



Hope Connection 2.0: Evaluating the efficacy of sensory interventions to improve sensory processing in adopted children

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Abstract

In October and November of 2022, TCU’s Karyn Purvis Institute of Child Development hosted the Hope Connection 2.0 camp which is a trauma-informed, therapeutic intervention for adoptive families. Children in adoptive families often have histories of trauma which impacts many aspects of their lives. Sensory processing is the mechanism in the brain that manages incoming sensory information and is known to be affected by early experiences with trauma. The Hope Connection 2.0 camp is designed to address many of the effects of trauma, including sensory processing. This study evaluated the efficacy of the Hope Connection 2.0 camp at reducing sensory processing deficits and improving children’s ability to process sensory input. Ten families participated in the camp which took place over two weekends. Parents completed surveys providing information on their children’s capacity for sensory processing prior to attending camp and after attending the final session in November. The information gathered at each time point was then analyzed to determine the change in the child’s ability to process sensory information over time.

Introduction

Early experiences with trauma may disrupt a child’s capacity for sensory processing (Purvis et al., 2013b). Nurturing caregivers naturally provide sensory-rich environments for children through affectionately touching, holding, or speaking to the child, but many children who have been adopted do not have these opportunities (Purvis et al., 2013b). Without frequent sensory input, children are unable to practice integrating sensory input in infancy and they might struggle to process sensory input as they age (Cermak & Daunhauer, 1997). Without early practice with sensory processing, some sensory information may illicit unexpected behavioral or motor responses in this population (Purvis et al., 2013b).

Hope Connection 2.0 is a therapeutic camp intervention developed to meet serve children who experienced early deprivation primarily through adoption (Purvis et al., 2007). Camp was built to address three main factors of a child’s life – attachment, behavior, and sensory processing (Purvis et al., 2007). Camp is a sensory-rich environment designed to stimulate all internal and external senses (Purvis et al., 2007). At camp, sensory tools like fidgets and sensory rooms are available at all times to aid children with emotional regulation (Purvis et al., 2013a). Specific activities at camp are also designed for sensory stimulation.

This study seeks to evaluate the efficacy of the Hope Connection 2.0 Camp at reducing sensory processing difficulties among children who have experienced trauma through adoption. This therapeutic camp intervention seeks to address many of the effects of trauma on the child’s life, including sensory processing. It was hypothesized that after the camp intervention, children would show decreases in sensory processing difficulties.

Methods

Participants were families with at least one adopted child recruited by the Karyn Purvis Institute of Child Development through their database of TBRI Practitioners and social media. The adopted children had to be between the ages of 5-12 during camp, adopted into the family for at least one year, and all family members living in the home were required to attend camp. Each family selected one target child to focus on for the intervention. One parent of each child completed several online assessments before and after the camp intervention. The focus of this study is the assessment regarding sensory processing of the target children.

Participants:

- 10 families

Measure:

- Short Sensory Profile 2 (SSP2)

Procedure:

- Camp occurred over two weekends spaced five weeks apart from one another in October and November 2022.
- Participants completed online assessments two months prior to camp (T1) and one month after camp (T2).

