

Abstract

Prospective memory (PM) means remembering to do things in the future. In this study, we examined the PM of 20 adults with mild mental retardation by giving them two laboratory tasks that resembled a computer game and a real-life task. In the event-based task, participants played the game but they were instructed to press a bell immediately upon the appearance of a "target symbol" which came on at 2, 8, 12, 16, and 22 minutes during the game. In the time-based task, participants played the same game but they were required to press a bell every 5 minutes during the game. In the real-life task, participants completed all the required tasks were asked to return to the center on a specific day and get a souvenir from the social worker. We also assessed participants on their non-verbal IQ and retrospective memory. The results were compared with a group of 20 normal children with matching mental age. When compared with the children, adults with mentally retardation showed significant performance deficits in both event-based and time-based tasks tested in laboratory. However, performance on the real-life PM task did not differ between the two groups. Motivation could be the cause of the lack of difference in the real-life task since adults with mental retardation was as motivated as children when concrete reward was involved. We also found that the time-based task performance correlated with verbal recall ability in adults with mental retardation. Hence verbal recall ability could play an important role in retrieval of the content for PM tasks. Further studies with larger scale and systematic manipulation of the identified variables will generate more conclusive knowledge related to prospective memory.