Eating difficulties in children with intellectual disability of known genetic aetiology

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Background

• Children with neurodevelopmental disorders experience more eating difficulties than typically developing children.¹

• Despite research showing that eating difficulties can negatively impact children in both the short- and long-term, this has not been investigated specifically in children with intellectual disability (ID) with a known genetic cause.

This study aims to investigate:


2. Eating difficulties and their association with child and caregiver psychological wellbeing.

Methods

• 1,192 children aged 4-19 years with ID of known genetic aetiology (CNV/SNV) were recruited through UK Regional Genetic Centres.

• Caregivers completed structured psychiatric and developmental history interviews:
  - Development and Wellbeing Assessment (DAWBA)
    Eating behaviours in children (parent reporting on child).
  - Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ)
    Child emotional and behavioural adjustment (parent reporting on child).
  - Everyday Feelings Questionnaire (EFQ)
    Parental emotional wellbeing (parent reporting on self).

These validated assessments have been used in UK studies of psychological wellbeing.

Interviews were administered online, over the phone or in person.

Results

- 80% of children were found to have eating difficulties, compared to 25% in typically developing children.² Of these:
  - 49% of caregivers reported that eating difficulties affect the child’s wellbeing.
  - 58% reported that eating difficulties put a burden on the caregiver and the family.
  - 37% of children eat too little at meal times, 26% eat too much at meal times, 34% eat too much between meals, 43% eat a too narrow a range of foods, and 18% eat things they shouldn’t.

- SDQ total scores were significantly higher in children reported to have eating difficulties than those who were reported to not having eating difficulties (p<0.001), falling in the ‘very high’ category (M=21.01).

- Caregiver EFQ total scores were significantly higher in those who reported their children as having eating difficulties (p<0.001), falling within the ‘slightly raised’ category (M=17.10)

Conclusions

- Children with ID of known genetic aetiology had eating difficulties that were associated with poorer child and caregiver psychological wellbeing.

- Further understanding about the interaction between eating difficulties and psychological wellbeing in children and caregivers is important in improving outcomes for these families.

References
