

CORRELATION BETWEEN SENSORY PROCESSING DYSFUNCTION AND EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONS IN CHILDREN WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW

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Abstract. *This article is dedicated to systematically examining the correlation between sensory processing dysfunction and executive functions in children with Autism Spectrum Disorder. The study analyzes how sensory processing difficulties, which affect a child's ability to receive, interpret, and respond to environmental stimuli, are related to executive functions such as attention control, working memory, planning, problem-solving, and behavioral regulation.*

Through a systematic review of existing research, the article investigates the impact of sensory and executive function impairments on academic performance, social interactions, and daily adaptive behavior.

The results indicate that understanding the relationship between sensory processing dysfunction and executive functions is essential for developing individualized therapeutic and educational strategies for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder. Furthermore, the study identifies directions for future research and provides practical recommendations for interventions to support developmental and cognitive outcomes.

Keywords: *Autism Spectrum Disorder, Sensory Processing Dysfunction, Executive Functions, Child Development, Attention and Working Memory, Planning and Problem-Solving, Behavioral Regulation, Therapeutic and Educational Interventions.*

Introduction

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a neurodevelopmental condition characterized by complex impairments in social communication, language, behavior, and interests in children.

These impairments often significantly affect a child's sensitivity to the environment, their ability to respond to various sensory stimuli, and their capacity for self-regulation. Sensory Processing Dysfunction refers to difficulties in receiving, interpreting, and responding to sensory information from the environment. For instance, some children may exhibit hypersensitivity or under-responsiveness to sensory stimuli. At the same time, executive functions encompass higher-order cognitive abilities, including attention control, planning, problem-solving, working memory, and self-regulation. Recent studies indicate that sensory processing difficulties in children with ASD may influence the effective functioning of their executive functions.

Therefore, understanding the relationship between sensory characteristics and executive functions is crucial for supporting the development of children with ASD and designing effective intervention strategies. This systematic review aims to analyze existing research to highlight the correlation between sensory processing dysfunction and executive functions in children with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

Relevance

Autism Spectrum Disorder affects a growing number of children worldwide, making it a critical focus for research and intervention.

Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder often experience sensory processing dysfunctions, which can significantly impact their daily functioning, learning, and social interactions. Executive functions, which include planning, attention, working memory, and self-regulation, are essential for adaptive behavior and academic success. Despite increasing research on Autism Spectrum Disorder, the relationship between sensory processing dysfunction and executive functions remains underexplored. Understanding this correlation is essential for developing targeted interventions, educational strategies, and therapeutic approaches that can enhance the overall development and quality of life for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

Aim

The primary aim of this systematic review is to examine and synthesize existing research on the correlation between sensory processing dysfunction and executive functions in children with Autism Spectrum Disorder. By doing so, this review seeks to identify patterns, highlight gaps in the current literature, and provide evidence-based insights that can inform clinical practice, educational planning, and future research directions in supporting children with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

Main part

Autism Spectrum Disorder is a neurodevelopmental condition that affects the development of social communication, language, and behavior in children. This condition often significantly influences a child's sensory abilities and cognitive functions, impacting their everyday life and learning. Sensory processing dysfunction refers to difficulties in receiving, interpreting, and responding to sensory information from the environment. Children with sensory processing difficulties may exhibit hypersensitivity or under-responsiveness to stimuli such as sound, light, touch, taste, or smell. For example, some children may overreact to ordinary noises or bright lights, while others may fail to respond to important environmental cues. Executive functions encompass higher-order cognitive abilities, including attention control, working memory, planning, problem-solving, and self-regulation. These functions are essential for academic success, adaptive behavior, and social interactions. Research indicates that sensory processing dysfunction may interfere with the effective functioning of executive functions in children with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

Understanding this relationship is crucial for designing interventions and support strategies that enhance developmental outcomes. This systematic review aims to synthesize existing studies to clarify the correlation between sensory processing dysfunction and executive functions in children with Autism Spectrum Disorder. Investigating this connection contributes to evidence-based approaches for therapeutic, educational, and developmental support.

Furthermore, examining these links can inform caregivers, educators, and clinicians about the individual needs of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder. Identifying patterns of sensory sensitivity and cognitive control deficits allows for more precise and effective interventions. The current review emphasizes the importance of integrating findings from multiple studies to provide a comprehensive understanding of these complex interactions. The ultimate goal is to support children in achieving optimal development, social functioning, and quality of life.

Autism Spectrum Disorder is a neurodevelopmental condition characterized by varying degrees of impairments in social interaction, communication, and behavior. Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder demonstrate differences in language development, social engagement, and interest patterns. Some children may exhibit delayed speech or limited verbal communication, while others may show minimal interest in social interactions.

