

Abstract

The current study examined the prevalence of gastrointestinal (GI) dysfunction among children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) in Hong Kong. It is also the first investigation which examined the predictive power of ASD on GI dysfunction with the control of the influence of other covariates. Furthermore, among the children diagnosed with ASD, the association between GI dysfunction and emotional problems, behavioral problems and diet were explored. Results indicate that ASD children are more prevalent in experiencing GI dysfunction than children without ASD in Hong Kong. ASD children are significantly more at risk for GI dysfunction, particularly functional constipation and irritable bowel syndrome with upper and lower abdominal pain. Nonetheless, ASD is only identified as a significant predictor of specific GI symptoms (i.e. functional constipation and irritable bowel syndrome with upper abdominal pain), but not general GI dysfunction. A negative interaction effect of ASD and conduct problems on one's experience of irritable bowel syndrome with lower abdominal pain is also identified. In addition, among the ASD children who have GI dysfunction, they are indicated to have more emotional problems, conduct problems and less consumption of fibre and nutrient.