Discussion

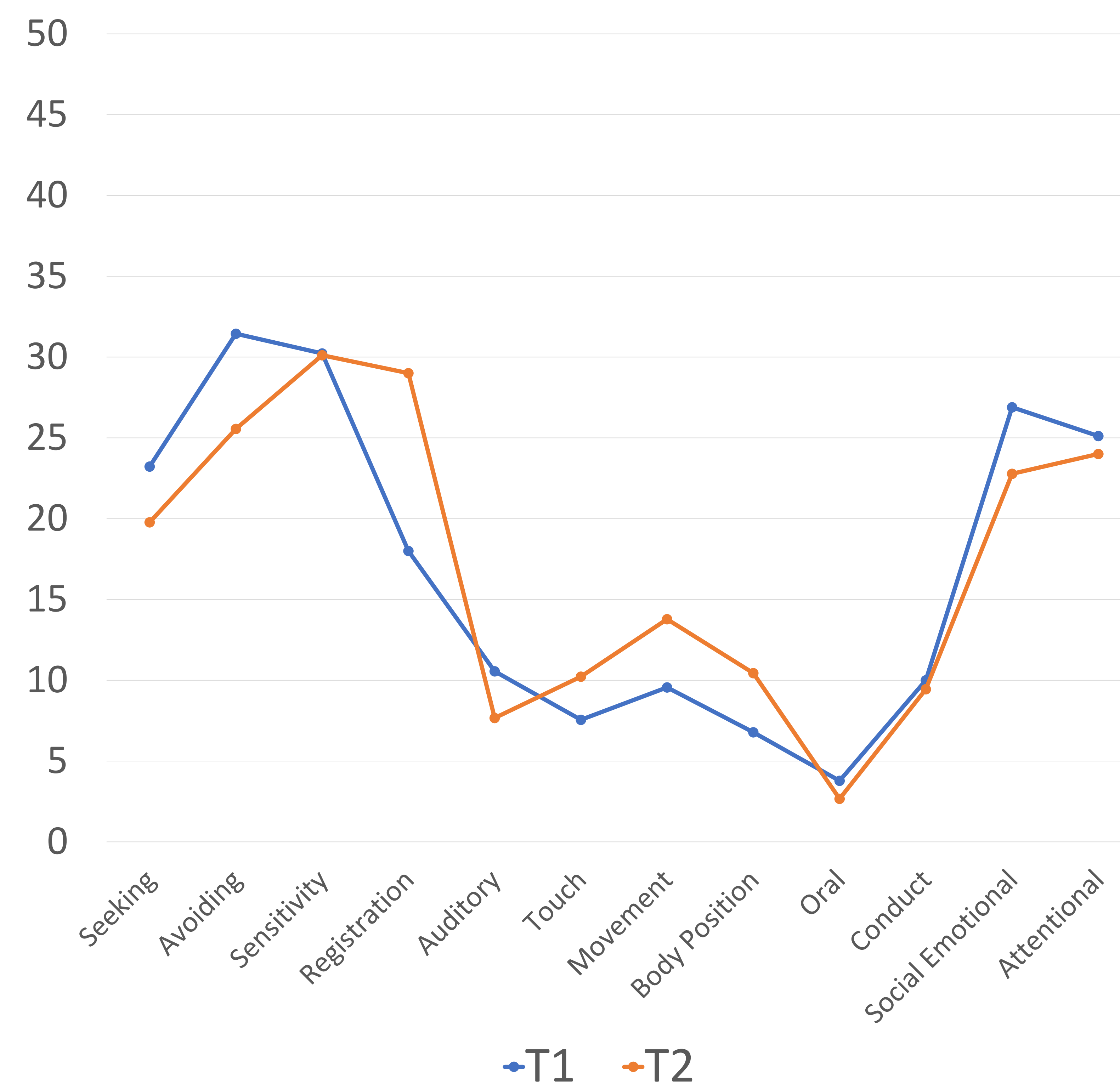
This study examined the effectiveness of sensory interventions within a therapeutic camp in improving sensory processing in adopted children four weeks after attending camp. This study found that there was not an improvement in sensory processing abilities at the T2 timepoint. A recent study from the KPICD did not demonstrate decreased sensory processing deficits two weeks after camp but the study showed decreases six months after camp. The current study is consistent in showing that improvements to sensory processing capacities were not immediately observable following the camp intervention.

In some instances, sensory processing deficits increased following the camp intervention. One reason might be that parents receive intensive training regarding TBRI which includes sensory processing. The parent trainings might equip parents with more knowledge of sensory-related behaviors which the parents may become more attuned to after attending camp.

Another reason for these results might be that each family had some knowledge of TBRI prior to attending camp. Families that attended camp have already attempted implementing TBRI principles in their homes prior to attending camp. Familiarity with TBRI might explain why there was not an immediate reduction in sensory processing challenges.

Results

Average Subscale Scores T1 vs T2



References

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