

E-motion

Potential of highly sensitivity

What is high sensitivity?

The specificity of the functioning of highly sensitive children in the preschool, school and home environment (part 1)?

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WHAT IS "E-MOTION"?

E-MOTION is the project to be developed by researchers and practitioners, which is focused on supporting highly sensitive children in their immediate environment



Structure

Justification for the analysis of this particular characteristic

The importance of early identification of the feature

The specificity of the functioning of highly sensitive children in the preschool, school and home environment

Justification (1/2)

- Sensory Processing Sensitivity (SPS) is a **feature** that describes differences in environmental sensitivity between people, both positive and negative ones
- SPS is a heritable, evolutionarily conserved trait
- SPS is related but relatively distinct from common personality traits and affect
- this trait entails the risk of psychopathology and the occurrence of stress-related problems when a person grows, is raised and lives in inappropriate, negative conditions/environment
- this trait is associated with special benefits (including a positive mood, greater awareness, responses to interventions) when a person grows, is raised and lives in positive conditions/environment
- SPS is conceptualized as a **trait** rather than a disorder

(Assary, et al., 2020; Greven, et al., 2019; Lionetti at. 2019; Pluess, 2015)

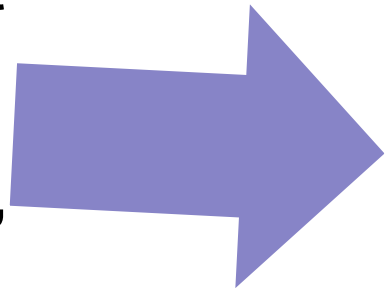
Justification (2/2)

- People can function properly when, among others, they make use of the available resources
- According to the assumptions of the Environmental Sensitivity concept, both humans and animals are programmed to perceive, process, react and adapt to specific social and physical elements of the environment
- Significant differences are observed in reactivity and sensitivity to the environment in both humans and animals

(Belsky i Pluess, 2009; Pluess, 2015; Pluess et al., 2017)

Why do we consider high sensitivity (1/6)?

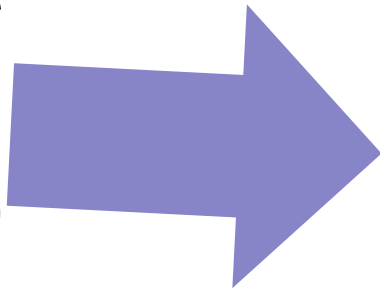
Numerous studies have demonstrated that high sensitivity itself is not a disorder, however, **in negative, unfavourable conditions it may be correlated with numerous difficulties:**



- **internalization problems** (Boterberg and Warreyn, 2016)
- **anxiety** (Bakker and Molding, 2012; Liss, Mailloux and Erchull, 2008; Molsa, 2018; O'Donovan, Slavich, Epel, & Neylan, 2013)
- **increased levels of stress** (Bakker and Molding, 2012; Benham, 2006)

Why do we consider high sensitivity (2/6)?

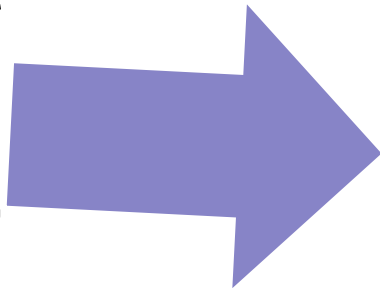
Numerous studies have demonstrated that high sensitivity itself is not a disorder, however, **in negative, unfavourable conditions it may be correlated with numerous difficulties:**



- **of poor health** (with somatic illnesses) (Benham, 2006)
- **depression** (Bakker and Molding, 2012; Liss, Mailloux, Erchull, 2008; Ioannou, Dellepiane, Olsson, Steingrimsson, 2017; Serafinia, Gonda, Canepa, Pompili, Rihmer, Amore, Engel-Yeger, 2017; Yano & Oishi, 2018)

Why do we consider high sensitivity (3/6)?

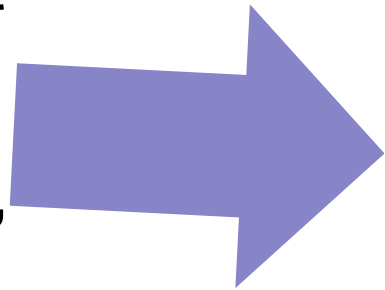
Numerous studies have demonstrated that high sensitivity itself is not a disorder, however, **in negative, unfavourable conditions it may be correlated with numerous difficulties:**



- **alexithymia** (Liss et al. 2008; Serafinia, Gonda, Canepa, Pompili, Rihmer, Amore, Engel-Yeger, 2017)
- **helplessness** (Serafinia et al., 2017)
- **impulsiveness** (Serafinia et al., 2017)
- **lower level of subjective happiness** (Sobocko and Zelenski, 2015) and **lower level of life satisfaction** (Booth et al., 2015)

Why do we consider high sensitivity (4/6)?

