

BAR – ILAN UNIVERSITY

**The relationship between sensory processing difficulties  
among young children, their adjustment capabilities, and  
the degree of emotional flooding their mothers experience**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The aim of the study is to examine the relationship between difficulty in sensory processing and the functioning of the young child, in the various areas of life. In addition to examining the relationship between sensory processing difficulties and the emotional flooding that a mother experiences with her child. Finally, to examine whether the emotional flooding experienced by the mother related to the difficulty in her child sensory processing contributes to his difficulties in functioning.

Sensory processing is a process of absorbing, recognizing, organizing, and giving meaning to the sensory stimuli from the environment and from the body and to respond appropriate to the stimulus. It is a nerve system capacity, which begins to develop from birth. This evolving and dynamic capability enables efficient and adaptable functioning in the environment. Impairment in this ability means, difficulty in absorbing the stimuli, regulating, processing, and organizing them into a response adapted to the stimulus in its intensity and duration. Sensory processing impairment moves across an axis in its severity and can appear in some or all the sensory channels. It has been found to be related to various areas of functioning such as social skills, arousal and attention, managerial abilities, internalization and externalization behavior problems, self-image, and self-esteem.

Emotional flooding is the intensity in which emotions are experienced so that they take over the individual and cause physiological arousal alongside with disruption in emotional and cognitive processes. The individual's ability to respond calmly, organized and adapted to the flooding event is impaired. Also, the feeling of emotional flooding can cause intense and uncontrollable emotional reactions. Usually the individual will try to escape the event and even avoid similar events in the future. In the context of parental emotional flooding, the parent cannot leave the scene. Thus, the parent may take responses that will end the reason for the emotional flooding at that moment, such as a disciplinary and difficult response appropriate to an authoritative parenting style or a weak and avoidant response, appropriate to a permissive parenting style, but in the long run these responses are not beneficial.

In the present study, 60 mothers and their children aged 3 - 4.5 participated. The child's sensory profile was determined according to a sensory profile questionnaire filled out by the mothers. In addition, they completed an ABAS II functional questionnaire on the child, and an emotional flood questionnaire on themselves.

The findings, according to research hypotheses, found a link between the child's difficulty in general sensory processing and poor performance of the child number of dimensions, including self-directed function, Leisure, society, and everyday life. It was also found that the child's difficulty in sensory processing increases the chance of the mother's emotional flooding, and that the mother's emotional flooding is associated with the child's lower functioning in the indices: self-direction, leisure and society.

The conclusions from the findings are that the more difficulty is found in the general sensory profile, the higher the level of emotional flooding of the mothers and the lower the level of functioning of the child. The direct relationship between the degree of general difficulty in sensory processing and the child's adaptation will be significantly reduced compared to the mediated relationship through emotional flooding.

The present study is a pioneering study examining the relationship between difficulties in general sensory processing and the experience of mothers' emotional flooding of young children. At the same time, due to a relatively small sample and a high percentage of mothers with higher education degrees, the need arises to increase the number of subjects.