

Disorder of Executive Function in Autistic Children

Abstract

The dynamics of changes in the executive function was examined in autistic children during their middle and late childhood. The executive function relates to the ability of self-regulation including attention, motor reactions, resistance to distractions and delay of gratification. As noted by a number of authors autistic persons show considerable difficulties in this respect. Significant progressive changes in the development of executive functions were observed in the examined children. It allows the conclusion that autistic children are able to acquire an ability to change their former behaviours. They are, therefore, able to refrain from awaiting immediate gratification, and capable of understanding that a previous rule may be changed for another one.

Key words: *Autism, executive function, therapy, progress*

Introduction

It may be noted that many studies on autism concentrate upon the executive function and its impairment. Duncan (1986) as well as Zelazo et al (1997) assume that the executive function (EF) relates to higher order cognitive processes concerning the ability to control one's own actions. As pointed out by Kaczmarek (2003), it is closely connected with a regulatory function of language. At the same time, Luria (1961) stated that a capability to act in accordance with verbal commands given by an examiner is established at the age of 5–6 years when the frontal lobes attain the first stage of maturity. It is worth reminding that both the social use of language and difficulties in controlling their own behaviour are characteristic of autistic persons (cf. Minshew et al, 1997, and Pierce et al, 1997). In fact, it is one