能発達障害に特化したグループホームで, C県の 単独事業)で生活することになった。支援の目標 は, 家族関係の改善と本人が自立して生活できる ことであった。

2. 経過

ホーム利用当初より対人トラブルが頻発した。 人とのつき合い方, 距離感がわからないことが原 因であったため, 適切な対人関係の取り方につい ての支援を行った。また, 困ったときには相談で きるということを伝え, 実際に相談することで問 題が解決できたという経験を積んでもらった。次 第に, 対人関係にいくつかの課題が残っているも のの, 本人の状態は安定していった。ホームで暮 らすようになり, 家族と距離を置くことで, 家族 にも余裕ができ, 関係の改善がみられるように なった。

3. ホームを一人暮らしの準備のキーステーショ ンとして

一人暮らしへの移行に伴い、仕事に影響が出ないよう、6カ月の移行期間を設けた。また、「一人暮らしと仕事との両立は難しい」との訴えに配慮したものであった。一人暮らしが軌道に乗ったころ、本人から「仕事と一人暮らしは両立できるものですね」という言葉が出てきた。一人暮らしに移行した後も定期的に訪問し、仕事のことや生活のことなど、本人の困りごと、気になることに対しての相談時間を設けた。

しかし、自ら運転する車で交通事故を起こしたことがきっかけとなって一人暮らしが立ち行かなくなった。自動車の修理代に関する金銭問題が発生したためである。家族との金銭問題の話し合いがうまくいかず、支援者も本人と家族の調整をうまくできなかったこともあり、家族関係も再び悪化した。本人はこれ以上一人暮らしを続けるのは難しいと感じていた。そして再びホームで生活す

ることとなり, あらためて家族関係の修復と一人 暮らしに向けた取り組みを行うこととなった。

IV 今後の課題

これまで、発達障害者の青年期の課題の多様性とその支援の在り方としての福祉的サービスの概要と支援の可能性について述べてきた。先にも述べた通り、発達障害の青年期の支援の課題は、彼らの障害特性や周囲の誤解などの問題もあり、これまで適切にサービスの提供を行えなかった部分も少なくない。これからは、福祉的サービスを積極的に用いることを通して、彼らの社会参加や社会自立に向けた支援の在り方を明確にする作業を行う時期とすべきであろう。そしてこれらの作業や実践から、さらに必要なサービスメニューについても議論を重ね、今後の新たな支援の在り方と可能性についても議論をはじめることが求められよう。

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日本版青年・成人感覚プロフィールの構成概念妥当性*

自閉症サンプルに基づく検討

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抄録

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本研究では、感覚刺激に対する反応異常のアセスメントツールとして国際的に広く用いられている感覚プロフィールの日本版の標準化に関する研究の一環として、自閉症サンプル (n=172)をもとに、日本版青年・成人感覚プロフィール (AASP-J) の妥当性を検討した。その結果、一般群と ASD 群との間で尺度得点に差異がみられた。また、保護者評定版の感覚プロフィールや日常生活への適応を阻害する不適応行動との関連が示され、尺度としての妥当性が確認された。ただし、知的障害や ASD 特性を抱える場合には、自己評定形式の AASP-J に加え、他者評定形式の感覚プロフィールを実施し、客観的な視点から感覚異常を把握することの必要性も示唆された。

Key words

Sensory profile, Scale development, ASD, Sensory processing

はじめに

発達障害児者には感覚刺激に対する反応異常が みられることが多く、感覚の問題が生活上の諸問 題と結びついている。しかし、発達障害児者の援 助をする上での感覚の問題への対応の重要性に反し、日本ではそれを的確にアセスメントするツールが不足していた。本論文では、感覚刺激に対する反応異常を評定する日本版青年・成人感覚プロフィール (the Japanese version of the Adoles-

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^{*} Construct Validity of the Japanese Version of the Adolescent/Adult Sensory Profile in the Assessment of Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder

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²⁾ 以下の著者所属, 英文表記は文末に掲載

cent/Adult Sensory Profile; AASP-J) の妥当性を検討した結果を報告する。

自閉症スペクトラム障害 (autism spectrum disorders; ASD) 児は、感覚処理の問題を持つことが多く報告されている^{7.15)}。さらに、感覚の問題は対人関係、情動、行動などにみられる問題と関係している。たとえば、高機能 ASD 児の感覚刺激に対する反応異常は、社会性の障害の重症度との間に有意な相関を示すことが報告されている⁹⁾。このように、発達障害児者の感覚の問題は学校や社会生活での適応に影響することが多い。

そのため、発達障害児者の持つ感覚の問題を把 握し、対応を検討する必要がある。しかし、本邦 ではそれを的確に評定するツールが不足してい た。海外では、感覚刺激に対する反応の評定には カンザス大学の Dunn W らによって開発された 感覚プロフィール3,5,6)が用いられることが多い。 感覚プロフィールは、発達障害をはじめとしたさ まざまな障害や疾患によって生じる感覚異常を評 定する質問紙式の検査である。この検査はアメリ カで開発・標準化され、信頼性と妥当性が検証さ れている。感覚プロフィールには、対象児者の年 齢に応じて, 乳幼児用(0~36 か月), 児童用(3~10 歳用, the Sensory Profile; SP), 学校版(3~11 歳用), 青年・成人用(11歳以上用), の4バージョ ンが標準化されている。感覚プロフィールを活用 すれば, 発達障害児者の感覚刺激に対する反応異 常についての信頼性のあるデータが収集でき、臨 床・教育現場での指導、家族指導において重要な 情報を提供することが可能になる。アメリカ精神 医学会による精神疾患の診断・統計マニュアル第 5版(DSM-5)においても、ASDの診断基準に「知 覚・感覚の異常」が新たに加えられた10ことから も、感覚刺激に対する反応異常を把握するツール の必要性は高い。本邦において、感覚プロフィー ルを再標準化し、実用化することは急務である。

これまで我々は、原著者との調整を重ね、 AASP-Jの開発と標準化を進めてきた。AASP-J の標準値および信頼性については梅田ら¹⁶⁾によっ て報告されている。本報告では、自閉症サンプル に基づいて AASP-J の構成概念妥当性を検討した結果を示す。本研究の具体的な検討事項と予測は、以下の4点である。

1点目に、AASP-Jが ASD 児者の感覚処理の 問題を捉えられているかを検討するために、 ASD 群と一般群の尺度得点を比較する。ASD 児 者の多くは感覚の問題を呈するため、ASD 群の AASP-J の得点は一般群よりも高くなると予測 される。また、知的障害を合併する場合、感覚刺 激への感情的・行動的反応の自己制御が困難さを 増すため、一般群との差がより顕著になると考え られる。2点目に、ASD 児者における知的能力 (IQ) および ASD 症状の程度と AASP-J の連続 的な関連を検討する。上述の理由から、AASP-J はIQ との間に負の相関、ASD 症状との間に正 の相関を示すと考えられる。3点目に、保護者評 定形式の日本版感覚プロフィール (the Japanese version of the Sensory Profile; SP-J)を併せて 実施し、自己評定形式の尺度である AASP-J の 基準関連妥当性を検討する。AASP-JとSP-Jの 同じ象限同士は異なる象限よりも強い相関を示す と考えられる。4点目に、日常の社会生活への適 応と AASP-J の関連を検討する。感覚異常の問 題は,適応に必要となる適応行動の習得を遅らせ, 適応を阻害する不適応行動の生起を促進すると考 えられるため、AASP-J は適応行動とは負の相 関,不適応行動とは正の相関がみられると予測さ れる。以上の観点から、AASP-Jの構成概念妥 当性を多角的に検証する。

方法

1. 対象

全国 28 都道府県の医療・心理・教育機関を受診し、熟練した精神科医により DSM-IVの診断基準に基づいて ASD (自閉性障害、アスペルガー障害または特定不能の広汎性発達障害) の診断を受けている 172 名が調査の対象となった。診断または IQ に基づき、知的障害のない ASD (highfunctioning ASD; HFASD) 群、知的障害のある ASD (low-functioning ASD; LFASD) 群、知的

表 1. サンプルの内訳

						ASD 群					
	知的障害なし				知的障害あり			知的水準不明			
	男性	女性	不明	計	男性	女性	計	男性	女性	不明	計
n	48	6	1	55	21	6	27	70	19	1	90
平均年齢	14.5	12.5	17.0	14.4	15.5	17.8	16.0	19.6	19.6	29.0	19.7
(SD)	(3.5)	(2.1)		(3.4)	(3.4)	(5.2)	(3.9)	(6.6)	(6.0)	<u>.</u>	(6.5)
平均 IQ	103.5	96.8	93.0	102.6	52.8	43.6	50.9	<u> </u>			
(SD)	(14.7)	(12.4)		(14.5)	(15.6)	(15.8)	(15.8)	_			

