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Adolescent discounting behaviour: influences on academic achievement

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This study investigated the **development during adolescence of the ability to delay gratification** as well as its **relationship with academic achievement and motivation**.

Introduction

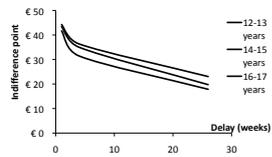
Adolescents often seem unable to envision the long-term consequences of their actions. Unfortunately, rewards in educational settings are often days or weeks away from behaviour that obtains them. **An inability to delay gratification** and thereby to make long-term oriented decisions, could therefore be **detrimental to academic achievement**.

Method

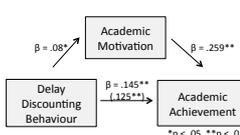
Data collected from **670 adolescents, aged 12-18:**

- **Delay discounting task:** choice between a delayed reward of €50 and an immediate reward of lower value
- **School Attitude Questionnaire** (Smits & Vorst, 1998) to measure academic motivation
- **End-of-year grades** for Dutch (native language), English (foreign language) and Mathematics

Long-term preference increases with age



Academic motivation mediates the effect of discounting behaviour on academic achievement



*p < .05, **p < .01

Conclusions

1. Preference for larger delayed rewards over smaller immediate rewards **increased with age**
2. There were **no differences between boys and girls**
3. Students with an **increased ability to delay gratification achieved higher grades**
4. The effect of delayed gratification abilities was **most effective when academic motivation was high**

Implications

The results suggest **various intervention opportunities:**

- **Stimulating the ability to delay gratification in low-achieving students**, for example through teaching goal-setting strategies and encouraging students to work towards long-term goals.
- **Working with students' preference for the short-term** by offering immediate incentives related to their academic performance.