

ABSTRACT

Recent researches suggested a relationship between eye contact and the “theory of mind” abilities in individuals with autism. Present study attempted to replicate the study by Yirmiya et al (1999) with several modifications in order to verify the association of the quantity of eye contact and the ability to understand people’s mental states. 49 autistic individuals with mild grade mental deficiency, aged from 8-17 were recruited for the study. Individuals with Down’s syndrome and normal individuals with the projected mental age matched at group level served as the control groups. They were administered two sets of ToM tasks, namely the Value beliefs task & Fact beliefs task, that conveyed important information through visual displays of affective cues ie. facial expression by the experimenter. Participants’ gaze at experimenters’ face and the ToM task material were measured while they responded to the ToM task. Results showed no significant differences in the quantity of eye gaze between the ToM passers and failers within the autistic individuals and as well as the other two groups. These findings contrasted with the previous study. The role of eye contact and the factors that might be important in the development and the theory of mind abilities were discussed.