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A Study of Real Conditions and Support of “Hyper-sensitivity and Insensibility” of Persons with Asperger Syndrome and High-functioning Autism

— Needs Survey of Persons with Asperger Syndrome and High-functioning Autism —

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Abstract

In recent years, many notes written by persons who were diagnosed as Asperger syndrome or high-functioning pervasive developmental disorders (autism) (hereinafter referred to as Asperger syndrome and so on) have been published. This phenomenon is gradually drawing attention to problems of senses that they confront.

Although persons with Asperger syndrome and similar disorders have *body senses* that differ from normal senses, they infer such a condition as *normal*. Thereby, their problems of hypersensitivity and insensibility or of *body senses have only slightly* ever been elucidated. In addition, Asperger syndrome and similar disorders are difficult to understand because of their distinctive difficulties. For that reason, the following perceptions have still not been cast aside: “You could be normal if you tried hard.” “You are lazy.” “Teachers and parents are spoiling you.” Their problems are also apt to be misunderstood as *selfish, egoistic*, and so on. Such beliefs appear to induce newly secondary disorders, such as maladaptation and problematic behaviors.

This study is therefore intended to examine actual conditions of hypersensitivity and insensibility, which have remained poorly understood, through a questionnaire survey of persons with Asperger syndrome and similar disorders. Furthermore, we attempted to clarify difficulties and needs that are specifically caused by hypersensitivity and insensibility and the support that they demand.

The survey was conducted as follows: 1) Examining many notes written by persons with Asperger syndrome and so on, we grasped what kind of hypersensitivity and insensibility they had. Based on an examination of them, we created a “Checklist of hypersensitivity and insensibility” and a “Checklist for understandings and support for hypersensitivity and insensibility which persons with Asperger syndrome and similar disorders ask”. 2) Obtaining cooperation from persons with Asperger syndrome and similar disorders, concerned organizations supporting developmental disorders, and so on, we administered questionnaires “Survey of actual conditions and supports for hyper-sensitivity and insensibility” to persons who were diagnosed or assessed as having Asperger syndrome or high-functioning pervasive developmental disorders (autism) and recognized such disorders (youths of upper secondary school and older and adults). 3) We also administered a similar questionnaire survey to *healthy* students, who were majoring in special support education at university or graduate school or taking a class related to developmental disorders. Results were compared and examined.

The survey period was November 2006 through February 2007. We received valid responses from 75 persons who were diagnosed or assessed as Asperger syndrome or high-functioning pervasive developmental disorders (autism) and recognized such disorders (youths at upper secondary school and older and adults) and 113 “regular” students who were majoring in special support education at a university or graduate school or taking a class related to developmental disorders.

The check rates for the checklist with 330 items related to hypersensitivity and insensibility by persons with Asperger syndrome

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and similar disorders varied considerably from person to person: the highest was 61.5%; the lowest was 0.9%. Additionally, concerning the check rates to the checklist with 160 items about understanding and support for which they asked, the highest was 62.5% whereas the lowest was 0%. Results also clarified that great individual differences existed in understanding and support for which they asked. As understanding and support that they requested from schools and teachers, various requests were raised, such as: 1) I have problems with being touched and standing in line. Therefore, I want people to speak to me in advance before touching me and to take sufficient space when standing in line (tactile hyperaesthesia). 2) I often incorrectly interpret words with similar pronunciations. If asked to repeat themselves over and over again, I want people not to get angry (acoustic hyperaesthesia). 3) I am very afraid of what I have never eaten. Therefore, I want to eat a small amount of what I am going to eat at the first time at school lunch and so on, and to take supplements (gustatory hyperaesthesia). 4) I have a serious problem with smells, such as: gymnasiums and sports equipment rooms, art materials such as adhesives and paints, and school lunches. Because they make me sick, I want to take my favorite aroma with me (olfactory hyperaesthesia). 5) I get very relaxed when I slightly swing my body or leaning and hopping, so that I want people not to care about what I do. 6) I become comfortable and stable if a “space only for me” exists in a classroom.

We also classified the persons' current status into four groups: *at school*, *during employment* (including part-timers and freelancers), *supported employment in workshop*, and *out of employment*. Then we compared check rates of hypersensitivity and insensibility per person according to their status; check rates of persons *out of employment* were the highest in many items. In contrast, check rates of persons *in employment* were low. The results indicate that with or without and/or the degree of hypersensitivity and insensibility had no small effect on finding work. In addition, for all items except those related to the sense of taste, check rates of females are more than double those of males, which suggests that gender differences exist in hypersensitivity and insensibility.

This survey only illustrated an overall tendency of hypersensitivity and insensibility. Therefore, it does not fit all Asperger syndrome or high-functioning pervasive developmental disorders (autism). It also revealed that great differences are apparent among individuals. Therefore, for supporting each, it is necessary to clarify individual difficulties and needs and to support them politely.

Key words: Asperger Syndrome, High-functioning Autism, Hyper-sensitivity, Insensibility, Needs Survey