SD: standard deviation

ASD: autism spectrum disorders

水準不明 ASD 群の 3 群に対象者を分類した。各 群の平均年齢・性別・平均 IQ の内訳は表 1 の通 りである。ただし,欠損値は分析ごとに除外した ため,分析によってデータ数は若干異なる。 AASP-J については対象者本人に評定を求め, その他の尺度については,保護者,配偶者,兄弟, 施設職員など,対象者をよく知る者に回答を求め た。

2. 調査内容

1)日本版青年・成人版感覚プロフィール (AASP-J)

AASP-J は、11 歳以上を対象とする自己評定 形式の尺度であり、60項目から構成される。質 問項目は味覚・嗅覚、運動、視覚、触覚、活動レ ベル、聴覚の6セクションからなる。スコアリ ングに際しては、低登録、感覚探究、感覚過敏、 感覚回避の4象限ごとに集計・評価される。こ れら4象限は行動反応・自己制御の次元と神経 学的閾値の次元によって区分され、積極的反応・ 高閾値が感覚探究(e.g., 明るい場所や華やかな 色彩の場所に行くのが好き),消極的反応・低閾 値が感覚過敏(e.g., まわりが騒々しいと混乱し てしまう),消極的反応・高閾値が低登録(e.g., 人が腕や背中に触っても,気付かないほうだ), 積極的反応・低閾値が感覚回避(e.g., 騒がしい ところには行かない)にそれぞれ対応する。各項 目は日常の経験に対する反応を記述したもので, そのような反応を示す頻度を本人が5段階で回 答する [1. ほとんどしない(5%), 2. まれに (25%), 3. ときどき(50%), 4. しばしば(75%), 5. ほとんどいつも(95%)]。評定値が高いほど, 反応の頻度が高いことを意味する。分析では, 象限ごとに項目得点を合計した値を用いた。

日本版の開発にあたり、原版の AASP を翻訳 し、バックトランスレーション手続きを経て原著 者の承認を得た。また、原版の出版社であるピア ソン社からも研究における AASP-J の使用許諾 を得た。

2) 知能指数(IQ)

回答者への聞き取りによって、ウェクスラー式またはビネー式知能検査による IQ の情報を得た。上記知能検査を受けた経験がない、または、正確な IQ 値について回答者の記憶がないもしくは曖昧なケースを除き、82 名 (45.1%) について IQ の情報が得られた。

3) 日本自閉症協会検討委員会版広汎性発達障害評定尺度 (PDD-Autism Society Japan Rating Scales; PARS)

PARS¹³⁾は、ASD の把握とその困難度を評価するために、国内で開発・標準化された半構造化面接形式の尺度である。ASD 児者に特異的な行動を記述した項目で構成され、ASD の識別力やASD アセスメントのゴールドスタンダードである ADI-R との関連などの観点から妥当性が確認されている¹¹⁾。幼児期の最も症状が顕著だったときに関する回顧評定(ピーク評定)と現在の症状に関する現在評定の2パターンがある。ピーク評定尺度については因子構造が検討されており、社

会的コミュニケーション(8項目),過敏性・困難性(10項目),常同行動(8項目),こだわり(8項目)の4下位尺度が見出されているため、本研究ではピーク評定尺度を用いて AASP-J との関連を検討する。

PARS の項目は、ASD 児者に特徴的な行動特徴を記述したもので、「なし(そのようなことはなかった/ない)」(0点)、「多少目立つ(多少そのようなことがあった/ある)」(1点)、「目立つ(よくそのようなことがあった/ある)」(2点)の3段階で評定を行う。高得点ほど、ASD 特性が顕著であることを意味する。

4) 日本版感覚プロフィール(SP-J)

SP-J は、原版では3~10歳の子どもを対象と する尺度であるが、11歳以上に適用した場合で も尺度の信頼性が十分に高いことが確かめられて いる¹⁰⁾。また、ASD 特性を持つ人々を対象とし た研究では、年齢にかかわらず SP が実施される 場合が多い。SP-Iは日常の経験に対する反応を 記述した125項目から構成され、保護者が5段 階で回答することによって評定される〔1. しな い(0%), 2. まれに(25%), 3. ときどき(50%), 4. しばしば(75%), 5. いつも(100%)]。評定値 が高いほど頻度が高いことを意味する。SP-Jの スコアリングシステムには、(1)理論的に想定さ れる 14 セクション, (2) 探索的主成分分析によっ て見出された9因子, (3) AASP-J と同様の4象 限, の3種類があるが, 本研究では, AASP-J との対応を検討するため、4象限に基づくスコア リングを行った。

5) Vineland-II 適応行動尺度 (Vineland Adaptive Behavior Scales, Second Edition; Vineland-II)

Vineland-Ⅱ¹⁴⁾は、さまざまな障害や疾患を抱える者の適応行動の発達や機能低下を評価するための半構造化面接形式の尺度である。知的障害・発達障害のアセスメントをはじめ、国際的に幅広い研究・臨床の文脈で使用されている。本研究ではバックトランスレーションと約1,400名のサンプルによる標準化のプロセスを経て開発された日

本版 Vineland- II を使用した。日本版 Vineland- II は,高い信頼性を持ち,対象者の適応状況を正確に評価できることが明らかとなっている 18 。

Vineland-II は全 435 項目からなり、大きく適応行動尺度と不適応行動尺度の 2 つに分かれている。適応行動尺度は、4 領域(コミュニケーション、日常生活スキル、社会性、運動スキル)から構成され、それぞれに 2 つから 3 つの下位領域が存在する。不適応行動尺度は、不適応内在化、不適応外在化、不適応その他、重要事項の 4 つの下位尺度からなるが、数量的評価には前 3 者が用いられ、重要事項については個別的な評価のみを行う。

Vineland-Ⅱの各項目は、基本的に 2, 1, 0 の 3 段階で評価される。2 点は対象者が手助けなしにその行動を習慣的に行っている場合に与えられる。1 点はその行動の遂行に手助けが必要か、または時々行われている場合に与えられる。0 点は、対象者がその行動を滅多に行わないか、全く行わないことを意味する。適応行動尺度は高得点ほど適応行動の習得が進んでいること、不適応行動尺度は高得点ほど不適応行動の頻度が高いことを意味する。

3. 倫理的側面への配慮

本研究の手続きは、浜松医科大学医の倫理委員会の審査と承認を受けた。調査の実施にあたっては、調査に参加しないことによる不利益が生じないことを明確に説明した上でインフォームドコンセントを得た。

4. 分析

まず、尺度が的確に発達障害者の感覚異常を捉えられているか否かを検討するため、一般群とHFASD群、LFASD群の各象限の平均値を比較した。知的障害の有無が評定に影響する可能性が考えられたため、知的水準不明 ASD 群については平均値の比較を行わなかった。この分析では、一般群の11~17歳の平均値および標準偏差¹⁶⁾を一般母集団の値とみなし、z 検定を行った。この分析により、標本(臨床群)の平均値と母集団(一般群)の平均値の間に統計的な有意差があるかど

表2 一般群と臨床群の比較

	一郍	群		· · · · HE	'ASD 群			LF	ASD 群	
	М	SD	М	SD	2	ď	М	SD	z	d
低登録	31.53	8.57	35.24	9.16	2.91 **	0.43	34.14	9.61	1.43	0.30
感覚探求	38.34	8.98	33.51	9.28	-3.61***	-0.54	35.68	7.88	-1.39	-0.30
感覚過敏	33.01	9.11	35.71	10.36	1.99*	0.30	32.86	10.28	-0.07	34.26
感覚回避	32.96	9.23	34.87	10.06	1.39	0.21	32.32	10.31	-0.33	-0.07

p*<.05, *p*<.01, ****p*<.001

M: Mean, SD: standard deviation

HFASD: high-functioning autism spectrum disorders, LFASD: low-functioning

autism spectrum disorders

表3 AASP-JとIQ, PARSとの相関係数

			3		•	
	TO:		P.	ARS ピーク評	Ž	Carlos de Carlos
	1Ø	社会性	敏感性	常同行動	こだわり	合計
低登録	11	.02	18	.15	.23	.05
感覚探求	14	07	07	.08	04	09
感覚過敏	.02	12	02	.20	.28	.14
感覚回避	.04	04	.07	.14	.22	.10

