

# An Exploration of Sensory Features & their Relationship to Family Routines

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## Introduction

This study examined occupational engagement of families with children with ASD who have high sensory features in one of the two main subtype categories.

- High hyper-responsive group
- High hypo-responsive group

Little research currently exists examining the ways that these divergent responses to sensation impact family occupations & routines.

*Research Aim: To describe the nature of relationships between specific sensory features and family occupations.*

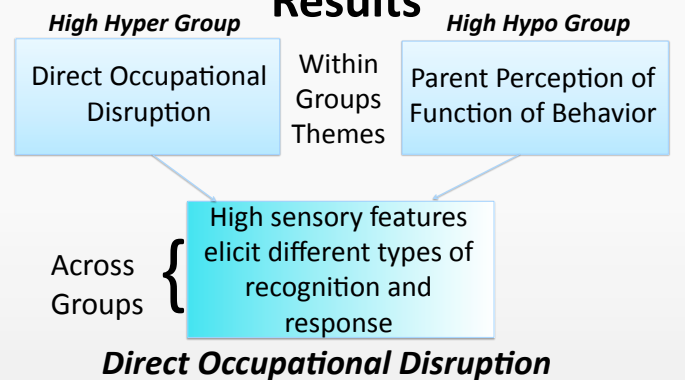
## Methods

- Analyzed 16 qualitative interviews from the SEP<sup>a</sup>
  - Secondary data analysis
- Scores on the SEQ<sup>b</sup> 2.1 were used to select participants
  - 8 highest hypo-responsive scores on SEQ
  - 8 highest hyper-responsive scores on SEQ
- Process of thematic analysis consistent with methodology of Braun & Clarke (2006)

a. The Sensory Experiences Project (SEP) (PI, Dr. Grace Baranek)

b. Sensory Experiences Questionnaire (SEQ 2.1; Baranek, 1999c; Baranek et al., 2006)

## Results



*“We don’t do a lot of family activities. . . we don’t go out to restaurants, or if we do, it’s very rare, & we go when we know it’s going to be relatively quiet.”*

**Parent Perception of Function of Behavior Affects Level of Disruption**

*“To, get his focus into things that are acceptable. . . & when he’s not allowed to do it, you know, he gets really upset. So I try to get him to think of something else.”*

*“I’m thinking that sometimes it puts him back in sorts so that he can you know move on with his day”*

**High Sensory Features Elicit Different types of Recognition & Response**

*“We may be a little bit more sensitive. . . but we really don’t avoid it anymore because I’ve had to literally desensitize him in order for him to survive in this world.”*

## Discussion

Ways parents recognized & responded to sensory features varied based on:

1. **The level of disruption the behavior presents** Hyper behaviors can be highly disruptive.
2. **Parents’ perception of purpose of behavior** Parents feeling that behavior is “inappropriate” are more likely to stop the behavior or redirect. Parents who believe that the behavior could help their child engage were more likely to allow/encourage it.

Some parents avoided occupations to address sensitivities. Other parents immersed their child in sensory-rich environments. Variations are due to differences in inherent beliefs.

## Implications for OS/OT

- Must consider parents’ beliefs around 1. The function of a child’s behavior, & 2. How to address/cope with their child’s behavior
- Occupational disruption was common with hyper-responsive behaviors
  - Some parents experienced more distress & disruption than others.
- Future OS research could examine the adaptive & maladaptive ways families deal with disruption. This could provide helpful information for families.

## References

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