

# The impact of atypical sensory processing on adaptive functioning and maladaptive behaviors in autism spectrum disorder during childhood: results from the ELENA Cohort

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## Background

Sensory processing allow to select, organize and associate several sensory informations from the environment in order to adapt the individual's behaviour. In children with **Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD)**, atypical sensory processing, adaptive difficulties, and problem behaviours are frequently reported. In the literature, there's an agreement that atypical sensory processing are common in ASD. However, **the prevalence** is variable depending on studies and their association with adaptive functioning and maladaptive behaviours are still unclear.

Our aims were to **estimate the prevalence of atypical sensory processing** and to **investigate their associations with adaptive functioning and maladaptive behaviours**.

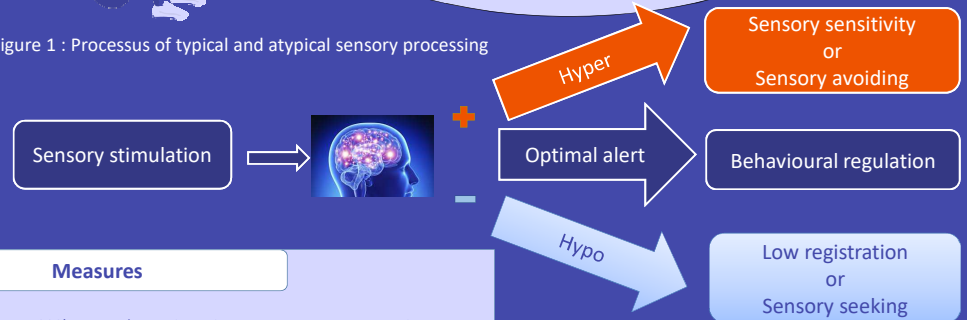
## What is the ELENA cohort ?

It's a **French national** clinical pediatric cohort with ASD. This cohort is a dynamic and prospective study. Participants are aged between 2 and 16 years, and have a **diagnosis of ASD** formally established by a multidisciplinary team according to international criteria (DSM5).

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Figure 1 : Processus of typical and atypical sensory processing



### Participants

N=181



83 % 17%

3 to 11 years

### Measures



**Sensory profile** (Dunn, 1999) parental questionnaire : assess sensory processing



**Vineland II** (Sparrow, 2005) parental interview : assess adaptive functioning



**Aberrant behaviour checklist** (Aman, 1985) parental questionnaire : Assess maladaptive behaviours

## Results

Our findings highlight that atypical sensory processing are highly prevalent in children with autism spectrum disorders and that they are not influenced by gender, age or autism severity. All sensory modalities are disturbed in ASD, multisensory processing being the most. Atypical sensory processing is strongly associated with maladaptive behaviours.

Percentage of atypical and typical score at the sensory profile depending of sensory quadrants