PARS: PDD Autism Society Japan Rating Scales

うかを検討できる。

次に、AASP-Jの各象限と、SP および発達障害に関連する他の測度との相関係数を算出し、基準関連妥当性を検討した。発達障害に関する測度として本研究では、知的水準(IQ)、ASD 症状(PARS)、適応行動・不適応行動(Vineland-II)を外在基準とし、AASP-Jとの関連を検討した。なお、この分析では、AASP-Jと他の尺度との関連を、全体の傾向として把握することが目的であったため、臨床群のデータをまとめた上で分析を行った。

結果

1. 一般群と臨床群の比較

表 2 に HFASD 群と LFASD 群の象限ごとの 平均値と SD, および z 値と効果量 d を示した。 効果量 d は, 群間の平均値の差に関する標準化 された指標であり, 慣習的な目安として, 0.2 程度で小さい差, 0.5 程度で中程度の差, 0.8 程度で大きい差を示すとされる 4 。 z 検定の結果, HFASD 群では,感覚探求が一般群よりも低く,

低登録と感覚過敏は一般群よりも高かった。効果量 d の値は絶対値で $0.30\sim0.54$ であり、小~中程度の群間差を示している。一方、LFASD 群においては、いずれの象限においても一般群との差がみられなかった。

2. IQ, PARS との関連

表3にAASP-Jの各象限とIQ,PARS(ASD症状)との相関係数を示した。AASP-Jの各象限とIQには有意な相関がみられなかった。同様に、PARSのいずれの下位尺度とも、有意な相関はみられなかった。

3. SP-J との関連

表4にAASP-JとSP-Jの各象限の相関係数を示した。SP-Jの低登録、感覚過敏、感覚回避とAASP-Jの各象限との間には、.24~.45と低~中程度の有意な正の相関がみられた。同一の象限同士では、.35~.39の正の相関がみられた。また、AASP-Jの感覚探求は、SP-Jとは有意な相関がみられなかった。

4. Vineland-IIとの関連

続いて、表5にAASP-Jの各象限と Vineland-

表 4 AASP-Jと SP-J の相関係数

		SI	2-1	
	低登録	感覚探求	感覚過敏	感覚回避
AASP-J				
低登録	.36 ***	.45 ***	.28 ***	.35 **
感覚探求	01	.13	02	.08
感覚過敏	.28 **	.26 **	.35 ***	.43 ***
感覚回避	.24 **	.15	.30 ***	.39 ***

^{*}*p*<.05, ***p*<.01, ****p*<.001

AASP-J: The Japanese version of the Adolescents/Adults Sensory Profile, SP-J: The Japanese version of the Sensory Profile

表 5 AASP-Jと Vineland-IIとの相関係数

			不適応行動					
	コミュニ ケーション	日常生活 スキル	社会性	運動 スキル	適応行動 全体	不適応 内在化	不適応 外在化	不適応 全体
低登録	.13	.19	.08	.27 *	.20	.28**	.37 ***	.37 ***
感覚探求	.14	.18	.19	.20	.21 *	12	.10	01
感覚過敏	.13	.15	.06	.12	.14	.33 **	.42 ***	.40 ***
感覚回避	01	01	04	08	04	.32 **	.40 ***	.36 ***

^{*}*p*<.05, ***p*<.01, ****p*<.001

Ⅱとの相関を示した。適応行動尺度との関連では、低登録と運動スキル、感覚探求と適応行動全体との間に、有意ではあるが弱い正の相関を示しただけであった。不適応行動尺度との関連では、低登録、感覚過敏、感覚回避の3象限と不適応内在化・外在化との間に.28~.42と、低~中程度の有意な相関がみられた。しかし、感覚探求は不適応尺度との間に関連がみられなかた。

考察

本研究では、発達障害児者の感覚刺激への反応 異常を捉える尺度として国際的に広く利用されて いる AASP の日本版について、ASD を有する 172名を対象とした調査データを基に、その妥当 性を検討した。

一般群と臨床群の得点を比較した結果, HFASD群は、低登録および感覚過敏において、 予測と一致し、一般群よりも高い得点を示した。 このことから、低登録および感覚過敏の2象限 はASDに伴う感覚異常の把握に有効であること

が明らかになった。ただし、差の大きさを示す d に着目すると, 低登録で 0.43, 感覚過敏で 0.30 と小~中程度の差となっており、保護者評定の SP-J(低登録で 1.69、感覚過敏で 0.78) 9) に比較す ると差が明確でない。一方, 感覚探究では HFASD 群が一般群より低い得点を示した。保護 者評定の SP では、感覚探究も他の象限と同じく、 一般群より HFASD 群が高得点を示すという結 果が得られているが、AASP-Iでは逆の結果が 示された。AASP-Jの感覚探究は、SP-Jの感覚 探究とは異なる特性を反映している可能性があ る。SP-Jの感覚探求は、「1日中1人でぐるぐる 回っていたりする」、「危険度を無視して飛び降り たがる」、「やっていることの目移りが激しく、遊 びにならない」といった項目で構成される。これ らは、ASD の特徴である常同行動や、感覚刺激 への過剰な反応といった不適応的な行動を表した ものといえる。他方、AASP-Jの感覚探求は、「身 体を動かすのが好き」、「華やかな色の服を着るの が好き」、「人前で何かをするのが好き」といった、

一見すると、活動性が高く適応的である行動を表す項目によって構成されている。すなわち、AASP-JとSP-Jの実質的な項目内容の違いにより、異なる結果が得られたと考えられる。

LFASD 群においては、予測に反し、いずれの象限も一般群との差がみられなかった。この結果は、対象者の知的水準が高い場合、ASDを有していても、ある程度感覚の問題を評定できるが、知的水準が低い場合、自己のモニタリングが困難となり、自己評定形式のAASP-Jでは適切に評定できない可能性を示唆する。また、評定前の段階で、尺度項目の意味を理解するのが困難であり、適切に回答が行われなかった可能性もある。この点については、対象者が自己評定を行う際、保護者やスタッフが質問文の理解を補助するといった、実施上の工夫を行っていく必要がある。

IQ および PARS (ASD 症状) との相関は、いず れの象限も有意な値を示さなかった。IQ との相 関は、絶対値にして.02~.14と弱く、上述の群 間比較の結果とも一致し、知的水準が低い場合、 自己評定形式の AASP-J の適用は困難であるこ とが示唆された。PARS との相関は、感覚探究を 除く3象限で,こだわり因子との相関が.22~.28, 常同行動因子との相関が.14~.20, 低登録と過敏 性・困難性因子との相関が-.18という一定の値 を示しているが、サンプルサイズの不足によって 統計的有意性は示されなかった。PARSは, ASD 症状を把握するのに特化したツールである が、感覚の問題まで網羅しきれておらず、AASP-Jとの相関が低く出た可能性も考えられる。ま た、PARS の過敏性・困難性因子の項目は、「過 去の嫌なことを思い出して、不安定になる」、「急 に泣いたり怒ったりする」といった、幅広い感覚 の問題とそれに伴う困難性を測定しているため. 感覚の問題に特化した AASP-J との相関が低く なったと考えられる。さらに、PARS 得点は、保 護者に対して、対象者の幼児期の最も症状が顕著 だったときを回顧してもらうピーク評定によって 得られたため、現在の状況についての自己評定を 行う AASP-I 得点との相関が低くなった可能性 がある。以上の理由により、PARS の得点と AASP-J の得点間には、高い相関関係がみられ なかったと考えられる。これらの点については、 PARS の現在評定を用いるといった追試的な検討 が必要である。

保護者評定である SP-I との関連を検討した結 果,感覚探求を除いては,同一の象限の間で .35~.39 の相関がみられた。この結果は、一定程 度、自己評定形式の AASP-I と保護者評定形式 の SP-J による評定が一致することを示してい る。一般に、同一の概念の測定尺度であっても自 己評定と保護者評定の相関は高くないことが知ら れている。たとえば、児童・青年の問題行動を測 定する Strength and Difficulties Questionnaires では、同一下位尺度における自己評定と保護者評 定の相関は $.30\sim.42$ にとどまっている 8 。また, 同じく問題行動の評定尺度である Child Behavior Checklist とその自己評定版である Youth Self Report でも、同一下位尺度における両者の相関 は.22~.47となっている17)。これらを考慮する と. 本研究における感覚探究を除く3象限にお ける.35~.39という相関係数は、自己評定と保 護者評定の相関としては標準的な水準にあり、一 定の収束的妥当性が示されたと言える。感覚探究 については、上述の群間比較でも保護者評定の SP-Jと異なる結果が得られており、先に考察し たように、AASP-Jの感覚探求は、SP-Jにおけ る感覚探究とは異なる概念を測定している可能性 が高い。

