Introduction

- Atypical reactions to sensory stimuli are common in individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD), with the majority of studies reporting prevalence of above 90% for both children and adults (Leekam et al., 2007).
- Sensory atypicalities present a risk for affective disorders in both general (Aron et al., 2012) and ASD population (Lisdstone, Uljarević, et al., 2014).
- There is evidence for a genetic influence on sensory atypicalities (Zawdaski et al., 2001; Goldsmith et al., 2006).
- Given that ASD itself is a highly heritable disorder (Freitag et al., 2010) with subclinical autistic traits found in parents (Gerds & Bernier 2011), and that affective disorders are prevalent in parents of children with ASD (Karts & Van Hecke, 2012), it is clear that investigating sensory symptoms in parents is important both from clinical and theoretical standpoints.

Objectives

- The main objective was to explore the frequency of sensory problems in mothers of children and adolescents with ASD.

Methods

- 50 mothers of children and adolescents with ASD were recruited to the study (mean age = 44.4 years, SD = 6.3). None of the mothers had diagnosis of ASD.
- Mothers completed the Adult Sensory Profile (AASP; Brown & Dunn, 2002). The AASP is a norm-referenced questionnaire that provides scores for four types of responses to sensory stimuli (sensory quadrants): hypo-sensitivity, hyper-sensitivity, sensation seeking, and avoiding. The manual provides scores from a large normative sample of typically developed adult individuals.

Results

Performance of parents across four sensory quadrants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quadrants</th>
<th>Two or more SDs below the mean</th>
<th>Between 1 and 2 SDs below the mean</th>
<th>Typical Performance (less than 1SD above or below the mean)</th>
<th>Between 1 and 2SDs above the mean</th>
<th>Two or more SDs above the mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low Registration</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1 (2%)</td>
<td>18 (36%)</td>
<td>17 (34%)</td>
<td>14 (28%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensation Seeking</td>
<td>15 (30%)</td>
<td>15 (30%)</td>
<td>18 (36%)</td>
<td>1 (2%)</td>
<td>1 (2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensory Sensitivity</td>
<td>2 (4%)</td>
<td>1 (2%)</td>
<td>25 (50%)</td>
<td>7 (14%)</td>
<td>15 (30%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensation Avoiding</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7 (14%)</td>
<td>19 (38%)</td>
<td>11 (22%)</td>
<td>13 (26%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

RESULTS (Summary)

- 49 mothers (98%) had sensory scores at least one Standard Deviation (SD) above the normative mean and 44% were 2 or more SDs above the mean for at least one sensory quadrant.

DISCUSSION

- This study provides the first evidence for sensory atypicality in parents of children with ASD.
- Since sensory problems have been found to be associated with affective disorders in both ASD and general population future work will need to address the role of sensory problems as risk factors for anxiety in parents of ASD individuals.
- Further research is needed to elucidate the contribution of genetic and environmental influences on the expression of sensory problems in ASD.

REFERENCES

- Please email for the full list of references

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