

Abstract

Feeding disorder and anxiety are prevailing problems in children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in addition to their repetitive behavior and deficit in social communication. Their mealtime behaviors have caused serious trouble to parents and clinical professions. This study aimed to investigate the relationship between ASD children's anxiety level and mealtime behavioral problem; whether children would demonstrate different problematic mealtime behaviors in home and school contexts as rated by parents and teachers; whether there would be a SCERTS[®] communication stage effect on children's anxiety and feeding problem. Both parents and teachers of 138 preschool children with ASD studying Special Child Care Centre (SCCC), aged approximately from 4 to 6, completed a set of questionnaires about feeding problem using Brief Autism Mealtime Behavior Inventory (BAMBI) – 15 items (DeMand, Johnson, & Foldes, 2015; Lukens & Linscheid, 2008) and child anxiety using Preschool Anxiety Scale (Spence, Rapee, McDonald, & Ingram, 2001). In both parent and teacher ratings, moderate positive correlations were found between child anxiety and feeding problem after controlled for age. When child communication stage was taken into consideration, the strength of the correlation between child anxiety and feeding problem became significant and strong for children with higher communication ability but insignificant for children with lower communication ability. By using 34 as the cut-off score for feeding problem in BAMBI suggested by DeMand et al. (2015), children with feeding problem showed higher anxiety level than those without feeding problem in both parent and teacher ratings. Correlation between parent and teacher ratings on anxiety scale was low and insignificant on BAMBI. More problematic mealtime behaviors were identified by parents at home than by teachers at school. Food selectivity and food refusal caused most complaints from parents and teachers among all other feeding problems.