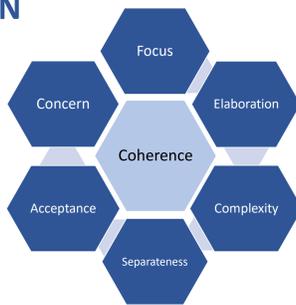


Coherence of Parental Representations Following Therapy for Autistic Children



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INTRODUCTION



- Parental representations → Information processing rules that guide parents' interpretations of their child's feelings and behaviours¹
- Coherence → Clarity, consistency, multidimensionality, and authenticity of parents' verbal narrative about their child²
- Outside of autism, relationships have been examined between coherence and child characteristics in the context of parent-focused interventions³
- Research is needed to examine associations between coherence and child characteristics in the context of child-focused interventions for autistic children

OBJECTIVES: 1) Examine changes in the coherence of parents' representations following participation in their children's therapy
2) Explore associations between parental coherence, baseline child characteristics, and child outcomes

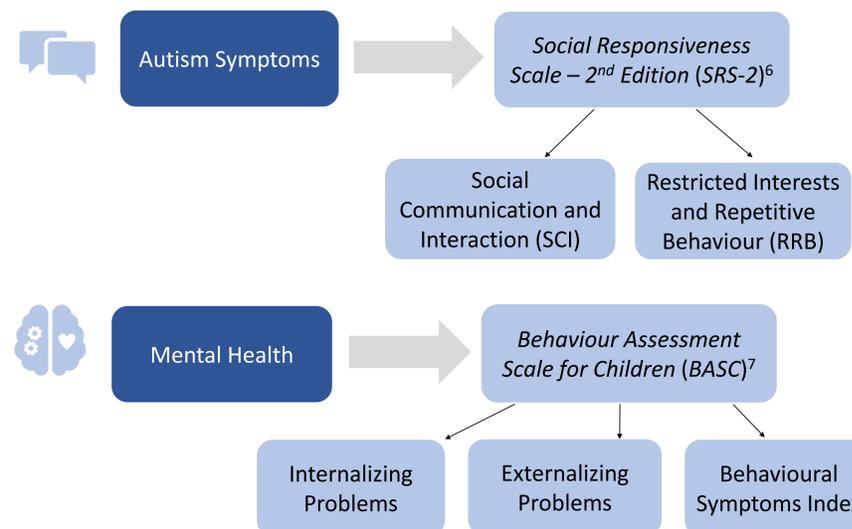
METHODS

PARTICIPANTS

- N = 81 parent-child dyads completed a 10-week cognitive behavioural therapy intervention designed to improve child mental health challenges
- Parents were 35 to 54 years ($M = 43.84$ years, $SD = 4.41$ years)
 - > 85% female
- Children were 8 to 13 years ($M = 9.60$ years, $SD = 1.38$ years)
 - > 89% male

MEASURES

- Parental coherence: Five Minute Speech Sample Procedure (FMSS)⁴, Narrative Coherence Coding System⁵
- Interrater reliability established by three coders, coding 20% of transcripts: Excellent for overall and subscale coherence scores ($ICC = .92$ to $.98$)



Aspects of coherence (i.e., concern and acceptance) improved following parental participation in children's therapy

Links were found between parental coherence and child mental health both prior to and following therapy

RESULTS

Table 1. Spearman rho correlations between autism symptoms, children's mental health, and parental coherence.

	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. SCI	.69***	.39***	.30**	.51***	-.03	.14	.10	-.10	-.13	-.07	.004
2. RRBI	-	.37***	.24*	.46***	-.12	.18	.03	.13	-.21	-.08	-.17
3. Internalizing Problems	-	-	.49***	.73***	-.03	-.002	-.16	.13	-.35**	-.36***	-.35**
4. Externalizing Problems	-	-	-	.79***	.007	-.07	-.17	.07	-.24*	-.41***	-.34**
5. Behavioural Symptoms	-	-	-	-	-.06	.02	-.05	.04	-.30**	-.39***	-.31**
6. Focus	-	-	-	-	-	-.004	-.05	-.04	.006	.09	.10
7. Elaboration	-	-	-	-	-	-	.05	-.01	-.05	.16	.06
8. Separateness	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-.03	.02	.09	.07
9. Concern	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-.33**	-.29**	-.58***
10. Acceptance	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	.61***	.71***
11. Complexity	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	.76***
12. Coherence	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

- Post-intervention Concern scores were lower ($Z = -3.38$, $p < .001$), and post-intervention Acceptance scores were higher ($Z = 2.48$, $p = .01$) than pre-intervention scores
- There were no differences in other subscale scores from pre- to post-intervention (all p 's > .10)
- 30% ($N = 24$) of parents were rated as coherent pre-intervention, and this increased to 43% ($N = 35$) post-intervention, though these changes were not statistically significant ($p = .07$)
- Change in coherence accounted for a very small degree (3%) of unique variance in post-intervention behavioural symptoms ($t = -2.79$, $p = .007$), after accounting for baseline clinical symptoms

DISCUSSION

- Understanding the relationships between parental coherence and child characteristics may inform potential targets for intervention
- Observed improvements in aspects of coherence following therapy, and links with child outcomes, suggests that supporting parents alongside their children may promote the well-being of autistic children

LIMITATIONS & FUTURE DIRECTIONS

- Lack of diversity, little variability in coherence subscales, and correlational nature of the analyses
- Future research is needed to examine changes in coherence within the context of parent-focused interventions, therapeutic processes that may be related to changes in coherence (e.g., parent/child engagement), and longitudinal associations between coherence and child characteristics

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