

A family study of autism : Psychiatric morbidity and cognitive pattern in parents

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Aim of the work: To detect the type of the possible psychiatric morbidity in parents of autistic children and its relation to the severity of autism in their children.

Design of the study: Cross sectional, case control study.

Method: the study includes 30 children with different types of pervasive developmental disorders according to ICD-10 criteria and their parents; they are aged from 3-13 years. Both sexes are included. 30 normal children of matched age, sex and socioeconomic status together with their parents are included as control group. Children are subjected to the following: 1) semi structured psychiatric interview. 2) WISC. 3) CBCL. While, parents are subjected to the following tools: 1) ICD-10 symptom checklist of mental disorders. 2) WAIS. 3) PSI.

Results: in the current study 31% of autistic parents compared to 10% of control group have a diagnosable psychiatric disorder according to ICD-10 diagnostic checklist i.e. 8% of fathers of cases and 4% of mothers of cases compared to 0% in fathers and mothers of controls suffered from social phobia, depression is found to be higher in mothers(28%) than of fathers of cases(12.5%) compared to fathers and mothers of controls (10% for each), the only diagnosed cases of OCD are present in mothers of cases (4%) and not in fathers; there is no OCD in the control group. Also, there is a relative increase in cluster A personality disorders in fathers of cases than in mothers and more than in control group, the main traits are aloofness, oversensitivity to criticism and eccentricity. Parents of autistic children show multiple cognitive deficits in WCST and WAIS compared to controls.

Conclusion: dimensional classification based on the symptom pattern present in autistic children as well as the cognitive phenotype of their parents is suggested to have a good impact on diagnosis, management as well as research.