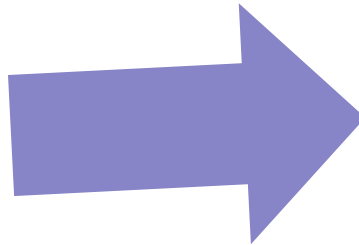
Numerous studies have demonstrated that high sensitivity itself is not a disorder, however, **in negative, unfavourable conditions it may be correlated with numerous difficulties:**



- **exaggerated perception of home chaos** (Wachs, 2013),
- **higher degree of dissatisfaction with work and a greater need for regeneration** (Andresen, Goldmann and Volodina, 2017; Evers, Rasche and Schabracq, 2008)

Why do we consider high sensitivity (5/6)?

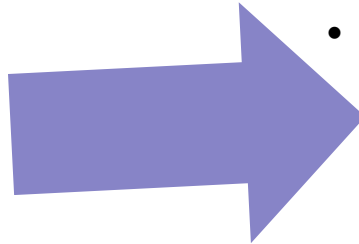
Studies concerning environmental sensitivity emphasize that SPS is also important for understanding of the **optimal development or even exceptional development of potential in a positive environment**. The research suggests that SPS is also associated with:



- the positive aspects of functioning, such as the ability to induce a positive mood (Lionetti et al., 2018)
- increased social competencies in interaction with positive parenting styles (Slagt et al., 2017)
- reductions in the incidence of depression, violence and victimization as a result of positive intervention (Pluess & Boniwell, 2015)

Why do we consider high sensitivity (6/6)?

Studies concerning environmental sensitivity emphasize that SPS is also important for understanding of the **optimal development or even exceptional development of potential in a positive environment**. The research suggests that SPS is also associated with:



- **increased activation in the major reward centres of the brain in response to positive stimuli**, such as the smiling face of a partner or generally positive emotions (Acevedo et al., 2014)
- **feelings of admiration, which increase the sense of pleasure and meaning in life**, the HSP scale significantly correlates with such feelings (Aron, Aron and Tillmann, 2018)
- **the development of talents** (Mullet, Rinn, Jett, Nyikos, 2017)

Does high
sensitivity
have to be
associated
with
dysfunction?

NO,
research emphasizes the importance
of the environment for proper
development (which is appropriate
for all people and especially
beneficial for the highly sensitive)



SPS risk or protective factor (1)

One side of the same coin

tendency to react with fear and anxiety

tendency to experience difficult emotions, anticipating difficult situations
,pessimism'

being influenced by the emotions of others

labeling, achievements below competences

may result in the identification of the trait as disorder and prepare intervention in terms of disorder



SPS risk or protective factor (2)

The other side of the same coin

empathy; ability to empathize with someone else's situation

significant result of positive intervention; a slight correction causes a change in behavior

creativity

depth of processing as opposed to simply identifying the stimuli and responding to it

may result in /be called as sensitivity that gives you an advantage

High sensitivity can be both a risk factor and a factor that ensures the correct development of a child's personality.

Early identification is particularly important for the proper development of children

- The initial identification of temperamental features is often based on the analysis of behaviours
- in the case of HSCh may be confused (e.g. with sensory disintegration, anxiety disorders, hyperactivity, attention deficits, autism spectrum disorders)
- a proper 'tool' can be the first stage of the process of support for HSCh and their families as well as their close environment
- 'positive diagnosis'

...about how to
„identify” -
tomorrow, and
today we are
talking about the
specificity that was
the basis for the
analysis of
behavior

The specificity of the functioning of Highly Sensitive Children in the preschool, school environment

The characteristics of high sensitivity

Aron distinguishes four aspects of high sensitivity, which may be understood as personality features (Aron 2002).

In order to classify a person as highly sensitive, all four criteria have to be met.

DOES acronym

It has been proposed that these characteristics should be represented by the acronym DOES.

