Mealtime Behaviors, Sensory Responsiveness, and Feeding Services for Children with ASD
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INTRODUCTION

Background
- Atypical eating behaviors and feeding challenges have become a growing concern among parents of children with autism spectrum disorders (ASD), with estimated prevalence reported to be between 30 and 89 percent. Despite the documented prevalence of mealtime challenges, research examining the relationship between aberrant mealtime behaviors and features typical of ASD such as sensory responsiveness is preliminary.
- Further evaluation of mealtimes is needed to uniformly characterize and understand mealtime behaviors in children with ASD.

Aims
- Determine the relationship between mealtime behaviors and sensory patterns in children with ASD.
- Determine the relationship between mealtime behaviors and sensory patterns to feeding intervention services received that address difficulties.

RESULTS

Limited Feeding Services Received

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant ID</th>
<th>Current Feeding Intervention (Minutes/Week)</th>
<th>Bayley/School Addressing Feeding</th>
<th>Parent in Workshop in Past</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>5-20% time, 1x/week Speech Therapy</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>5-20% time, 1x/week Speech Therapy</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Varied Mealtime Behavior Severity and Sensory Responsiveness Across Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant ID</th>
<th>BAMBI Sum Score</th>
<th>SEQ Sum Score</th>
<th>BAMBI Mean Score (SD)</th>
<th>SEQ Mean Score (SD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>231</td>
<td>2(2)</td>
<td>2.34(1.34)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>2(2)</td>
<td>2.09(1.31)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>2(2)</td>
<td>1.90(0.97)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>2(1)</td>
<td>1.87(1.22)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>277</td>
<td>3(2)</td>
<td>2.44(1.34)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comparison of Mealtime Behaviors and Sensory Responsiveness Scored from 1 (least) to 5 (most)

CONCLUSION

- The participants were currently receiving limited direct services to address their feeding and mealtime behaviors despite parent-identified mealtime challenges.
- Results from preliminary analyses suggest that a trend exists between mealtime behaviors and sensory responsiveness, however further research is needed to investigate the relationship between mealtime behaviors and sensory responsiveness in children with ASD.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

- Occupational Therapists (OT) are uniquely equipped to work with children with ASD due to their focus on adjusting tasks and the environment to match a child’s needs and abilities. OTs also are skilled at developing strategies that help a child respond to and process sensory information to promote engagement in mealtime.
- OTs should advocate for families who have children with ASD to influence the provision of services to remediate feeding challenges.
- OTs should collaborate with other health professionals to promote the use of standardized tools to evaluate feeding challenges and their origin.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

Participants
- Five male children with ASD who have parent identified feeding difficulties between the ages of two and six (M = 4.6, SD = 1.52).
- A cross-sectional case series design was used to examine mealtime behaviors, sensory patterns, and the feeding services currently provided to address mealtime challenges.

Measures
- Background Information Questionnaire (BIQ) – parents indicated the percent of feeding intervention services that their child is currently received per week. Parents also indicated if feeding was addressed during school time.
- Brief Autism Mealtime Behavior Inventory (BAMBI), an 18-item caregiver questionnaire designed to evaluate food repertoire, food refusal tendencies, and behavioral features of autism on a 5-point Likert scale was administered.
- Sensory Experiences Questionnaire (SEQ), a 105-item questionnaire designed to evaluate a child’s responses to sensory stimuli, using four subscales: hyper and hypo-responsiveness, sensory seeking, and enhanced processing (Hyper, Hypo, Seek, EIP) on a 5-point Likert scale was administered.

REFERENCES


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