また、Vineland-IIの適応行動との関連は、低登録と運動スキル、感覚探求と適応行動全体が弱い正の相関を示した以外は、有意な相関がみられなかった。一方、Vineland-IIの不適応行動との関連は、低登録、感覚過敏、感覚回避の3象限が、不適応内在化、不適応外在化、不適応全体のいずれとも中程度の負の相関を示した。以上の結果から、AASP-Jによって捉えられる感覚の問題は、適応行動の習得を阻害するよりも、不適応行動の生起を促進する形で適応に悪影響を及ぼすことが示唆された。また、AASP-Jが不適応の内在化、

外在化の両側面と関連を示したことから,感覚異常の問題が,抑うつ,不安,ひきこもりのような内在化問題から,攻撃,非行,反社会的行為のような外在化問題まで,広範な不適応問題のリスク要因となることが示唆された。

以上のように、AASP-JはASDに伴う感覚異常の問題の把握に一定の有効性を持つことが示唆された。しかし、一般群とLFASD群との間に差がみられなかったことや、IQとの相関がみられなかったことを考えると、知的障害を抱える対象者の場合、自己評定形式のAASPの適用は困難と考えられる。また、知的障害を持たないHFASD群でも、保護者評定のSP⁸と比較すると、AASP-Jにおける一般群との得点差は顕著でないことから、ASD特性そのものが自己評定の妥当性に影響を及ぼしている可能性がある。したがって、ASD児者の感覚異常の把握においては、自己評定形式のAASP-Jに加えて他者評定形式のSP-Jを実施して、客観的な視点からのアセスメントも同時に行う必要があると考えられる。

最後に今後の展望について述べる。第1に. ASD 以外の障害群を対象とした AASP-J の妥当 性の検証が挙げられる。本研究では, 感覚の問題 が特に顕著であると考えられる ASD を有する者 を対象とした。しかし、ASD だけでなく、注意 欠如多動性障害 (attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder; ADHD) 児でも、一般群よりも顕著な 感覚処理の問題がみられることが分かってい る¹²⁾。また、統合失調症の患者も、AASPの低 登録, 感覚探求, 感覚回避の程度が一般群と異な ることが報告されている²⁾。今後は,ASD に限 らず、発達障害や精神障害といった障害群のデー タを収集し、群間の得点の差異や障害特性との関 連を検討することで、AASP-Jの妥当性を検証 する必要がある。第2に、AASP-Jの臨床的応 用の可能性が挙げられる。本研究により、AASP-Jの一定の妥当性が示された。ASD 特性や知的 障害が、自己評定の妥当性に影響を及ぼす可能性 があるという課題は残るものの, 感覚異常は, 対 象者の主観的な問題を含むため、他者評定式の尺

度だけでなく自己評定式の AASP-J を組み合わせて使用することが望ましい。支援の中で AASP-J を用い、対象者本人が知覚する困難さに積極的に焦点を当てることで、本人と周囲の他者との認識のずれや、対象者を取り巻く環境の感覚刺激を調整することに役立てることができると考えられる。今後は、臨床・教育現場で AASP-J を併用したアセスメントに基づき、発達障害児者の持つ個々のニーズに応じた、より効果的な支援の方策を立てるための実践的な検討を行っていく必要がある。

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Summary

Construct Validity of the Japanese Version of the

Adolescent/Adult Sensory Profile in the Assessment of Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder

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As part of a series of studies on the standardization and validation of the Japanese Version of the Adolescent/Adult Sensory Profile (AASP-J), we examined its construct validity by using data from 172 Japanese individuals with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). We conducted two types of analyses: (1) a comparison of the AASP-J scores between normally developing individuals and those with ASD; and (2) an examination of the criteriarelated validity of the AASP-J with other ASD scales. The results revealed the following: (1) the scale scores identified a difference between normally developing individuals and those with ASD; (2) the AASP-I self-rating scores were moderately correlated with the parent-rating version of the Sensory Profile scores; and (3) the AASP-J scores were positively correlated with the maladaptive behavior scores, as measured using the Vineland-II adaptive scale. These results confirmed the high validity of the AASP-J and led to a discussion of the clinical utility of the AASP-J

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RESEARCH Open Access

N-ethylmaleimide-sensitive factor interacts with the serotonin transporter and modulates its trafficking: implications for pathophysiology in autism

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Abstract

Background: Changes in serotonin transporter (SERT) function have been implicated in autism. SERT function is influenced by the number of transporter molecules present at the cell surface, which is regulated by various cellular mechanisms including interactions with other proteins. Thus, we searched for novel SERT-binding proteins and investigated whether the expression of one such protein was affected in subjects with autism.

Methods: Novel SERT-binding proteins were examined by a pull-down system. Alterations of SERT function and membrane expression upon knockdown of the novel SERT-binding protein were studied in HEK293-hSERT cells. Endogenous interaction of SERT with the protein was evaluated in mouse brains. Alterations in the mRNA expression of SERT (SLC6A4) and the SERT-binding protein in the post-mortem brains and the lymphocytes of autism patients were compared to nonclinical controls.

Results: *N*-ethylmaleimide-sensitive factor (NSF) was identified as a novel SERT-binding protein. NSF was co-localized with SERT at the plasma membrane, and NSF knockdown resulted in decreased SERT expression at the cell membranes and decreased SERT uptake function. NSF was endogenously co-localized with SERT and interacted with SERT. While *SLC6A4* expression was not significantly changed, *NSF* expression tended to be reduced in post-mortem brains, and was significantly reduced in lymphocytes of autistic subjects, which correlated with the severity of the clinical symptoms.

Conclusions: These data clearly show that NSF interacts with SERT under physiological conditions and is required for SERT membrane trafficking and uptake function. A possible role for NSF in the pathophysiology of autism through modulation of SERT trafficking, is suggested.

Keywords: Serotonin transporter, NSF, Interaction, Membrane trafficking, Autism, Post-mortem brain, Lymphocyte

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Background

Autism is a pervasive developmental disorder characterized by severe and sustained impairment of social interaction and communication, and restricted or stereotyped patterns of behavior and interest. Many studies on the pathophysiological mechanisms of autism have focused on the serotonergic system. Prior studies have consistently found elevated serotonin levels in the whole blood cells and platelets of autism patients [1-5] and their relatives [6-8]. Short-term dietary depletion of tryptophan (the precursor of serotonin) has been shown to exacerbate repetitive behavior and to elevate anxiety and feelings of unhappiness in autistic adults [9]. Accordingly, many genetic studies have examined the associations between autism and genetic mutations of human serotonin transporter (SERT; solute carrier family 6 (neurotransmitter transporter), member 4 (SLC6A4)), especially the short allele of a polymorphism in the promoter region of the serotonin transporter gene. Although some positive relationships have been found, the results to date are inconsistent [10-15]. A single photon emission computed tomography study showed that autistic children, under light sedation, exhibit a reduction in SERT binding in the medial frontal cortex, midbrain and temporal lobe areas [16]. Importantly, our colleagues recently reported that binding of SERT and its radioligand was significantly lower throughout the brain in autistic individuals compared with controls [17]. The reduction in the anterior and posterior cingulate cortices was associated with an impairment of social cognition in autistic subjects, and a significant correlation was also found between repetitive and/or obsessive behavior and interests and a reduction in SERT binding in the thalamus [17]. These results suggested that SERT protein levels and/or its transport capacity were decreased in the brains of autistic patients. Despite this prediction, Azmitia and colleagues reported increased immunoreactivity to a SERT antibody of serotonin axons in the post-mortem cortices of autism patients [18].

SERT is an integral plasma membrane glycoprotein that regulates neurotransmission through the reuptake of 5-hydroxytryptamine (5-HT), also known as serotonin, from the synaptic cleft. SERT transport capacity is known to be regulated through mechanisms that involve subcellular redistribution of the transporter, which are regulated by various cellular mechanisms, including interactions with other proteins [19,20]. Indeed, several SERT-binding proteins have been reported. Syntaxin-1A [21-23] and secretory carrier membrane protein 2 (SCAMP2) have been reported to be associated with the N-terminal tail of SERT [24]. Macrophage myristoylated alanine-rich C kinase substrate (MacMARCKS) [25], integrin β3 [26] and nitric oxide synthase (nNOS) [27] have been reported to be associated with the C-terminal tail of SERT. SERT also forms complexes with hydrogen peroxide-inducible clone

5 protein (Hic-5) [28,29], phosphatase 2A (PP2A) [30], and α - and γ -synuclein [31,32]. By interacting with SERT, SCAMP2, MacMARCKS, nNOS, Hic-5, PP2A and α/γ -synuclein reduce the efficacy of serotonin reuptake because of a reduction in surface expression of SERT or promotion of SERT dephosphorylation [24,25,27,29-32]. Loss of integrin β 3 results in decreased SERT function and surface expression in platelets [26]. Syntaxin-1A regulates the electrophysiological properties of SERT [23].