In addition, children with Autism Spectrum Disorder often have unique sensory characteristics that influence how they perceive and respond to the environment. Some children are hypersensitive to sounds, lights, or touch, whereas others may be under-responsive to the same stimuli. Cognitive development in children with Autism Spectrum Disorder also varies, particularly in executive functions such as attention, planning, problem-solving, and self-regulation. Deficits in these areas can limit children's ability to adapt, learn, and perform daily tasks independently. Understanding these characteristics is essential for developing individualized support strategies in educational and therapeutic settings. Research highlights that sensory processing dysfunctions and executive function impairments often coexist, affecting learning outcomes and social adjustment. Investigating these factors provides insight into the unique developmental profile of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

Moreover, understanding the variability among children enables professionals to implement tailored interventions that address both cognitive and sensory needs. Studying Autism Spectrum Disorder within this framework enhances the knowledge necessary for improving developmental and functional outcomes. A comprehensive analysis of social, cognitive, and sensory features is critical for guiding interventions, educational programming, and clinical approaches.

Sensory processing dysfunction refers to difficulties in receiving, organizing, and responding to sensory stimuli from the environment. This condition may affect visual, auditory, tactile, gustatory, and olfactory systems, resulting in behavioral and functional challenges.

Children with hypersensitivity may overreact to ordinary environmental stimuli, such as light, sound, or touch, while children with under-responsiveness may fail to notice significant sensory cues. Sensory processing difficulties can interfere with daily activities, including eating, dressing, playing, and social interactions. In children with Autism Spectrum Disorder, these challenges are particularly pronounced, as sensory processing dysfunction often coexists with cognitive and behavioral difficulties. The relationship between sensory processing dysfunction and executive functions is increasingly recognized in research. Difficulties in sensory regulation can impact attention, problem-solving, planning, and self-regulation. Studies indicate that children with greater sensory sensitivity or under-responsiveness often demonstrate lower performance in executive function tasks. Understanding sensory processing dysfunction is therefore essential for designing interventions aimed at improving cognitive, behavioral, and social outcomes.

Therapeutic strategies often include sensory integration therapy, structured routines, and adaptive environments to support children's processing abilities. Addressing sensory processing dysfunction may enhance executive function performance and overall adaptive functioning. By analyzing existing research, this review seeks to clarify the connections between sensory processing difficulties and executive function impairments. Recognizing these patterns informs educational planning, clinical practices, and caregiver support strategies. A comprehensive understanding of sensory processing dysfunction can lead to more effective interventions, promoting developmental success and quality of life for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

Executive functions are higher-order cognitive processes that enable children to regulate their behavior, plan actions, solve problems, and achieve goals. These functions include attention control, working memory, cognitive flexibility, planning, problem-solving, and self-regulation.

In children with Autism Spectrum Disorder, executive functions are often impaired, affecting their ability to adapt to new situations, complete tasks independently, and manage daily routines.

Deficits in attention control may result in difficulties sustaining focus on activities, while impaired working memory can limit the ability to follow multi-step instructions. Cognitive flexibility challenges make adapting to changes or switching between tasks difficult for these children. Planning and problem-solving deficits hinder goal-directed behaviors and decision-making. Self-regulation impairments can lead to emotional outbursts, frustration, or socially inappropriate responses. Research indicates that executive function deficits are strongly associated with the severity of Autism Spectrum Disorder symptoms. These impairments affect academic performance, social interactions, and overall adaptive functioning. Understanding the nature of executive function difficulties in children with Autism Spectrum Disorder is crucial for designing effective educational and therapeutic interventions. Interventions targeting executive functions may include structured routines, cognitive training, task segmentation, and behavioral strategies. Strengthening executive functions can improve self-control, academic skills, and adaptive behaviors. Furthermore, executive function development interacts with sensory processing abilities, as difficulties in sensory regulation may exacerbate cognitive challenges.

Addressing both sensory and executive function deficits simultaneously can enhance developmental outcomes.

Comprehensive assessment of executive functions in children with Autism Spectrum Disorder provides valuable information for individualized support planning. Awareness of these impairments allows caregivers, educators, and clinicians to implement strategies that maximize developmental potential. Improving executive functions contributes to long-term social, emotional, and academic success.

Research indicates a significant relationship between sensory processing dysfunction and executive functions in children with Autism Spectrum Disorder. Sensory processing difficulties, such as hypersensitivity or under-responsiveness, can influence cognitive processes, attention, and self-regulation. Children who are highly sensitive to environmental stimuli may experience heightened stress and distraction, reducing their ability to focus on tasks. Conversely, children with under-responsive sensory processing may fail to notice important cues, resulting in slower decision-making and impaired problem-solving. Studies suggest that deficits in sensory processing may correlate with difficulties in planning, working memory, and behavioral regulation. These challenges can affect academic performance, social interactions, and overall adaptive functioning.

