

26th Edition of International Conference on **Clinical Psychology and Neuroscience**
&
24th International Conference on **Neuroscience and Neurochemistry**

July 23-24, 2018 Birmingham, UK

Are middle - aged university students disadvantaged in comparison to younger students in terms of their cognitive functioning and behavioural characteristics?

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Previous research has shown that younger adults often perform better than older adults on tests of cognitive function including those of memory, attention, and executive function. However, there has been less research that has investigated the differences between younger and middle aged adults, especially those currently in education. This study aimed to bridge this gap. A group of 20 younger students (aged between 19 and 25) was compared to a group of 20 middle-aged learners (aged between 35 and 55). Both groups were required to complete a selection of tests from the Cambridge Neuropsychological Test Automated Battery (CANTAB). In addition, both groups were required to complete five standardised questionnaires that measured further aspects of cognition and behaviour, including resilience and self-esteem. In terms of the CANTAB tests the younger group generally outperformed the middle-aged group, although not significantly. However, in one of the more complex executive function tasks, a test of multitasking, the middle-aged group seemed to have particular difficulties responding accurately to conflicting stimuli and multiple significant differences were found. In terms of the behavioural measures, the younger participants scored significantly higher on self-esteem, but middle-aged participants had significantly higher scores on the BUSS measure of academic tenacity and on the CD-Risc and Resilience Scale. While this was a small pilot study, it does suggest that there may be genuine differences between younger and middle aged students in certain aspects of cognition and behaviour that warrant further exploration.

Biography

Nibras Rothwell is a PhD student in Psychology Department at University of Bolton. She is interested in Psychology, Neuropsychology, Neurocognition, Educational Psychology and Human Memory in general. She has completed professional academic degrees in teaching, interpreting and translation, British airlines experience, case working, leadership, advice, advisory, a quality and assurance assessment, and English law interpretation. She has been living, communicating and working in various countries and has gained excellent experience. Her educational background and experiences made her ambitious to investigate more aspects in human brain, cognitive abilities, performance and behaviour.

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