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Differences in patterns of time processing ability and daily time management in children with and without disabilities

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Introduction

In the time-dependent society of today, those with limited ability to manage time will show a heightened dependence on others and more need for support, exacerbating their vulnerability. Children with developmental disabilities, e.g. ID or autism, are reported to have problems in time perception, time orientation or time management, i.e. time processing ability (TPA). It is not known whether the problems described are diagnosis specific or reflect differences in age or in level of TPA.

Objectives

The aim of this study was to investigate if there were different patterns in TPA in children with disabilities and typically developing (TD) children investigating if there were different patterns in TPA in the two samples and whether differences were related to the type of diagnosis, chronological age and the relation to daily time management (TM) and self-rated autonomy.

Methods

Participants were children with developmental disabilities (n=77) (e.g., Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder [ADHD], Asperger syndrome or intellectual disability) and TD children (n=89), totally 166 children aged 5-10 years. Using a cross-sectional design and instruments for measuring TPA, a Parent scale for estimating daily TM and a self-rating of autonomy. Data was analysed in a cluster analysis.

Results

The results indicated that four of the five clusters differed mainly in the chronological age of the TD children and in levels of TPA. In four clusters children with diagnosis were significantly older than the TD peers. There is no clear relation to diagnostic category. Daily TM as estimated by the parents and self-rated autonomy differs between clusters and was related to the TPA.

Conclusion

Overall the level of TPA seems to be a more valid base for planning interventions in daily TM than type of diagnosis. A child with a disability can have same pattern of TPA as younger TD children being more dependent in daily TM than their same-aged TD peers are.

Contribution to the practice/evidence base of occupational therapy

This study informs our practitioners of the importance of addressing the issue of TPA aiming at increasing daily TM and autonomy in children with developmental disabilities. It is time for time!