects experiment

Danni Liu, Anouk van Dijk, Zonglin Tian, Maja Deković & Judith Semon Dubas

Utrecht University, Netherlands

The differential susceptibility model suggests that the same children who are highly susceptible to positive peer relationships are also highly susceptible to negative peer relationships, describing a within-subjects phenomenon inherently. However, existing support for this idea is limited to between-subjects experiments and correlational research. Therefore, we conducted a preregistered within-subjects experiment with N=455 Chinese preadolescents, investigating whether preadolescents with higher environmental sensitivity (i.e., high Sensory Processing Sensitivity; SPS) are more susceptible to both peer acceptance and rejection compared to those with lower SPS. Participants were randomly assigned either to the experimental group or the control group, participating in a bogus social media platform two times (spaced three weeks apart). Experimental group children received positive and negative peer feedback in counterbalanced order while control

group children received neutral feedback. In both sessions, we assessed their mood, state self-esteem, intent attributions, and social behaviors. Data are currently being analyzed and we plan to present preliminary findings at the conference.

Association between Loneliness, Quality of Life and Differential Susceptibility A cross-national study in Croatia and Italy

Petra Plisic & Antonio Dellagiulia

Salesian University of Rome, Italy

Meta-analytical evidence highlights an increasing of perceived loneliness during emerging adulthood. In this period, characterized by multiple life transition in education, work and relationships, emerging adults experience a peak in loneliness due to the mismatch between their desired and actual social relationships. Whereas the association between loneliness and quality of life have been studied, to the best of our knowledge, no studies have investigated the association with differential susceptibility. In a sample of 369 emerging adult (Mage = 25.36 years; SD = 4.03; age range = 19 – 36; 54% female; 43% Italian) we found association between differential susceptibility and loneliness ($r = .42, p < .001$) and quality of life ($r = -.15, p < .001$). Associations were comparable across the two sample. Our preliminary results suggest the importance of support Highly Sensitive people during life transition in emerging adulthood.

The Highly Sensitive Infant Rating System: an observational measure for the assessment of Environmental Sensitivity from 3 months of age

Alessandra Sperati, Maria Spinelli, Mirco Fasolo, Michael Pluess & Francesca Lionetti

G. d'Annunzio University of Chieti-Pescara, Italy

There is a range of reliable measures for investigating Environmental Sensitivity (ES) in childhood. Yet, there are no direct measures for investigating ES in infants. Traditional reactivity markers, as difficult temperament, are biased by a focus on negative emotions only. We introduce a new candidate observational measure for assessing ES in infancy through a series of lab-based episodes designed to elicit infants' reactivity to positive, negative and sensory stimuli. On a sample of $N = 50$ 3-month infants (45%F), we explored (1) the ES distribution, (2) associations among sensitivity stimuli, and (3) ES association with infants' emotion recognition and emotional arousal. ES was normally distributed and responses to positive, negative and sensory stimuli were moderately associated, suggesting a potentially unique ES underlying trait. ES correlated with stronger infants'

responses (i.e., looking time and arousal) to an emotion recognition task, suggesting a deeper processing of facial details in highly sensitive infants. Findings suggest that sensitivity can be potentially assessed from an early age with a series of lab-based procedures.

The Interplay between Covid-19 related stress and Adolescents' levels of Environmental Sensitivity in Predicting Their Well-Being during the Pandemic

Benedetta Taddei, Lisa De Luca & Annalaura Nocentini

University of Florence, Italy

The Interplay between Covid-19 related stress and Adolescents' levels of Environmental Sensitivity in Predicting Their Well-Being during the Pandemic. This study investigated the impact of COVID-19-related stress on early adolescents' well-being according to environmental sensitivity levels. The sample included 157 Italian students ($M_{age}=12.77$, $SD=.77$, 53.5% female) who participated in two data collection points (T1: June 2021; T2: June 2022). Adolescents were differentiated into three groups: low ($N=39$), medium ($N=65$) and high ($N=35$) sensitive groups. Multiple regression analysis revealed a significant effect of COVID-19-related stress (T1) on well-being (T2) for highly sensitive adolescents ($\beta = - .282$; $SE = .100$; $p < .05$), whereas no effects were found for adolescents in the low and medium sensitive groups. Findings suggest that the highly sensitive group was most at risk during the pandemic. Theoretical and practical implications were discussed.

We look forward to seeing you at the next Environmental Sensitivity meeting!