In this study, we sought to identify novel proteins interacting with the N- and C-terminal portions of SERT, and which thereby regulate SERT function. We also measured the levels of mRNAs for SERT and SERT-interacting proteins in post-mortem brains and lymphocytes from autism patients to assess their involvement in autism.

Methods

Animal experiments

Experiments using mice were approved by the Committee on Animal Research of Hamamatsu University School of Medicine and University of Fukui. These experiments were performed in accordance with the Guide for Animal Experimentation at the Hamamatsu University School of Medicine and the University of Fukui.

Glutathione S-transferase pull-down assays

Full-length rat SERT complementary DNA (cDNA) was obtained from Dr Heinrich Betz (Max Planck Institute) [25,33]. PCR fragments corresponding to the N-terminal domain of the rat SERT (N-SERT; residues 1 to 85 amino acids) and the C-terminal domain of the rat SERT (C-SERT; residues 595 to 630 amino acids) were fused to glutathione S-transferase (GST) by subcloning into the pGEX-5X-1 bacterial expression vector (Amersham Bioscience, Uppsala, Sweden), to produce vectors containing GST-N-SERT and GST-C-SERT. Plasmids were transformed into Escherichia coli (BL21 (DE3), Stratagene, La Jolla, CA, USA) and were cultured and induced with isopropyl-β-D-thiogalactopyranoside (IPTG) at 37°C for 4 h. Mouse brain tissue was homogenized on ice using a homogenizer (Iuchi, Osaka, Japan), in 5 ml of homogenization buffer (50 mM NH₄Cl, 40 mM Tris-HCl pH 8.0) supplemented with a 1x complete protease inhibitor cocktail (Roche Applied Science, Indianapolis, IN, USA) per brain. The same amount of extraction buffer (20 mM NaCl, 20 mM Tris-HCl pH 8.0, 1% NP-40, 1% deoxycholate) was added, and homogenates were incubated at 4°C for 30 min with rotation. Insoluble cellular debris was removed by centrifugation, and the supernatants were collected. Then, the extracts were diluted up to tenfold in homogenization buffer plus extraction buffer without detergents. Extracts were incubated with glutathione agarose bound to GST, GST-N-SERT or GST-C-SERT at 4°C for 3 h. Beads were washed five times with TBS buffer (50 mM Tris-HCl

pH 7.4, 150 mM NaCl and 1 mM ethylenediaminetetraacetic acid) and boiled in SDS-PAGE sample buffer for 5 min to elute bound proteins. These samples were subjected to SDS-PAGE, which was followed by silver staining using a Silver Stain MS Kit (Wako Pure Chemical Industries, Ltd, Osaka, Japan) to visualize protein bands for mass spectrometry analysis. The samples were also used for Western blotting experiments.

Western blot analysis

Western blotting was performed following a previously published protocol [34]. Antibodies against SERT (1:400 to 2,000; C-20, Santa Cruz Biotechnology, Inc, CA, USA), N-ethylmaleimide-sensitive fusion protein (NSF; 1:500; Cell Signaling Technology, Inc, Danvers, MA, USA), syntaxin-1A (1:500; Santa Cruz Biotechnology, Inc, CA, USA) or β -actin (1:1,000; Abcam Inc, Cambridge, MA, USA) were used. Immunoreactive bands were scanned and quantified using ImageJ software (ImageJ 1.44, National Institutes of Health, USA).

In-gel digestion and mass spectrometry analysis

Protein bands were excised from SDS-polyacrylamide gels. The bands were processed in destaining solutions included in the Silver Stain MS Kit. Disulfide bonds were reduced with dithiothreitol (DTT) and the proteins were alkylated with iodoacetamide. The proteins were then treated with 50 µl (25 ng/µl) of Trypsin Gold (Promega, Madison, WI, USA) in 50 mM ammonium bicarbonate for 45 min on ice, and then overnight at 37°C. After enzymatic digestion, the peptides were eluted from the gel by treatment (twice, for 30 min each time) with 50 μl of a mixture containing 50% acetonitrile and 5% trifluoroacetic acid. The two eluates were pooled and evaporated to dryness in a vacuum centrifuge. Prior to mass spectrometric analysis, peptides were re-dissolved in 50 µl of 0.1% formic acid. Liquid chromatography-tandem mass spectrometry (LC-MS/MS) of the peptide mixtures was performed on a QSTAR XL (ESI-QqTOF; AB Sciex, Foster City, CA, USA) mass spectrometer. Product ion (MS/MS) spectra of the peptides separated by high-performance liquid chromatography (HPLC) were recorded and then submitted to the Mascot database search engine (Matrix Science [35]) for protein identification. The SwissProt database was used with 'all entries' for taxonomy. The tolerance was ±0.1 Da, and only one error was considered for the enzyme's cutoff point.

Production of a stable cell line (HEK293-hSERT cells)

The human SERT (hSERT) protein was transcribed from the human SERT gene. The cDNA for hSERT was isolated by RT-PCR. The PCR fragments were cloned into pcDNA3.1(+) (Invitrogen Carlsbad, CA, USA) resulting in the construct pcDNA-hSERT. To generate stably

transfected cells, pcDNA-hSERT was transfected into the human embryonic kidney cell line HEK293 using Transfectamine 2000 (Invitrogen) in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions. After 24 h, transfected cells were switched to a medium containing 1 mg/ml geneticin (G418); 1 week later, resistant colonies were isolated from culture plates using sterile clone rings. Individual cells were used to generate clonal lines. Multiple lines tested positive for immunostaining using SERT Ab (Santa Cruz Biotechnology, Inc) and a fluorescence-based uptake assay, and clonal line #7 (termed HEK293-hSERT cells) was used in all experiments reported here. The HEK293-hSERT cells were cultured in DMEM (Invitrogen) supplemented with 10% fetal bovine serum (Invitrogen), penicillin (100 U/ml), streptomycin (100 μ g/ml) and G418 (0.2 mg/ml) at 37°C in 5% CO₂.

Primary culture of serotonergic raphe neurons

Primary culturing of serotonergic raphe neurons was performed using mouse neurons as described previously [36]. Pregnant BL6 mice (E16.5) were euthanized by cervical dislocation. Embryos were removed and placed in Hank's balanced salt solution (HBSS) without Ca2+ (Life Technologies Co, Carlsbad, CA, USA). Rostral raphe neurons were dissected from the midbrain according to a method described previously [37]. Briefly, heads were removed from the embryos under a dissecting microscope (SMZ645; Nikon, Tokyo, Japan), and the midbrain/brainstem was gently dissociated. The neural tube was opened ventrally and flattened in a Petri dish containing HBSS without Ca2+. A strip of tissue of approximately 0.5 mm in width was dissected at the midline of the rostral rhombencephalon. Raphe tissue was resuspended in 5 ml of HBSS without Ca2+ and triturated ten times; the homogenate was strained through a cell strainer (BD Biosciences, Mississauga, ON, Canada) to remove debris, and an equal amount of HBSS containing Ca2+ was added. Cells were centrifuged (500 g, 5 min), and the pellet was resuspended in 5 ml of Neurobasal media (Invitrogen) containing B27 supplement (Invitrogen), penicillin (100 U/ml), streptomycin (100 μg/ml), and 0.4% L-Glutamine (Invitrogen) and plated onto eight-well slide chambers coated with poly-D-lysine (BD Biosciences). Two days after plating, 0.3 ml of medium from each well was replaced with fresh medium. Cells were cultured for 7 days in vitro [36].

siRNA-mediated gene knockdown

The duplexed oligonucleotides of siRNA used in this study were based on the sequence of the human cDNA encoding *NSF*. *NSF* siRNAs and a non-silencing control siRNA were obtained from Integrated DNA Technologies (Coralville, IA, USA). The targeted sequences of the human *NSF* siRNAs were as follows: 5'-GGAATGCAA TAAAGAGTAAATATAC-3' (siRNA-1) and 5'-GGATAG

GAATCAAGAAGTTACTAAT-3' (siRNA-2). Transfection was performed using Lipofectamine RNAiMAX (Invitrogen) in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions, and cells were processed 48 h after transfection.

