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THE EFFECTS OF TV WATCHING ON THE AUTISM LIKE SYMPTOMS: AN OPINION ABOUT THE PATHOPHYSIOLOGY

TV İZLEMENİN OTİZM BENZERİ SEMPTOMLARA ETKİSİ: PATOFİZYOLOJİ İLE İLGİLİ BİR DÜŞÜNCE

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Autism is a neurodevelopmental disorder that effects one in every 250 children (Baird et al. 2006) and characterized by significant impairments before the age of three in verbal and non-verbal communication, social interaction and a general loss of interest (APA, 1994). Notably, despite the ongoing efforts the underlying pathophysiology of autism is not well-understood. Currently, stress diathesis model argues that a genetic vulnerability may later trigger autism by environmental stressors. Although the environmental triggers are not entirely revealed some potential ones were identified. For instance, substantial number of studies has shown that children with autism display an increased affinity for excessive TV and video viewing, and an increased viewing of screen media may trigger autistic symptoms. Chonchaiya et al. (2008) has shown that autistic children spends more hours in front of TV as compared with the same age children with delayed language development. Nevertheless, whether or not tv viewing predispose autism is a presumption that needs to be investigated in longitudinal trials. In 2006, Waldman et al., performed a thought provoking study in which they conducted a nationwide survey in USA and found an increased viewing time for TV in countries where autism prevalence were higher than the others. Interestingly, they demonstrated that county autism rates were positively related with the rate for subscribing cable TV. Moreover, in 2005 Zwaigenbaum et al. demonstrated an in increased predilection for TV viewing in children who are at-risk for autism.

An indirect interpretation of this relationship came from Canell (2008). He hypothesized that in the presence of increased hours spent in front of TV, children may develop D-vitamin deficiency that can disturb normal brain development. Here, I believe a more direct hypothesis may be developed, using the famous Bandura's social learning theory. Real-life social interaction that includes not only information exchange but also reinforce social imitation and learning processes could enhance social development of the children. In the lack of such interaction, merely interaction with the characters in the TV may imitate rewarding features of human-human

interaction which may decrease the children's motivation to engage real-life social activities. Therefore, a vicious cycle that increases social isolation may occur. Taken as a whole despite the benefits of technology on the development of children, without careful parental control, these technologies may be harmful for our children. Patients who experience such autistic like symptoms may be aware of the problems that are triggered my media over consumption. Besides, clinicians should question the amount of time spend in front of TV and video, while evaluating the mental problems of their patients. Serious cases should immediately refer to child and adolescent psychiatrists to get further counseling and treatment.

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