INTRODUCTION

1. It is well-known that children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) have problems with understanding mental states, especially false beliefs.

2. However, a standard false belief (FB) task involves mentalising as well as representational understanding.

3. If children with ASD have a general difficulty in understanding representations, this challenges the view that mentalising is a domain-specific problem in ASD.

METHOD

Participants: 18 children with ASD versus 18 children without ASD

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Chronological age (in months)</th>
<th>Verbal mental age (in months)</th>
<th>Non-verbal intelligence quotient</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ASD</td>
<td>104.89 (19.95)</td>
<td>75.56 (20.70)</td>
<td>97.89 (19.93)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>74.39 (13.08)</td>
<td>77.67 (14.61)</td>
<td>109.33 (14.23)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The two groups did not differ in verbal mental age and non-verbal intelligence quotient (p > .05).

Materials: Non-verbal reality-unknown FB and false photograph (FP) tasks

Based on these tasks, a new false sign (FS) task was devised.

1. The groups were significantly different on the FB and FS trials.

2. Performance was correlated between the FB and FS trials, r = .55 for the ASDs, and r = .63 for the controls (p < .05).

CONCLUSION

1. This equivalence found between the FB and FS tasks in children with and without ASD suggests that their difficulty on false beliefs may be explained as a general cognitive difficulty in understanding representations.

2. This finding provides further support for the non-specificity claim of Theory of Mind.

3. Whether impaired representational understanding causes mentalising impairments or vice versa however, has not yet been established.

REFERENCES


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