

Researchers define uniform method to interpret autism spectrum disorders

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A researcher from Ben-Gurion University of the Negev has defined a new, integrated interpretation of Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD), which makes it easier to understand both the commonalities and differences between ASD and other conditions.

In an article published in the December 2009 issue of *The Neuroscientist* titled: "The Medial Prefrontal Cortex and Integration in Autism," Dr. Dorit Ben Shalom recommends a uniform approach to evaluating and confronting the four common problems associated with ASD.

"The main criterion defining Autism Spectrum Disorders is difficulty in emotional-social behavior," explains Dr. Ben Shalom of Ben-Gurion University's Zlotowski Center for Neuroscience, in Beer-Sheva, Israel. "Nevertheless, many people with ASD have some difficulties in three other domains -- memory, perception and motor behavior."

In her theoretical model, Dr. Ben Shalom recommends a uniform way to think about these four types of difficulties, which she believes are linked by a common [brain structure/brain function](#) connection involving the medial prefrontal cortex. This approach makes it easier to understand both commonalities and differences between ASD and other conditions, such as [Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder](#) (ADHD). This approach will make it possible to test predictions about the location of these brain networks, how they function differently in people with ASD and how to use this knowledge to design interventions and compensatory strategies.

According to the U.S. National Institute of Mental Health, ASD is more common in the pediatric population than better known disorders, such as diabetes, spinal bifida or Down syndrome. A recent study of a U.S. metropolitan area estimates that 3.4 of every 1,000 children between 3 and 10 years-old have Autism.

Provided by American Associates, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev

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