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Mapping Patterns of Restricted and Repetitive Behaviours and Media Use in Youth Diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder and Typically Developing Youth

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Introduction

- Researchers have started to give more attention to how media use relates to youth mental health and development.
- Some new research suggested youth with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) may use media in problematic and addictive ways.
- Studies have not looked into the idea that the media use shown by these youths may be “old” ASD symptoms that look new or different when using media.

Current Study

- Explored the connection between every day “sticky behaviors” (e.g., focused interests, fixed routines, repeated behaviors) and media “sticky behaviors.”

Method:

- A sample of 36 parents of 4- to 11-year-old children (ASD = 25; non-ASD = 11) was collected using an online survey.

Results:

Main Findings

- **Parent reports** showed:
 - Media “sticky behaviors” happened more in children with ASD than children without ASD.
 - More everyday “sticky behaviors” related to more media “sticky behaviors” in children with ASD.
 - Child age or everyday skills part of independence (e.g., eating without help) did not relate to media “sticky behaviors” for children with or without ASD.
 - The child's number of devices did not relate to child age or everyday skills part of independence for children with or without ASD.
 - Higher or lower levels of everyday skills part of independence did not relate to “sticky behaviors” involving sensation (e.g., touch, smell) or focused interests/routines.

Exploratory Findings

- There were many exploratory findings. Here are a few examples of what **parent reports** showed:
 - Children with ASD got upset more often, strongly, and for longer when their media use was stopped than children without ASD.
 - More distress related to more “sticky behaviors” in children with ASD.
 - Both children with and without ASD had more skills with newer media devices (e.g., smartphones) than with older media devices (e.g., TVs).
 - Children both with or without ASD liked cartoon and animated video, picture, and TV content more than other content.

Conclusions

- Media “sticky behaviors” may be like the everyday “sticky behaviors” seen in children with ASD.
- Media “sticky behaviors” may change how researchers and clinicians think about addictive media behaviors for children with ASD.
- Researchers and clinicians should explore media “sticky behaviors” further.