Immunocytochemistry and microscopy

HEK293-hSERT cells were grown on poly-D-lysinecoated glass coverslips. Raphe neurons were plated onto eight-well slide chambers coated with poly-D-lysine (BD Biosciences) and cultured for 7 days in vitro [36]. Cells were washed with PBS (-) and fixed with 2% paraformaldehyde in PBS (-), pH 7.4, for 15 min at room temperature (RT). Cells were washed with PBS (-) and incubated with ice cold 100% methanol for 10 min at -20°C to permeabilize them. Cells were washed with PBS (-) and incubated with blocking solution (5% skimmed milk in PBS (-)) at RT for 1 h followed by incubation with primary antibody against SERT (1:400; C-20, Santa Cruz Biotechnology, Inc), NSF (1:500; Cell Signaling Technology, Inc), cadherin (1:50; Abcam Inc, Cambridge, MA, USA) or serotonin (1:50; Gene Tex, Inc, Irvine, CA, USA) diluted in 1% skimmed milk in PBS (-) for 2 h at RT. Cells were washed in PBS (-) and incubated with the appropriate fluorophore-conjugated secondary antibody diluted in 1% skimmed milk in PBS for 60 min at RT. After washing, the cells were mounted onto microscope slides in 50% glycerol in PBS (-). Samples were imaged on a fluorescence microscope (BX53; Olympus, Tokyo, Japan) or a laser scanning confocal microscope (FluoView FV1000; Olympus).

Fluorescence-based uptake assay

The fluorescence-based uptake assay employed a fluorescent substrate that mimics the biogenic amine neurotransmitters and is taken up by the cell through their specific transporters, resulting in increased fluorescence intensity [38]. The corresponding fluorescence-based potencies (FL pIC₅₀ values) were determined in a similar manner to the [3H]-neurotransmitter uptake protocols [39]. HEK293-hSERT cells were plated in black, 96-well optical bottom assay plates coated with poly-D-lysine (#3882, Corning Life Sciences, Lowell, MA, USA) and transfected with siRNAs as described above. Fluorescent substrate uptake assays were performed using the Neurotransmitter Transporter Uptake Assay Kit (Molecular Devices Co, Sunnyvale, CA, USA) in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions. Kinetic measurements of relative fluorescence units (integrated over 0.5 ms) were made using a cycle time of 5 min in a fluorescence microplate reader (SpectraMax M5; Molecular Devices Co). Data were normalized to cell number using the 3-(4,5-dimethylthiazol-2-yl)-2,5-diphenyl tetrazolium bromide (MTT) assay described below. Non-specific uptake was determined in the presence of 10 μM fluoxetine, a selective serotonin reuptake inhibitor.

MTT assay

Cell proliferation was measured with a MTT assay. Cells were incubated with MTT solution at 37 °C for 6 h. Following removal of the solution, dimethyl sulfoxide was added, and the amount of formazan formed was measured spectrophotometrically at 550 nm using a microplate reader (Bio-Rad, Hercules, CA, USA).

Biotinylation

Biotinylation experiments were performed using the Cell Surface Protein Isolation Kit (Pierce, Rockford, IL, USA) in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions. The cells were incubated with sulfo-NHS-SS-biotin solution for 30 min at 4°C, and the biotinylation of membrane proteins was stopped by adding quenching solution. The cells were washed and lysed in lysis buffer containing 1× complete protease inhibitor cocktail (Roche Applied Science). Cell lysates were incubated with NeutrAvidin Agarose beads for 1 h at RT. Beads were washed and biotinylated proteins were eluted using SDS-PAGE sample buffer. Analysis was performed on aliquots taken: (a) prior to incubation with beads (as total lysate) and (b) of the bead elute (as the biotinylated membrane fraction). Then, immunoblot analysis was carried out as described above. Analysis was performed on aliquots taken: (a) prior to incubation with beads (as total lysate) and (b) of the bead elute (as the biotinylated membrane fraction). Then, Western blot analysis was carried out as described above. For the biotinylated membrane fraction, after Western blot analysis, the membrane was stained with Coomassie Brilliant Blue (CBB) as a protein-loading control.

Time-controlled transcardiac perfusion cross-linking and immunoprecipitation

The time-controlled transcardiac perfusion cross-linking (tcTPC) experiments were performed as described previously [40]. Mice were anesthetized and perfused with saline at 25 ml/min for 2 min to purge the blood vessels. The perfusate was switched to fixative solution (4% formaldehyde in PBS (-)) at 25 ml/min and cross-linking was carried out for 6 min. After perfusion, brains were rapidly removed from the skull, postfixed in tcTPC reagent and immediately frozen by immersion in liquid nitrogen. The perfusion and postfixing procedures were completed within 15 min. Mouse brains were homogenized on ice using a homogenizer (Iuchi, Osaka, Japan), in 5 ml of homogenization buffer (50 mM NH₄Cl, 40 mM Tris-HCl, pH 8.0) supplemented with 1× complete protease inhibitor cocktail (Roche Applied Science) per brain. The same amount of extraction buffer (20 mM NaCl, 20 mM Tris–HCl, pH 8.0, 1% NP-40, 1% deoxycholate) was added, followed by incubation at 4°C for 30 min with rotation. Insoluble cellular debris was removed by centrifugation (3,000 rpm, 10 min), and the supernatants were then used as a brain extract. Brain extracts were precleared with 30 μ l of protein G-Sepharose (Thermo Fisher Scientific, Inc, Waltham, MA, USA) for 1 h at 4°C. Cleared lysates were first incubated with an anti-SERT antibody (made by two of the authors, TT and SY) at 4°C for 3 h, and then with 20 μ l of protein G-Sepharose for 1 h at RT. The complex-bound resin was washed five times with IP buffer (25 mM Tris–HCl, 150 mM NaCl; pH 7.2). Immunoprecipitated complexes were boiled in 2× SDS-PAGE sample buffer for 5 min to elute bound proteins. Western blot analysis was carried out as described above.

Post-mortem brain tissues

The ethics committee of the Hamamatsu University School of Medicine approved this study. The Autism Tissue Program (Princeton, NJ, USA) [41], the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development's Brain and Tissue Bank for Developmental Disorders (Baltimore, MD, USA) [42] and the Harvard Brain Tissue Resource Center (Belmont, MD, USA) [43] provided frozen post-mortem brain tissues from dorsal raphe regions (n = 11 control) and n = 7 autism).

Lymphocyte samples

The participants in this study were 30 male subjects with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and 30 healthy male controls. All participants were Japanese. They were born and lived in restricted areas of central Japan, including Aichi, Gifu and Shizuoka prefectures. Based on interviews and available information, including hospital records, diagnoses of ASD were made by an experienced child psychiatrist (TS) based on the DSM-IV-TR criteria. The Autism Diagnostic Interview-Revised (ADI-R) [44] was also conducted by two of the authors (KJT and KM), both of whom have established reliability for diagnosing autism with the Japanese version of the ADI-R. The ADI-R is a semi-structured interview conducted with a parent, usually the mother, and is used to confirm the diagnosis and also to evaluate the core symptoms of ASD. The ADI-R domain A score quantifies impairment in social interaction, the domain BV score quantifies impairment in communication, and the domain C score quantifies restricted, repetitive and stereotyped patterns of behavior and interests. The ADI-R domain D corresponds to the age of onset criterion for autistic disorder. The manual for the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children, Third Edition [45], was used to evaluate the intelligence quotient (IQ) of all the participants. Comorbid psychiatric illnesses were excluded by means of the Structured Clinical Interview for DSM-IV (SCID). Participants were excluded from the study if they had any symptoms of inflammation, a diagnosis of fragile X syndrome, epileptic seizures, obsessive-compulsive disorder, affective disorders or any additional psychiatric or neurological diagnoses. None of the participants had ever received psychoactive medications before this study. Healthy control subjects were recruited locally by advertisement. All control subjects underwent a comprehensive assessment of their medical history to eliminate individuals with any neurological or other medical disorders. SCIDs were also conducted to identify any personal or family history of past or present mental illness. None of the comparison subjects initially recruited was found to fulfill any of these exclusion criteria.

This study was approved by the ethics committee of the Hamamatsu University School of Medicine. All participants as well as their guardians were given a complete description of the study, and provided written informed consent before enrollment. Whole-blood samples were collected by venipuncture from all participants. Lymphocytes were isolated from blood samples by means of the Ficoll-Paque gradient method (purity 80%) within 2 h after sampling.

