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EATING DISORDERS IN HIGH FUNCTIONING CHILDREN WITH AUTISM - A PILOT STUDY

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Introduction: Eating disorders in children with the autism spectrum are relatively frequent. However, it should be borne in mind that food selectivity in the case of patients with autism may have various grounds: sensory nature, limited and restrictive interests or repetitive behaviors. The main aim of the pilot study was to determine the frequency of food selectivity and to determine its causes.

Methods: The survey covered 30 families of children with autism living in south-eastern Poland with answers, in all cases, received from mothers/legal guardians of female sex. The children in the survey were diagnosed with autism/Asperger syndrome and were "highly functioning". Their age ranged 3.5 - 10 years (6.54; SD=2.28). The research tool was the author's questionnaire.

Results: Eating disorders were found in 63% of children in the surveyed group, while slightly more than half of 53% were identified as having significant impact on the health and functioning of the family. According to the parents, 68.4% of food selectivity was determined by the presence of sensory abnormalities.

Conclusions: Sensory integration therapy aimed at diet expansion therapy should be considered as an important element in the therapy of children with autism spectrum disorder.

Keywords: autism, eating disorders, sensory integration disorders.