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The Stanford Social Dimensions Scale (SSDS): A method for quantifying key social processes including social motivation in patients with social deficits including those with autism spectrum disorder

Scientists at the Stanford Autism Center have invented a questionnaire called the Stanford Social Dimensions Scale (SSDS) for measuring key social processes including social motivation, social communication and social recognition in both the general population and a wide range of patient populations such as those with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).

A key symptom of autism spectrum disorders is impaired social communication. Scientists believe a lower level of "social motivation," or the desire to interact with others, is what causes ASD children to struggle with communication. To help ASD patients improve their social motivation and communication and track progress, therapists need a method that specifically quantifies social motivation levels in ASD patients.

The current methods for quantifying autism spectrum disorders include techniques like the Autism Diagnostic Observational Schedule (ADOS-2) and the Autism Quotient (AQ), but existing methods either do not measure social motivation directly or do not measure it thoroughly. In addition, some methods rely on ASD patient self-reporting, which is not feasible in many young children. The SSDS overcomes the limitations of previous methods through a parent/caregiver report questionnaire which comprehensively and sensitively assesses social motivation as well as other key social domains such as social recognition, in patients on the autism spectrum.

This method was validated by testing over 600 children including typically developing children and children with a variety of neuropsychiatric disorders and displays excellent internal consistency and consistency with existing methods.

Applications

- Clinical measurement of social motivation and other key social processes in children with autism spectrum disorder and other neuropsychiatric conditions to identify ASD and/or track treatment progress

Advantages

- The SSDS is more comprehensive, sensitive and specific compared to other instruments in terms of capturing key social processes that are necessary for understanding of social deficits in conditions such as ASD as well as other clinical conditions.
- Allows for assessment of social motivation even in young children who can't self-report through the use of a parent/caregiver questionnaire
- Assesses other key social domains such as social recognition that are either not covered or covered insufficiently by other scales.

Publications

- Stanford Autism Center - Stanford Social Dimensions Scale (SSDS)
- Phillips, J. M. et al. Development of the Stanford Social Dimensions Scale: initial validation in autism spectrum disorder and in neurotypicals Mol. Autism 10, 48 (2019).
- Uljarevi?, M. et al. Exploring Social Subtypes in Autism Spectrum Disorder: A Preliminary Study Autism Res. 13, 1335–1342 (2020).

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