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Executive function performance in HIV positive adolescents of anti-retroviral treatment in Johannesburg, South Africa.

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Abstract

Executive Function is conceptualized in this study as the ability to form (the planning functionality obtained through initiation and working memory), maintain (response selection and the ability to self-regulate and inhibit) and switch (cognitive flexibility, mental tracking, organization and sequencing) mental processes in order to effect a positive outcome. The present research is a quasi-experimental study embedded in the Positivist tradition that sets out to empirically evaluate the Executive Function profile of seropositive adolescents (n = 29) emerging from a low socio-economic background and currently on a managed ART programme when compared to a healthy contrast group (based on age, socio-demographic and educational system). As a quantitative study, Executive Function was operationalized through the use of multiple tests of Executive Function such as the Delis-Kaplan Executive Function Colour Word Interference Test (D-KEFS CWIT), the Wisconsin Card Sorting Test (WCST) and the Trail Making Test Part B (TMT-B). As the study formed part of a larger study that included additional neurocognitive tests, including the WISC-R, selected subtests from the WISC-R were used to validate specific arguments relating to the study. The results showed that HIV positive adolescents were inclined to have poorer Executive Function performance especially under situations of higher cognitive load when compared to the unaffected group. The implications of these results are discussed in this research.