Abstract:
The proposed research will investigate triggers and functions of repetitive behaviours in children and adolescents with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD). The research will also examine differences in levels and types of anxiety across ASD subtypes and provide data on the factors that can influence the development of anxiety in this population. Repetitive behaviours and anxiety can present management challenges and this study will provide data on how they influence levels of stress and sense of personal well-being in parents.

Introduction
Restricted and repetitive behaviours and interests (RRBs) are a core feature of ASD. Anxiety, although not considered as a part of the core autistic symptomatology is very common in children and adolescents with ASD and can significantly increase their functional impairments.

RRBs are a part of the normal behavioural repertoire during early development and observed in a wide array of developmental, psychiatric and neurological disorders (Leekam, Prior & Uljarevic, 2011). It is thought that RRBs may serve to ward off anxiety and may represent a mechanism for organizing, accommodating to and eventually mastering the environment. RRBs and anxiety can present management challenges and interfere with family functioning and have been cited among the most stressful behaviours for parents (Bishop et al., 2007).

At present, contextual, constitutional and environmental triggers for repetitive behaviours in Autism Spectrum Disorders are not well understood. Although some studies suggest that the differences in anxiety across ASD subtypes might exist, this work is only in the infancy. Also research examining influence of developmental levels and chronological age in the symptom expression of anxiety is needed.

Study Aims:
To investigate the contextual, constitutional and environmental factors that provide triggers for repetitive behaviours.
To investigate differences in anxiety across ASD subtypes and also the influence of developmental levels and chronological age in the symptom expression of anxiety.
To investigate anxiety, emotion regulation, coping strategies and well-being of parents of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

Hypotheses / Expected Outcomes:
RRBs in older and more able children will be motivated more by anxiety, while in younger and less able children the main source of motivation will be sensory seeking.

Anxiety levels will be higher in individuals with Asperger’s Syndrome and PDD-NOS when compared to individuals with AD. Also anxiety will be more prevalent in older and more able children.

Higher levels of anxiety, emotion processing difficulties and less efficient coping strategies will be found in parents.

References:


Funding:
This project is funded by Welsh Assembly Government’s National Institute of Social Care and Health Research Scheme.