The acronym was created by arranging the first letters of high sensitivity characteristics, namely:

D – Depth of processing

O – Overstimulation (the ease of being overstimulated)

E – Emotional reactivity connected with empathy

S – Subtle stimuli (sensitivity to subtle stimuli)

D – Depth of processing (1/2)

Depth of processing refers to the amount of detailed information processed in relation to an object, information or stimulus.

Depth of processing manifests itself with the following features (Aron, Aron 1997; Aron 2002; Acevedo et al. 2014; Boterberg, Warreyn 2016):

- conscientiousness in behaviour;
- intensity in experiencing feelings;
- vivid dreams and a rich imagination;
- a tendency to reflect upon various activities in detail;
- awareness of the long-term consequences of their behaviour;
- a longer processing time of new information compared to peers;

Baryła-Matejczuk, M., Artymiak, M., Ferrer-Cascales, R., & Betancort, M. (2020)

D – Depth of processing (2/2)

Depth of processing manifests itself with the following features (Aron, Aron 1997; Aron 2002; Acevedo et al. 2014; Boterberg, Warreyn 2016):

- more effective learning from own experiences;
- drawing conclusions from experiences in order to increase efficacy;
- apparent slowdown in activity and inhibition – observing the situation before participating in it;
- asking “deep”, thought-provoking questions;
- using complicated words, demonstrating an above average ability compared to peer group;
- smart sense of humour;
- difficulties in making decisions due to considering too many options;
- slow (compared to less sensitive peers) adaptation to new people and situations (due to the desire to carefully observe them and reflect upon them)

Baryła-Matejczuk, M., Artymiak, M., Ferrer-Cascales, R., & Betancort, M. (2020)

O – Ease of being overstimulated (1/2)

When children are acutely aware of what is happening within them and around them, and process these situations including the actions and behaviours of other people more deeply and more thoroughly than their peers, they are also more prone to physical and mental fatigue than children who process fewer stimuli and less information.

Baryła-Matejczuk, M., Artymiak, M., Ferrer-Cascales, R., & Betancort, M. (2020)

O – Ease of being overstimulated (2/2)

The consequences of overstimulation may be:

- difficulties with falling asleep, waking up in the middle of the night;
- acute reactions to change, to pain;
- intense reactions to noise, cold, heat, artificial light, discomfort (e.g. sand in a shoe, wet clothing, a scratchy label);
- unwillingness to be in crowded places;
- the desire to play alone (independently);
- unwillingness to participate in team games;
- reluctance to speak in front of a class

Baryła-Matejczuk, M., Artymiak, M., Ferrer-Cascales, R., & Betancort, M. (2020).

E – Emotional reactivity connected to empathy

Emotions are a source of information about what is happening inside and outside the person. Sensitive children, due to their tendency to analyse thoroughly, with their greater interest in their surrounding reality, their superior ability for sharp observation, also react with greater emotional intensity.

The emotional reactivity of highly sensitive people is linked to the level of their **empathy** (Aron, 2002).

However, taking into account the specificity of the feature's manifestation, in the case of children, we should rather talk about syntony. By definition, empathy includes both an affective and a cognitive factor.

Baryła-Matejczuk, M., Artymiak, M., Ferrer-Cascales, R., & Betancort, M. (2020).

S – Sensitivity to subtle stimuli

Sensitivity to subtleties is identified as the awareness of details, subtle sounds, touch, smell and other delicate stimuli.

In children, this characteristic is manifested, among other ways, through:

- paying attention to the changes in the appearance of people or places, e.g. change in the position of furniture;
- noticing subtle odours, due to which the child may not want to, e.g. go somewhere or participate in some activity;
- paying attention to subtle sounds (e.g. birds singing), complex music;
- noticing (and often reacting to) changes in the tone of voice, “short glances”, small gestures.

Baryła-Matejczuk, M., Artymiak, M., Ferrer-Cascales, R., & Betancort, M. (2020)

The characteristics of
Highly Sensitive Children

Functioning in school and
kindergarten

Functioning in school and kindergarten

- Achermann (2013, in: Tillmann 2016) examined how highly sensitive adults perceive their time spent at school. The results were similar to those obtained by Aron (2002).
- Research results indicate that:
 - most HSP do not experience any school problems and bad grades because of the deeper content processing;
 - the majority of highly sensitive people are perfectionists and expect a lot from each other;
 - preferred learning environment and atmosphere: a quiet working atmosphere was important for proper focus and work;

Research results indicate that:

HSC prefer teaching through direct individual instructions, they do not like to appear in front of a group – however, if group work is used and preferred by the teacher,