Quantitative real-time reverse-transcription-polymerase chain reaction

Total RNA was isolated from the dorsal raphe regions of post-mortem brains and lymphocytes using TRIZOL reagent (Invitrogen). The RNA samples were further purified using the RNeasy Micro Kit (QIAGEN, Hilden, Germany). First-strand cDNA was synthesized from the RNA samples using the SuperScript III First-Strand Synthesis System (Invitrogen). Quantitative real-time reverse-transcription polymerase chain reaction (qRT-PCR) analysis was performed using the TaqMan method in the ABI StepOnePlus TM Real-Time PCR System (Applied Biosystems, Foster City, CA, USA). TagMan assay IDs of the genes are as follows: SLC6A4, Hs00984349_m1 and NSF, Hs00938040_m1. Actin, beta (ACTB; Hs99999903_m1) was used as the endogenous reference. Relative quantification of NSF and SERT expression levels in post-mortem brains was performed using the delta-delta C_T method [46], with the constitutively expressed gene ACTB as an internal control. Standard curves were constructed for NSF, SERT and ACTB primers to validate the application of the delta-delta C_T method. Relative quantification of NSF and SERT expression levels in lymphocytes was performed using the relative standard curve method, with the constitutively expressed gene ACTB as an internal control.

Statistical analysis

The data were analyzed using a two-tailed unpaired *t*-test after it had been confirmed that there were no statistically significant differences in variance as assessed by the *F* test.

One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) followed by Tukey's correction was used for multiple comparisons. One-way repeated-measures ANOVA with Tukey's post hoc test was used for analysis of data from the uptake assay. The Mann-Whitney U test was used to evaluate differences in age, post-mortem interval (PMI) and IQs between the autism and control groups, and gene expression levels in the post-mortem brains and lymphocytes between these groups. Fisher's exact test was used to evaluate differences in race and gender between the autism and control groups. Evaluation of the relationships between NSF expression level and clinical variables and symptom profiles was performed using Spearman's rank correlation coefficient. P values of less than 0.05 were considered to indicate statistical significance. All statistical analyses were performed using statistical analysis software (SPSS, version 12.0 J, IBM, Armonk, NY, USA).

Results

Identification of *N*-ethylmaleimide-sensitive factor as a novel serotonin transporter-binding protein

To identify novel binding proteins for SERT, we conducted pull-down experiments using GST-N-SERT or GST-C-SERT with and without (as a negative control) mouse brain lysates. After SDS-PAGE and silver staining of the gels, at least ten specific bands were observed in the lane containing proteins eluted from GST-N-SERT beads incubated with brain lysates, and at least three bands were observed in the lane containing proteins eluted from GST-C-SERT beads incubated with brain

lysates (Figure 1A). The protein bands were excised from the gel and subjected to in-gel trypsin digestion. The tryptic peptide mixtures were analyzed by mass spectrometry. Excluding proteins that bound to both termini of SERT, we identified seven N-terminal-specific binding proteins, but no C-terminal-specific binding proteins (Table 1). One of the N-terminal specific bands, migrating at around 70 kDa, N-4 (Figure 1A), was identified as NSF, which regulates membrane fusion events [47,48], based on 24 independent MS spectra (Figure 1B and Table 1). We focused on the interaction between NSF and SERT in the present study for the following reasons. First, we identified NSF as having the highest reliability score (Table 1). Second, NSF interacts with neurotransmitter receptors, such as AMPA, β2 adrenergic and GABA_A receptors, and it regulates the membrane trafficking and synaptic stabilization of these receptors [49-57]. Finally, in the photoreceptor synapse, the NSF and Arrestin 1 interaction regulates expression of vesicular glutamate transporter 1 and excitatory amino acid transporter 5 in the photoreceptor synapse [58]. These findings suggest that NSF may interact with neurotransmitter transporters and regulates these functions in the central nervous system (CNS). To verify the interaction of NSF with SERT, we conducted Western blot analysis. GST, GST-N-SERT and GST-C-SERT were incubated with mouse brain extracts. As shown in Figure 1C, NSF bound the N-terminal region of SERT specifically. In support of previous studies, N-terminal-specific binding of syntaxin-1A was confirmed [21-23] (Additional file 1: Figure S1).

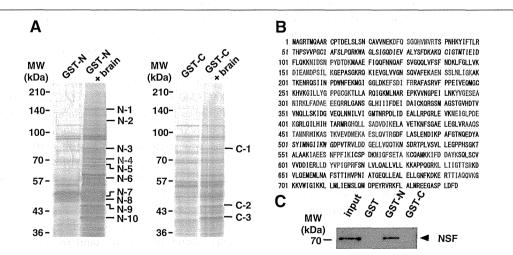


Figure 1 Identification of NSF as a novel binding partner of SERT. (A) GST-N-SERT and GST-C-SERT were incubated with and without (as negative controls) the mouse brain extract. Bound proteins were detected by SDS-PAGE and silver staining. At least ten and three specific bands were observed in the GST-N-SERT and GST-C-SERT lanes, respectively, compared with negative controls. **(B)** Analysis using Mascot identified 24 peptides (in red) that matched NSF from band N-4 (in red on (A)). **(C)** N-tail-specific binding of NSF to SERT was confirmed by Western blot analysis. C-SERT, C-terminal domain of the serotonin transporter; GST, glutathione S-transferase; GST-C, GST-C-SERT; GST-N, GST-N-SERT; N-SERT, N-terminal domain of the serotonin transporter; NSF, N-ethylmaleimide-sensitive factor; MW, molecular weight.

Table 1 Identification of GST-N-SERT and GST-C-SERT pulled-down proteins from mouse brain extracts

Spot number	Gene name	Protein name	MW (Da)	Number	Sequence coverage	Score	Accession number	N-terminal specific	Cellular and molecular events
N-1	Synj1	Synaptojanin 1	172,509	23	14%	785	Q8CHC4	*	Endocytosis
N-2	Cand1	Cullin-associated NEDD8- dissociated protein 1	136,245	14	10%	526	Q6ZQ38	*	SCF complex assembly
N-3	Aco2	Aconitate hydratase, mitochondrial	85,410	14	19%	534	Q99KI0		
N-4	Nsf	Vesicle-fusing ATPase (NSF)	82,561	24	27%	1,010	P46460	*	
N-5	Atp6v1a	V-type proton ATPase catalytic subunit A	68,283	13	21%	466	P50516	*	Hydrolysis
N-6	Crmp1	Dihydropyrimidinase-related protein 1	62,129	12	20%	441	P97427	*	Axon guidance and cell migration
N-7	Cct2	T-complex protein 1 subunit beta	57,441	11	19%	202	P80314	*	Molecular chaperone
N-8	Fscn1	Fascin	54,474	14	25%	174	Q61553	*	Actin filament binding
N-9	Eno1	Alpha-enolase	47,111	16	24%	703	P17182		
N-10	Cnp	2',3'-cyclic-nucleotide 3'-phosphodiesterase	47,094	22	40%	341	P16330		
C-1	Aco2	Aconitate hydratase, mitochondrial	85,410	8	9%	287	Q99KI0		
C-2	Eno1	Alpha-enolase	47,111	8	20%	384	P17182		
C-3	Cnp	2',3'-cyclic-nucleotide 3'-phosphodiesterase	47,094	18	32%	225	P16330		

C-SERT, C-terminal domain of the serotonin transporter; GST, glutathione S-transferase; MW, molecular weight; N-SERT, N-terminal domain of the serotonin transporter.

Co-localization of serotonin transporter and *N*ethylmaleimide-sensitive factor in HEK293-hSERT cells

The subcellular localization of SERT and NSF was examined using immunofluorescence confocal microscopy. NSF is expressed endogenously in HEK293 cells. We established a stable human SERT-expressing cell line, HEK293-hSERT, using HEK293 cells as described in the Methods section. It was confirmed that SERT was transported to the plasma membrane in this cell line by double staining using antibodies to SERT and cadherin, a membrane marker (see Additional file 2: Figure S2). HEK293-hSERT cells were double labeled with antibodies to NSF and SERT, and it was revealed that NSF co-localized with SERT in the plasma membrane (Figure 2A,B,C) and intracellular particles (Figure 2D,E,F).

Effect of *N*-ethylmaleimide-sensitive factor knockdown on serotonin transporter function and cellular localization

We used RNA interference to knock down endogenous NSF expression. We confirmed that the efficacy of siRNA transfection into HEK293-hSERT cells was >90% (see Additional file 3: Figure S3). As shown in Figure 3A,B, it was confirmed that both of the siRNAs (siRNA-1 and -2) targeting NSF suppressed endogenous NSF protein levels by approximately 60% (P < 0.001, one-way ANOVA with Tukey's *post hoc* test, n = 3 each). Importantly, whole-cell SERT protein levels were not changed significantly by the siRNAs targeting NSF ($F_{(2,14)} = 1.057$; P = 0.374, one-way

ANOVA, n = 5 to 6 each) (Figure 3C,D). To investigate the effect of NSF on SERT uptake function, we conducted a fluorescence-based uptake assay in HEK293-hSERT cells. As shown in Figure 4, both NSF siRNAs decreased fluorescence uptake (siRNA-1; P = 0.005 and siRNA-2; P < 0.001, one-way repeated measures ANOVA with Tukey's post hoc test, n = 8 each). Fluoxetine completely inhibited uptake (Figure 4), including nonspecific uptake.

