

Decreases in autonomic reactivity and interoceptive ability predict increases in self-reported emotion regulation across the lifespan

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Statement of introduction: Interoception refers to the ongoing transmission of sensory input from the visceromotor systems of the body. It is well established that interoception is critical for diverse kinds of mental experience, including that of emotion. In the past, emotions were thought to be fundamental biological states, characterized by specific patterns of physiological and neural activity.

Aims of the research: The purpose of this research is to use Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) and physiological devices to observe the neural and physiological activity that occurs while people have certain kinds of emotional experiences. We hypothesize that as people get older they have less strong emotional experiences and become worse at sensing emotions within their body. However, this is associated with easier emotion regulation.

Methods: Interoceptive ability is as measured on the body awareness questionnaire, the interoceptive sensation questionnaire, and using a gold-standard behavioral task, the heartbeat detection task. Whilst autonomic reactivity is taken as physiological measurements of participants' heart, lung, and skin activity while participants view emotionally salient images in an MRI scanner.