

A Cross Cultural Comparison of Sensory Responses in Children with and Without Autism Spectrum Disorders

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Introduction: Eighty to 90% of children with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) display sensory processing disorders that interfere with participation in daily routines and activities. These differences can result in occupational performance difficulties including difficulty completing self-care and daily living tasks, as well as impacting participation in social interactions, academics, and play activities. Occupational therapists work with individuals from different cultural backgrounds; therefore, understanding how culture shapes occupational performance is an essential. However, at this time limited research exists to indicate if and how cultural and environmental factors impact sensory processing.

Objectives: The purpose of this study is to determine if there are differences in sensory responses of in children with ASD from two cultures.

Methods: The study uses a retrospective chart review of data gathered from two separate data sets in Israel and in the United States. Participants were classified as either typically developing (i.e. No medical or psychological diagnoses) or ADS. All subjects met the inclusion criteria for the individual study protocols and were between the ages of 5 to 12 years of age. The study utilizes a descriptive quantitative design to compare Short Sensory Profile scores of typically developing children and children with ASD living in Israel and the United States.

Results: T-tests were used to compare group differences between the groups. Significant differences ($p \leq .05$) between the groups were found on several Sensory Profile subtests for both the typical and the ASD groups.

Conclusions and Implications for Occupational Therapy: Preliminary results suggest that there are significant differences in Short Sensory Profile scores based on culture for both typically developing children and children with ASD. These findings have implications for occupational therapists working with children with ASD who have sensory processing dysfunction to help them create and design culturally sensitive interventions. For example, if children from another culture such as Israeli are more sensitive to touch, then it may be necessary to change assessment guidelines and intervention strategies to accommodate these differences.