Self-Injurious Behaviour in Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder and Intellectual Disability

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Background

♦ Previous estimates suggest 1 in 2 people with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) show self-injury.
♦ Estimates are limited by poor description of ASD diagnosis and ability level.
♦ The characteristics of those with ASD who show self-injury have not been described in detail.
♦ Knowing the characteristics may help predict who is at risk for developing self-injury.

Aims of the project

♦ To estimate the prevalence of self-injury in ASD, with robust description of ASD diagnosis and ability.
♦ To compare the prevalence of self-injury in ASD with Fragile X and Down syndrome.
♦ To evaluate the association between ASD characteristics and self-injury.
♦ To describe the associations between characteristics and the presence of self-injury in ASD.

Methods

♦ Carers of individuals with ASD, Fragile X and Down syndromes completed questionnaires.
♦ Questionnaires included reliable and valid measures of ASD behaviour and self-injury.
♦ Questionnaires also assessed ability level, mood, repetitive behaviours and activity levels.

Results

♦ Self-injury was displayed by 50% of the ASD group, 54.5% of the Fragile X syndrome group and 18.4% of the Down syndrome group.
♦ Self-injury was associated with higher levels of autistic behaviour in the Fragile X and Down syndrome groups.
♦ In the ASD group, the characteristics of impulsivity, overactivity, low mood, poor speech and poor self-help skills were associated with self-injury.

Conclusions and future directions

♦ Self-injury is common in ASD, with 1 in 2 individuals engaging in self-injury.
♦ Self-injury is associated with the presence of ASD behaviours in individuals with genetic syndromes.
♦ In Down and Fragile X syndromes and ASD, the characteristics that are associated with self-injury may be used as risk markers for the purpose of targeting early intervention.
♦ Some of the characteristics associated with self-injury in individuals with ASD may indicate a role for impaired behavioural inhibition in the cause of self-injury.


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