

Repetitive and Stereotype Behaviours

- A new assessment tool

Repetitive and Stereotype behaviours are a relatively under-researched area of autism spectrum disorders (ASD). New research developments are now allowing to develop techniques that are used in assessment of children with suspected ASD.

An increasing amount of research is taking place looking specifically at autistic behaviours that are concerned with repetitive interests, behaviours and activities (RIBAs). RIBAs in autism spectrum disorders comprise a broad category that encompasses behaviours that are characterised by repetition, rigidity, invariance and inappropriateness. This is the third of the three main domains of autistic symptoms that are often referred to comprising a 'triad of impairment': the other two are social and language domains.



The Autism Families Research Team at Great Ormond Street Hospital and the Institute of Child Health is working to increase the understanding of this aspect of the triad and as a result, hope to improve the diagnostic techniques we use in assessing ASD in both children and adults.

The D-scale Questionnaire has been designed to look in depth at RIBAs and is completed by the parents of the child being assessed. It includes a series of questions about the child's development, specifically focusing on repetitive interests, behaviours and activities. One of the key advantages of asking the parents questions about such behaviours, rather than the child, is that it allows younger children who cannot speak to be assessed, which is beneficial because it leads to earlier interventions for autism being put into place.

With the help of the families taking part our Autism Families Study, our research team is piloting the D-scale questionnaire, which we believe will be more accurate and comprehensive than previous ways of measuring RIBAs in children being assessed for an ASD.

With the data collected from this pilot study, Özlem Baykaner a student who is currently on

placement within the SCDC team, intends to compare the D-scale results with IQ in order to improve our understanding of this very complex part of the Autism triad.

Previous research on this area has split RIBAs into two groups: higher order repetitive behaviours and lower order repetitive behaviours. *Lower order* repetitive behaviours are defined by repetitive movements with objects and/or the body. In contrast, *higher order* repetitive behaviours are related to unusually obsessive object attachments, insistence on sameness, circumscribed interests and repetitive language. Research has suggested that lower order RIBAs are more often seen in association with mild to moderate learning difficulties, whereas higher order RIBAs are associated with less intellectual impairment.



Research on the relationship between RIBAs and intelligence may provide an insight into whether both types of RIBAs are present in all types of autistic disorder. They could be associated to different degrees with autistic disorders that are linked to learning difficulties, and autistic disorders in which intellect is not seriously affected (Asperger syndrome). If there is relationship between the nature of RIBAs and IQ then perhaps different kinds of support should be given to those with different kinds of RIBAs.

Further research needs to be done in order to ensure that children get the correct support both medically and educationally, nevertheless, with the support of families and professionals' links are beginning to be made to head towards an improved future of care for children on the Autistic Spectrum.

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