

Pressure Garments as a Regulator of Behavior of Children and Adolescents in Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD)

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Abstract

This is the first time that the effects of pressure garments in children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) have been studied in Finland. This study investigated whether pressure garments could benefit children with ASD behavior in 32 participants aged 9 to 23 years. Each individual exhibited challenging and/or aggressive behavior. Only six of participants were without a comorbid learning disability diagnosis. 87.5% of participants were attending primary education (n=28). Weighted blankets and vests are commonly used as a treatment for autism, and this method has been found to work well. They have also been helpful in calming children with motoric restlessness and for improving body awareness. Pressure garments are a convenient way to generate a feeling of pressure. They are snugly fitting clothes, which apply adjustable pressure on different areas of the body. Each garment is tailor-made for each individual, and considerable planning goes into the design and selection of materials. The focus is on comfort, but also on the external product design. In this study, pressure garments with long pants and sleeves were used as intervention. The study design was carried out as follows in late 2008: Initially, respondents (parents, teachers, nurses) observed participants for a period of one month after which they completed questionnaires (survey 1). Participants began to use their custom-made pressure garments as they became available. The first participants received their garments at the end of January and the last ones in early February. Participants were given the following instructions: In the morning, the pressure garments are dressed over underwear, and under regular clothes. The garments are used continuously for 7 hours daily, and then removed. Participants used the garments until the end of May 2009. Subsequently, we assessed participants with the same questionnaire packet that was employed at the beginning of the study (2nd survey). Results are shown regarding data collected with the PSYTO-AU-questionnaire, a modified version of the psychosocial functioning scale (PS-TKA) for autistic mentally disabled persons. Despite noticeable between-subject variation, evidence suggests that the pressure garments significantly modulated ASD behaviors in some individuals, and in general, a trend for the overall efficacy of these garments is observable. In some areas, such as social skills, social relationships and sensory

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information processing, problems were reduced in the pressure garment group of participants. Further research on this subject is needed; while results indicate a possible role for pressure garments in a multimodel treatment of ASD, our data and methods do not allow for a causal explanatory model. Future and more comprehensive studies will address these limitations.

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