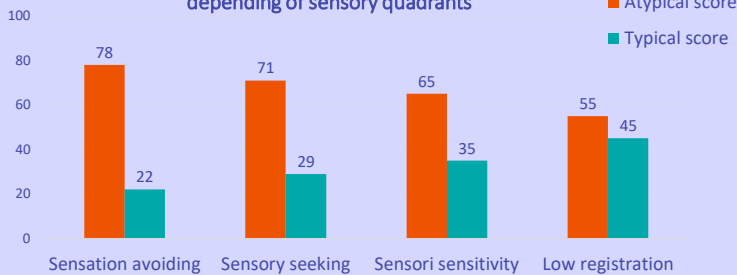


Table 1 Comparison of the Vineland scores between typical and atypical SP groups

	Low registration		Sensory seeking		Sensory sensitivity		Sensory avoiding	
	Typical N=83	Atypical N=92	Typical N=51	Atypical N=111	Typical N=55	Atypical N=99	Typical N=34	Atypical N=117
Communication	70.3 (17.6)	70.0 (15.7)	<b>74.0 (19.1)</b>	<b>68.0 (15.2)</b>	69.7 (18.2)	69.0 (14.9)	<b>63.9 (18.2)</b>	<b>73.3 (15.6)</b>
Daily living skills	75.4 (13.1)	72.0 (11.5)	<b>76.4 (12.8)</b>	<b>71.9 (12.1)</b>	74.1 (12.0)	71.2 (12.3)	74.2 (13.4)	73.4 (12.5)
Socialization	68.0 (12.6)	69.0 (9.4)	<b>71.5 (11.5)</b>	<b>67.1 (11.5)</b>	68.8 (11.8)	67.7 (10.4)	67.8 (12.3)	69.2 (10.9)

Percentage of atypical and typical score at the sensory profile depending of sensory modalities

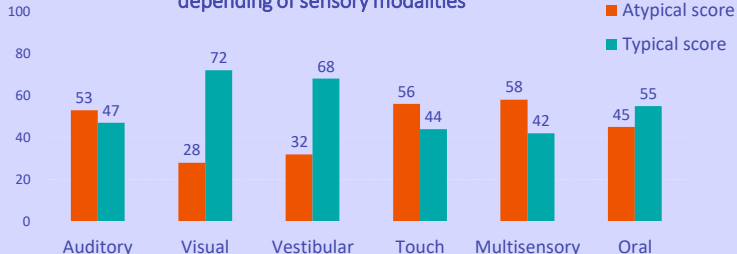


Table 2 Comparison of ABC scores between typical and atypical SP groups

	Low registration		Sensory seeking		Sensory sensitivity		Sensory avoiding	
	Typical N=58	Atypical N=81	Typical N=43	Atypical N=85	Typical N=43	Atypical N=76	Typical N=26	Atypical N=92
Irritability	<b>31.3 (17.3)</b>	<b>39.0 (19.0)</b>	<b>28.5 (17.8)</b>	<b>39.7 (19.3)</b>	<b>29.1 (17.5)</b>	<b>39.2 (19.5)</b>	<b>27.2 (20.1)</b>	<b>37.2 (18.5)</b>
Lethargy	<b>22.3 (16.8)</b>	<b>32.8 (16.7)</b>	<b>21.7 (15.7)</b>	<b>32.4 (17.8)</b>	<b>21.5 (17.6)</b>	<b>31.9 (17.9)</b>	<b>19.8 (16.1)</b>	<b>30.6 (16.8)</b>
Stereotypy	<b>26.2 (19.6)</b>	<b>39.2 (21.3)</b>	<b>27.1 (22.4)</b>	<b>37.8 (21.4)</b>	<b>26.6 (23.2)</b>	<b>39.2 (21.7)</b>	<b>22.3 (17.1)</b>	<b>36.2 (21.0)</b>
Hyperactivity	<b>44.7 (21.1)</b>	<b>51.4 (22.6)</b>	<b>31.4 (19.3)</b>	<b>56.6 (18.7)</b>	<b>39.9 (21.2)</b>	<b>53.2 (22.4)</b>	<b>41.5 (22.1)</b>	<b>49.1 (22.1)</b>

## Conclusion

**Sensory processing** is common in the large spectrum of ASD. Thereby, children with ASD and their families need to deal with them in everyday life. In particular, children with a sensory seeking profile have lower adaptive skills and require specific attention. Moreover, we highlight that atypical sensory processing are strongly associated with maladaptive behaviours. Atypical sensory processing might be one of the possible causes of challenging behaviours. For that reason it needs to be taken into account in early intervention in order to prevent subsequent challenging behaviours.

**Acknowledgements:** We wish to sincerely thank the participants and their families for their collaboration and their confidence in our study.

**Financed by:** French Ministry of Health (ELENA-E1, PHRCN 2013 - Project number: 13-0232), la Caisse Nationale de Solidarité pour l'Autonomie (CNSA) and the CHU of Montpellier (AOI Cohorte).

Consortium ELENA\* : [www.elena-cohort.org](http://www.elena-cohort.org)