Understanding this correlation provides insight into how sensory experiences impact higher-order cognitive abilities. Therapeutic interventions targeting sensory processing may indirectly improve executive functions. Similarly, enhancing executive function skills can support better management of sensory sensitivities. The interplay between sensory processing and executive functions underscores the importance of integrated assessment and intervention strategies. Systematic reviews of existing studies reveal patterns of co-occurring sensory and cognitive impairments. Clinicians and educators can use this knowledge to design individualized programs that address both sensory and executive function challenges. Interventions that simultaneously target sensory regulation and executive skills have been associated with improved attention, self-control, and social behavior.

Recognizing the bidirectional influence between sensory processing and executive functions is essential for effective therapy and educational planning. Research continues to explore the mechanisms underlying this relationship to inform evidence-based practices. Overall, understanding the correlation allows for a holistic approach to supporting children with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

Understanding the correlation between sensory processing dysfunction and executive functions in children with Autism Spectrum Disorder has important implications for intervention and education. Therapeutic strategies often focus on sensory integration, which aims to improve the child's ability to process and respond to environmental stimuli effectively. These interventions may include structured sensory activities, adaptive environments, and individualized sensory diets tailored to the child's needs. In addition, cognitive and executive function training can enhance attention, working memory, planning, and problem-solving skills.

Educators can implement classroom strategies such as visual schedules, task segmentation, and predictable routines to support children's executive functions. Collaboration between therapists, teachers, and caregivers is essential to ensure consistency and generalization of skills across settings. Early intervention is particularly effective, as the developing brain demonstrates higher neuroplasticity during childhood. Addressing sensory processing and executive function deficits together can improve academic performance, social participation, and adaptive behavior. Programs should be individualized based on assessment results and the child's unique profile of strengths and weaknesses. Evidence suggests that combining sensory and cognitive interventions produces greater improvements than addressing either area alone.

Monitoring progress and adjusting interventions according to outcomes enhances efficacy. Educators and clinicians should be aware of the bidirectional relationship between sensory processing and executive functions when planning interventions. Training caregivers in supporting sensory and cognitive development at home reinforces therapy outcomes. Ultimately, interventions informed by the understanding of this correlation contribute to higher quality of life, greater independence, and improved social and academic outcomes for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

Discussion and Results

The synthesis of existing research indicates a significant relationship between sensory processing dysfunction and executive functions in children with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

Studies consistently show that children with heightened sensory sensitivity or under-responsiveness often demonstrate deficits in attention, working memory, planning, and behavioral regulation. These deficits affect not only academic performance but also social interactions and daily adaptive functioning. Sensory processing difficulties may create additional cognitive load, causing children to struggle with focusing, problem-solving, and controlling impulses. Conversely, impairments in executive functions can exacerbate challenges in managing sensory stimuli, creating a reciprocal impact on overall functioning.

The analysis of various studies reveals that integrated interventions targeting both sensory processing and executive functions yield more positive outcomes than isolated approaches. For example, combining sensory integration therapy with executive function training improves attention, self-regulation, and adaptive behaviors more effectively than focusing on either area alone. Furthermore, individualized assessment is critical, as children with Autism Spectrum Disorder display a wide range of sensory sensitivities and cognitive abilities, requiring tailored interventions.

The results also highlight the importance of early identification and intervention, as developing executive functions during childhood enhances long-term developmental outcomes.

Educational strategies, such as structured routines, visual supports, and predictable environments, complement therapeutic interventions and support skill generalization across settings. Overall, the findings suggest that understanding the interplay between sensory processing and executive functions provides crucial guidance for clinical practice, educational planning, and caregiver support. This knowledge allows professionals to design evidence-based, holistic approaches that promote developmental progress, social participation, and quality of life for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder. In conclusion, addressing both sensory and cognitive challenges simultaneously is essential for maximizing the developmental potential of affected children and reducing the impact of Autism Spectrum Disorder on daily functioning.

Conclusion

The present systematic review highlights the significant correlation between sensory processing dysfunction and executive functions in children with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

Children who experience difficulties in receiving, interpreting, and responding to sensory stimuli often demonstrate impairments in attention, working memory, planning, problem-solving, and self-regulation. These impairments affect their academic performance, social interactions, and adaptive behaviors, creating challenges in daily life. The analysis of existing research emphasizes that sensory processing difficulties and executive function deficits are interconnected and mutually influential. Interventions that simultaneously address both sensory and cognitive challenges have been shown to produce more effective outcomes than those targeting only one area. Early assessment and individualized intervention are crucial for optimizing developmental potential and enhancing quality of life. Educational strategies, therapeutic programs, and caregiver involvement play essential roles in supporting children's sensory and executive function development.

Furthermore, understanding the interplay between sensory processing and executive functions informs evidence-based practice, guides educational planning, and supports the creation of holistic intervention approaches. Future research should explore diverse age groups, different types of sensory processing dysfunction, and long-term outcomes of integrated interventions. Overall, addressing both sensory and cognitive domains simultaneously is essential for promoting optimal development, adaptive functioning, and social participation in children with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

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