



We published an article!

The first article from Project ISLaND has now been published in *Molecular Autism*. Here is a summary of what we found:

Background & Study Aims

- Children with neurodevelopmental conditions can show a range of language and communication skills. Some school-aged children use very little or no spoken language, but there is considerable diversity in this group, with different strengths and support needs.
- In this study, we aimed to better understand the different communication profiles of minimally verbal children. In particular, we wanted to explore whether some children understand much more than they are able to express through speech.

Method

- A total of 193 children aged 4-13 years took part in the study. All used little spoken language. Most children had an autism diagnosis, while others had a genetic syndrome or other developmental conditions. It was common to have more than one diagnosis.
- Children participated in play-based activities with an experimenter that were designed to encourage communication, such as asking for help or sharing attention.
- Parents also completed questionnaires about their child's communication, daily living skills, and overall development.
- In addition, we assessed children's understanding of language, as well as their motor and imitation skills (their ability to plan movements and to copy observed behaviours).





Findings

- When we looked at the children's skills, six distinct groups of children emerged. Four of these groups showed broadly similar levels of ability across four key areas: understanding language, using language, motor and imitation skills, and everyday functioning. These groups could be described as having very low, low, mid-, or high skill levels.
- Importantly, the two other groups showed a different pattern. Children in these groups had lower spoken language abilities compared to their other skills, suggesting that they understood more language than they were able to express using speech. These children also tended to have mid-to-low motor and imitation skills.

Conclusions

- These findings suggest that some minimally verbal children may have an additional barrier to spoken language due to difficulties with producing speech – which may be linked to challenges with motor and imitation skills.
- Overall, this study highlights that minimally verbal children are not a single, uniform group. Recognising different communication profiles may help to ensure they receive more personalised and appropriate support.

You can read the full article here:

<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1186/s13229-026-00701-8>

A huge thank you to all of the families involved in Project ISLaND for contributing to this research!

