

HKU Autism Research Finds Changes in Brain Regions which Control Social Ability

Autism is a neurological disorder causing developmental disabilities. Difficulty with social interaction is one of the most serious aspects of the disorder. Autism affects about 2 per 1,000 individuals, with male-to-female ratio 4:1. The causes of autism are unknown.

Brain imaging for individual patients is not diagnostic of autism. However, a research study conducted by the Faculty of Medicine, HKU has recently found that brain anatomy in autism may be altered with a reduction of grey matter in social brain systems. This may affect the normal development of communication skills, social relationships and face recognition. In addition, brain networks responsible for social behaviours may not be tightly connected in autism. The results were recently published in the international journal, *Brain*.

Although there is no cure for autism there are many useful interventions to enhance their interactions with others. Early education to teach new skills is very important for the children to learn to talk, play and self-care. Sometimes medication helps when repetitive activities are a particular problem. The key is to get an early diagnosis so intervention can begin as soon as possible.