

Abstract

There is increasing evidence suggesting that early life adversity (ELA) might disrupt reward processing in the brain to produce apathy-like behavior. This project will investigate psychological processes that might be implicated in this behavioral dysregulation combining a well-established rat model of ELA with an innovative task measuring cue-motivated reward seeking. Experiment 1 will determine if rats exposed to ELA, using a limited bedding/nesting procedure, exhibit long-term alterations in motivational or cognitive components of reward seeking. Experiment 2 will identify neurobiological circuits which activity correlates with impairments in reward-related behaviors and altered sensitivity to stress. This research will advance our understanding of the specific reward-related behavioral effects of ELA and guide future research to identify underlying neural mechanisms.