HSP prefer working with friends rather than with people who are unknown to them;

the physical environment and its aspects, such as a colourful room, too much light or similar features also play an important role;

the behaviour of HS children resulting from overstimulation may be interpreted by the teacher as low motivation or attention deficits;

Research results indicate that:

new and unknown situations make the HSC feel uncomfortable;

they prefer repetitive, structured lessons, rules and rituals;

in unclear situations, without structure, HSP become nervous, full of anxiety and it is difficult for them to maintain their balance;

they are often tired after school;

Research results indicate that:

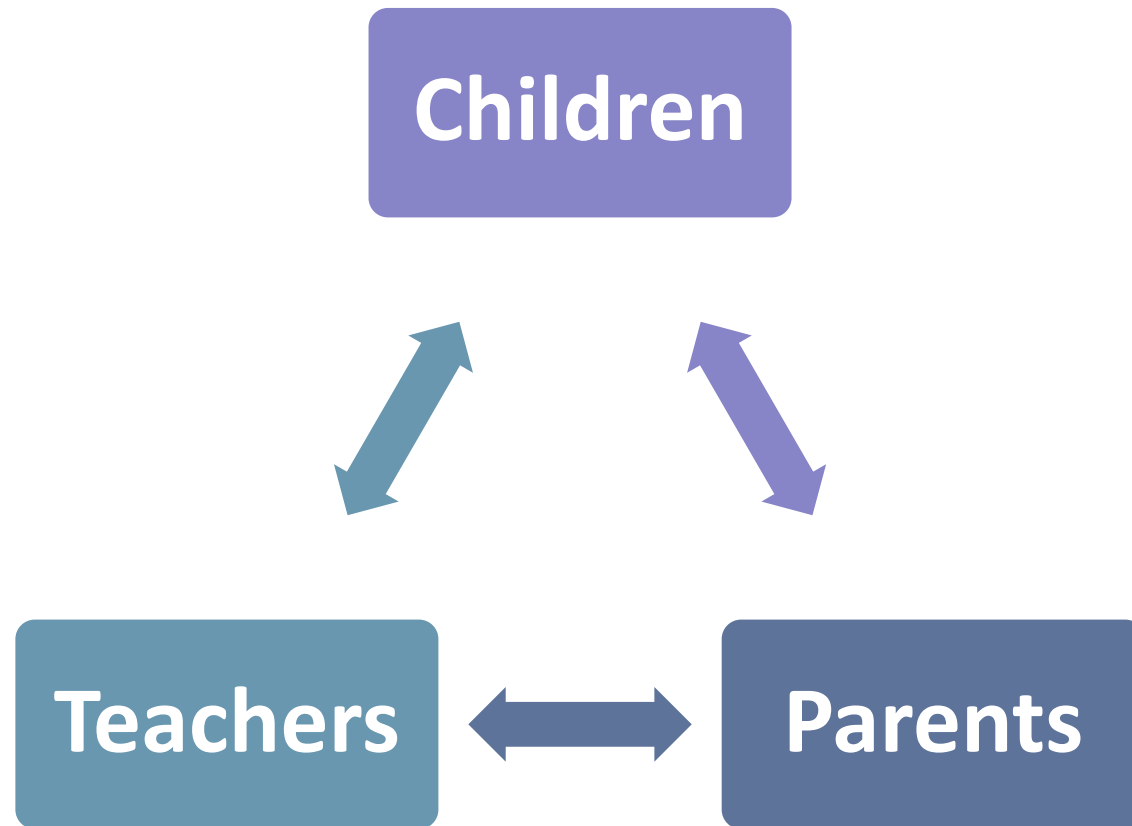
social life at school: close relationships are important for HSP, but they prefer a small circle of friends;

larger groups and large spaces (like a school playground) are perceived negatively;

conflicts have a negative impact on HSC, they may result in difficulties with maintaining their attention during lessons, and even later when they are already at home;

Therefore, it was crucial for us...

The key aspect is cooperation:



In summary...

it should be stated that the most appropriate forms of support for teachers and educators in preparing them for work with highly sensitive children are:

- equipping them with knowledge in the field of high sensitivity
- helping them to understand how highly sensitive children differ from other children and what their needs are;
- equipping them with tools; specific styles and methods of working with highly sensitive children (familiarizing them with, among others, elements of temperamental based intervention and self-regulation, somatic education, mindfulness);
- providing access to specialists and practitioners supporting HSC children thereby enabling mutual learning and the comprehensive support of highly sensitive children.

Thank you for attention!

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