Measuring functional deficits in relation to emotion regulation problems in autism spectrum disorder using the CAFAS
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Background
- Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a pervasive developmental disorder
- There is increasing evidence that individuals with ASD have difficulty with emotion regulation (ER)
- Research with typically developing children demonstrates functional deficits as a result of ER problems
- The relationship between ER and functional abilities has yet to be studied in ASD and could inform potential intervention approaches to ER and functional skills

Study Objective: Investigate the functional deficits related to increased ER problems in adolescents and young adults with ASD.

Methods
- Parents of 57 ASD-confirmed youth (Age M= 15, SD= 2.59) completed an interview with a blinded evaluator within a clinical trial
- The Emotion Dysregulation Inventory (EDI; Mazefsky et al., 2018) was used to measure a child’s dysregulation on both a reactivity and dysphoria scale
- Child and Adolescent Functional Assessment Scale (CAFAS; Hodges & Wong, 1996) was administered to measure functional outcomes in several domains
- Pearson correlations were conducted between EDI t-scores and CAFAS subscales

Results
- Analyses indicated that the EDI t-scores were not significantly associated with any CAFAS subscales (Table 1)
- CAFAS Mood/Emotion subscale was not correlated with the EDI, which may demonstrate an incongruence in how emotion is measured across these two assessments
- CAFAS data was skewed positively 1.634 (SE=.365)

Conclusions
- The CAFAS did not indicate functional problems related to ER in ASD, within a sample of participants specifically selected for having problems with ER
- Normal distribution on the CAFAS has been demonstrated in a typically developing population, but these results were not normal, indicating potential problems in psychometric properties in this population
- It would have been expected that there would be functional deficits as a result of ER problems, but results do not support this
- The Mood/Emotions subscale was not related to dysregulation, which may indicate differences in measurement of ER in ASD using the CAFAS.
- The EDI was specifically designed for measurement of ER in and ASD population, but the CAFAS was not developed for use in ASD which may contribute to the null findings.
- Future research can investigate further the effects of emotion dysregulation on functional outcomes and validation of measures of functional outcomes in ASD

CAFAS Subscales | EDI Dysphoria | EDI Reactivity |
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Mood/Emotions | r= 0.120, p=0.451 | r= 0.091, p=0.568 |
Self-Harm | r= 0.110, p=0.488 | r= 0.181, p=0.251 |
School/Work | r= 0.097, p=0.451 | r= 0.256, p=0.102 |
Home Behavior | r= 0.201, p=0.193 | r= 0.058, p=0.715 |
Community Behavior | r= -0.188, p=0.232 | r= -0.004, p=0.980 |
Substance Use | r= -1.88, p=0.232 | r= -0.004, p=0.980 |
Thinking Problems | r= 0.027, p=0.865 | r= 0.128, p=0.420 |
Behavior Towards Others | r= 0.050, p=0.755 | r= -0.043, p=0.785 |

Table 1. CAFAS subscales correlated with the EDI

References

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