

Link between epilepsy and autism

October 23 2015, by Anne Brown



Generalized 3 Hz spike and wave discharges in a child with childhood absence epilepsy. Credit: Wikipedia.

A new UK study has shed light on the negative impact that epilepsy can have on autism in adult patients.

Conducted by University College London in partnership with the University of Bath and the University of Cambridge, the study aimed to investigate autistic characteristics and their relationship to [seizure frequency](#) by analysing [behavioural traits](#) in people with epilepsy and those without.

The study employed a test of social responsiveness in 76 patients with epilepsy and 19 without, as well as looking at [repetitive behaviour](#) in 47 [epilepsy patients](#) and 21 control subjects.

Researchers also employed a unique method to quantify the extent to which autistic characteristics were related to perceived mild seizure activity, with patients instructed to rate their usual behaviour on each assessment and, at the same time, rate their behaviour again when they perceived that they were having mild seizure activity.

According to results published in the medical journal *Epilepsy & Behavior*, significantly higher levels of social responsiveness issues were related to having a diagnosis of epilepsy and were perceived by adults with epilepsy to increase during mild seizure activity, with these scores positively correlating with antiepileptic drug control.

By contrast, no difference was found for repetitive behaviour scores in those with epilepsy and those without.

The researchers concluded: "Together, these results suggest that adults with epilepsy have higher autistic characteristics measured by the social responsiveness scale, while sameness behaviors remain unimpaired.

"The autistic characteristics measured by the social responsiveness scale

were reported by adults with epilepsy to be more severe during their mild seizure activity."

It is estimated that the prevalence of autism spectrum disorders in epilepsy is between 15 and 47 per cent, with this new research adding credence to previous studies that indicated more pronounced autistic traits in adults with epilepsy.

More information: "Autistic characteristics in adults with epilepsy and perceived seizure activity." *Epilepsy Behav.* 2015 Oct 13;52(Pt A):244-250. [DOI: 10.1016/j.yebeh.2015.08.031](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.yebeh.2015.08.031)

Provided by University of Bath

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