Next, we conducted biotinylation experiments in HEK293-hSERT cells using sulfo-NHS-SS-biotin. This compound, which binds to lysine and arginine residues in proteins, is cell impermeant and labels cell-surface proteins. Cells transfected with the siRNA of NSF (siRNA-2) or a negative control were incubated with sulfo-NHS-SSbiotin, followed by isolation of labeled proteins with avidin beads and analysis by Western blotting using anti-SERT antibodies. For the biotinylated membrane fraction, after Western blot analysis, the membrane was stained with CBB as a protein-loading control (Additional file 4: Figure S4). As shown in Figure 5A,B, the level of SERT protein at the cell membrane was decreased by an average of 50% (t = 5.399; df = 16; P < 0.001, two-tailed unpaired *t*-test, n = 9) following NSF knockdown, despite no change in the total levels of SERT protein (t = -1.565; df = 10; P = 0.149, two-tailed unpaired t-test, n = 6). Finally, we examined the distribution of SERT in HEK293-hSERT cells when NSF was suppressed. In support of the results of the experiment using sulfo-NHS-SS-biotin, the

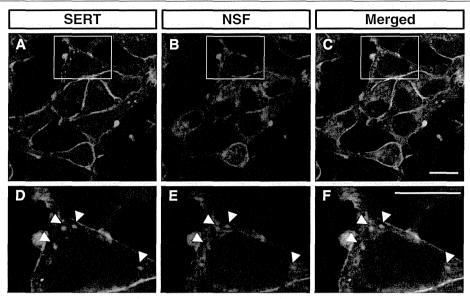


Figure 2 NSF co-localizes with SERT in HEK293-hSERT cells. (A,B,C) Double immunocytochemical staining for SERT (green) and NSF (red) in HEK293-hSERT cells. NSF co-localizes with SERT in the cell membrane (merged). (D,E,F) High-magnification views of the regions boxed in panels (A), (B) and (C), respectively. Arrowheads indicate double-positive intracellular particles. Scale bar: 10 μm. Results are representative of three independent experiments. NSF, *N*-ethylmaleimide-sensitive factor; SERT, serotonin transporter.

membrane expression of SERT was decreased by NSF knockdown in HEK293-hSERT cells (Figure 5C).

Association between serotonin transporter and *N*-ethylmaleimide-sensitive factor *in vivo*

To determine the physiological significance of our findings *in vivo*, we examined: (a) the interaction between SERT and NSF in the mouse brain by immunoprecipitation and Western blotting and (b) the cellular distributions of NSF and SERT in cultured mouse raphe neurons by immunocytochemistry and microscopy.

Schmitt-Ulms and colleagues have established a method that covalently conserves protein interactions through tcTPC [40]. This method enables the preservation of protein-protein interactions that occur under physiological conditions. We investigated the interaction of SERT with NSF in the mouse brain using this tcTPC method. First, we examined the accuracy of the method. Total protein from non-tcTPC- or tcTPC-treated mouse brains was analyzed by immunoblotting, and we confirmed that SERTcontaining cross-linked complexes were retained by this method (see Additional file 5: Figure S5A). Second, we checked whether the complexes were precipitated by anti-SERT antibodies and confirmed that SERT-containing cross-linked complexes were precipitated in a dosedependent manner using this antibody (see Additional file 5: Figure S5B). Then, finally, we investigated the binding of SERT to NSF. As shown in Figure 6A, NSF coimmunoprecipitated with SERT from tcTPC-treated brain cells indicating that NSF interacts with SERT in

the mouse brain under physiological conditions. Next, the cellular distributions of NSF and SERT in cultured mouse raphe neurons were examined. About 10% of all cultured cells were 5-HT-positive neurons in support of a previous report (data not shown) [36]. NSF was ubiquitously expressed in all cultured cells (data not shown). As shown in Figure 6B, triple immunocytochemical staining for SERT, NSF and 5-HT revealed that NSF co-localizes with SERT in the cell body and fibers of cultured serotonergic neurons.

SLC6A4 and *N*-ethylmaleimide-sensitive factor expression in the raphe region of post-mortem brains from autism patients

The demographic characteristics of subjects (seven with autism and eleven control subjects) are described in Tables 2 and 3. There were no significant differences in age (P = 1.000, Mann-Whitney U test), race (P = 0.305, mann-Whitney U test)Fisher's exact test), gender (P = 0.596, Fisher's exact test) and PMI (P = 0.513, Mann-Whitney U test) between the autism and control groups (Table 3). Although changes in SERT function and expression have been implicated in autism, mRNA expression of the SLC6A4 gene that encodes SERT in the brains of autistic individuals has never been reported. Therefore, first, we measured SLC6A4 expression in the raphe region of post-mortem brains from autistic individuals and controls using qRT-PCR. SLC6A4 expression was normalized to the expression levels of an internal control (ACTB). As shown in Figure 7A, there are wide individual differences in the

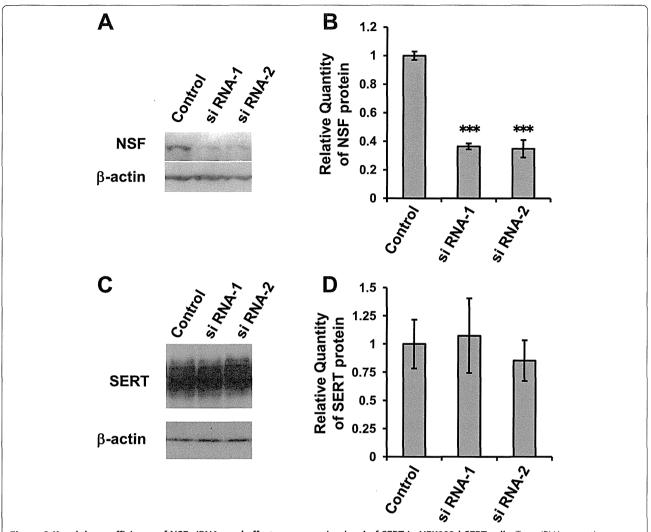


Figure 3 Knockdown efficiency of NSF siRNAs and effect on expression level of SERT in HEK293-hSERT cells. Two siRNAs targeting specific NSF sequences were transfected into HEK293-hSERT cells. (**A**) The expression levels of NSF and β-actin (as an internal control) were assayed by immunoblot analysis. (**B**) Quantitation of relative band densities for NSF was performed by scanning densitometry. Data are expressed as the means \pm standard deviation, n = 3. ***P < 0.001 vs internal control (one-way ANOVA with Tukey's *post hoc* test). (**C**) The expression levels of SERT and β-actin (as an internal control) were assayed by immunoblot analysis. (**D**) Quantitation of relative band densities for SERT was performed by scanning densitometry. Data are expressed as the means \pm standard deviation, n = 5 or 6. NSF, N-ethylmaleimide-sensitive factor; SERT, serotonin transporter; siRNA, small interfering RNA.

expression level of SLC6A4 among the subjects, and the level did not differ significantly between subjects with autism and controls (P = 0.928, Mann–Whitney U test). Then, we measured NSF expression in the same way. NSF expression was normalized to the expression of ACTB. We found that the NSF expression level in autism patients tended to be lower than that in controls; however, this trend was not statistically significant (P = 0.069, Mann–Whitney U test) (Figure 7B).

SLC6A4 and *N*-ethylmaleimide-sensitive factor expression in lymphocytes from patients with autism spectrum disorders NSF is expressed ubiquitously in all normal human tissues including lymphocytes [59]. Lymphocytes also

carry SERT [60]. Thus, we measured expressions of these genes in lymphocytes from individuals with ASD and age- and sex-matched controls by qRT-PCR. The demographic characteristics of the subjects (30 with ASD and 30 control subjects) are described in Table 4. There were no significant differences in age (P = 0.928, Mann–Whitney U test) or IQs (verbal IQ, P = 0.098, Mann–Whitney U test; performance IQ, P = 0.076, Mann–Whitney U test; full-scale IQ, P = 0.554, Mann–Whitney U test) between the ASD and control groups (Table 4). As shown in Figure 8A, the expression level of SLC6A4 did not differ significantly between subjects with ASD and controls (P = 0.518, Mann–Whitney U test). On the other hand, we found that the NSF expression level in ASD