

Signs and Symptoms of Screen Related Developmental Delay (SRDD): Emergent Patterns for Differential Diagnosis and Treatment

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Background

- Young children have progressively been spending more time engaging with screen media over the last decade [1].
- Excessive screen media use, in children, is associated with delays in multiple developmental domains [2-4].
- Recent reports suggest that some of the signs of excessive screen use are similar to symptoms of autism spectrum disorder (ASD) [5].
- Currently there are no standardized protocols to distinguish ASD from developmental delays due to screen use.

Objectives

- 1.To summarize the signs and symptoms of screen-related developmental delay [6] (SRDD) reported in the literature.
- 2.To summarize reported strategies in differentiating between SRDD and ASD.
3. To summarize treatment approaches for SRDD.

Method

- A scoping review [7] of the literature was completed using 5 relevant databases: Scopus, PubMed, APA PsycNet, Web of Science, and CINAHL. Handsearching methods were also used.
- Key terms: “Child (0-5)” AND “Screen use” AND “autism-like symptoms.”
- The final search included 100 articles.
- 10 articles were identified as duplicates. Following the title and abstract screening, 41 articles were excluded, and an additional 23 articles were excluded after full-text review for being outside the scope of the review.
- 26 articles were included in the final sample of texts.

Characteristics of Studies

- Of the 26 texts:
 - 9 were from the Eastern Mediterranean, 7 from the Western Pacific, 3 from South-East Asia, and 1 each from Europe and the Americas; 5 did not specify.
 - 11 were cross-sectional, 6 case studies, 5 quasi-experimental, 2 qualitative, and 1 each were case series and mixed-methods.
- Other names for SRDD from the text included:
 - Attachment disorder (Not Otherwise Specified).
 - Autism-like or ASD-like symptoms, mobile autism, Post Digital Nannying Autism Symptoms (PDNAS), pseudo-autism, transient autism symptoms, and virtual autism.
 - Early and excessive screen exposure syndrome, early media exposure syndrome, early media overexposure syndrome, and electronic screen syndrome.
- Screen addiction and screen dependency.

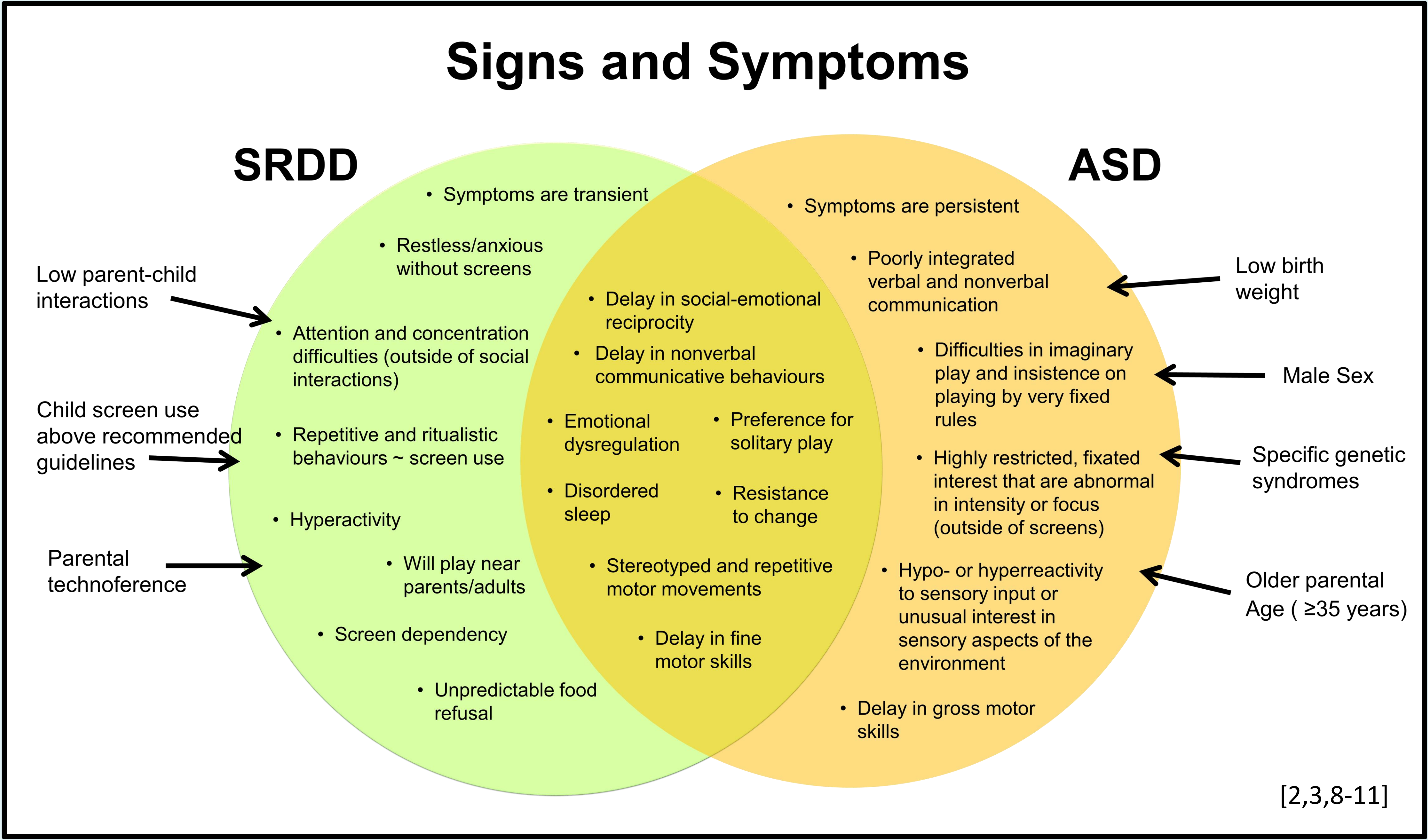
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Key Finding: Parent-focused interventions were a common and reportedly effective treatment for SRDD.

Noticeable changes in SRDD symptoms occurred within the first month when parents eliminated or reduced screen time and increased interactions with their child.

Etiology and risk factors



SRDD: A Multifaceted Approach to Management

1. Primary care providers should include screen media use during psycho-social history gathering.
2. If symptoms of ASD and problematic screen use co-occur, offer strategies to reduce screen time.
3. Developmental monitoring at regular intervals using standardized assessment tools.
4. Re-evaluate if any new developmental or behavioural concerns arise.

Implications and Future Directions

- Currently there are no standardized assessment tools that differentiate between SRDD and ASD.
- It is important for clinicians to be aware of the overlap between presentations of SRDD and ASD.
- More research is needed to better understand the underlying mechanisms and developmental trajectories associated with screen-related delays and ASD in early childhood.
- As this research area is still emerging, there is a clear need to develop a broader understanding of how this phenomenon manifests in the Canadian context.

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