

**BAR-ILAN UNIVERSITY**

**Mothers' representation of their young children with sensory processing difficulties: Relationships between degree of sensory processing difficulties, aspects of mothers' representations and adaptive behaviour.**

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## ABSTRACT.1

This study deals with the relationship between the child's sensory profile, and the mother's representation of their children. It focuses on children aged 3-4 years old who show signs of difficulty in sensory processing and environment-adapted functioning. Sensory processing is the process of absorbing, identifying and integrating sensory information, organizing the information, and producing an adaptive behavioral response in accordance with the interpretation of the received information. It is a dynamic process from birth, enabling efficient functioning. Sensory impairment means difficulty in absorbing the sensory stimuli, processing them and producing an adaptive response adapted to the stimulus. Children at young ages with difficulty in sensory processing may experience difficulty in various areas of functioning, such as: social skills, attention span, managerial abilities and more, and accordingly exhibit rigid and non-adaptive behaviors. These children will often be described as having a difficult temperament, because the responses to the information received are not adjusted in terms of frequency, form and intensity and will require external assistance .

The need for ongoing external assistance may affect parenting and parenting abilities, as mothers of children with sensory processing difficulties may, often, feel guilty or experience a sense of failure as a result of the child's behavior. Following these complex feelings, it is possible that the mother's will react critically and not towards the child. These parental challenges may significantly affect the functioning of the child and the family. This dynamic is particularly challenging as children with severe temperaments are disproportionately affected by parenting and the quality of care.

The concept of mother's representation of the child was originally introduced by Bowlby (1969), to describe the process of storing the experiences and interactions from the child's daily life with the parent. a mother's representation of the child serves as a guideline for behaviors and observations in the relationship. Parental representations are complex cognitive structures that direct the mother's interpretation and responses - emotional, cognitive and behavioral - to the signals of her children. Children with difficulty in sensory processing, combined with challenging temperament, challenge the mother's ability to respond to their child in an adapted and reassuring way, which in turn may adversely affect the mother's representation of the child. The various manifestations of behavior and difficulties mentioned above, directly and significantly affect the child and their immediate environment in a variety of contexts. These difficulties may manifest themselves as difficulty in managing close relationships, difficulty in adapting and in functioning abilities, or a substantial difficulty in perfecting existing abilities and acquiring new skills.

Given the importance of the topic, this study examines the various connections between the child's sensory profile, and the mother's representation of the child on the one hand, and the child's function on the other. The aim is to examine relationships between the child's sensory profile, and the mother's representation of the child. In addition, the study seeks to examine the relationship between measures of the child's sensory profile and different aspects of maternal representations and the child's functioning in various areas.

The study involved 60 mothers and their children aged 2-4. The student assessed the child's sensory profile according to a sensory profile questionnaire filled out by the mother. The Sensory Profile caregiver questionnaire provides standardized tools to help evaluate a child's sensory processing patterns in the context of home, school, and community-based activities. The mother's representation of the child was evaluated by a procedure called: Object Representation Inventory (ORI), designed by Blatt and

colleagues (Blatt, 1992), adapted for this study to evaluate the mother's representation of the child. The level of child functioning was measured by the ABAS II questionnaire, which provides a comprehensive norm-referenced assessment of adaptive skills for an individual's age from birth to 89 years. The ABAS-II measures ranges of adaptive skills according to American Association on Mental Retardation (AMAR) and Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders- Fourth Edition (DSM-IV). It is a complete assessment tool to measure multiple respondents, evaluating functioning across multiple settings and to assess daily functioning of an individual.

The study findings indicated that there is a relationship between the child's sensory profile and the mother's representation of the child. It was also found that the higher the sensory profile indices, the lower the mother's representation of the child indices. In contrast, the higher the child's sensory profile indices, the higher the degree of ambivalence associated with the mothers aspects of the mother's representation of the child. Finally, it was found that the higher the measures of mother's representation of the child that characterize the child, the higher the measure of function, while the higher the degree of ambivalence, the lower the measure of function. According to the findings of this study, the mother's representation of the child is a mediating variable. linking difficulties in the child's sensory processing with the child's level of functioning. mother's representation of the child constitutes as a mediating variable that decreases the direct proximity between the sensory profile measure and the functioning measure. According to this finding, a positive mother's representation of the child can improve the child's functioning indicators.

There are limitations to generalizability of the study. Due to the relatively small sample and a high percentage of mothers with an advanced academic education. The need arises to expand the size of the sample and harness research subjects from diverse backgrounds as well as from different regions around the country. In addition to the breadth of subjects, it is also necessary to further explore the relationship between the mother's representation of the child and other developmental aspects of the child.