In our clinical practice with impedance measurements (Peters, model AP-61C) in the different pathologies of speech, language and hearing, we observed that autistic children do not show any contractions of the tympanic muscles (failure to elicit a stapedius reflex).

This absence of response has not been found in other cases like: dyslogics (mental retardation) or dysarthrics (cerebral palsy); the reflex-eliciting stimulus is perceived equivalent to a 70- to 80-dB sensitivity level or greater. This fact seems to have validity enough to be considered and investigated.

Our clinical criterion of autism is quite different from the usual anglo-saxon concept. We consider it as: a schizophrenia-whose main symptom is a relational disorder affecting communication and thus personality structuration and cognitive processes.

17 autistic children whose ages ranged between 3 and 9 years were tested by acoustic impedance measurements. None of them had been previously affected by middle ear pathology in the test ear and had no evident hearing loss in the other ear. As mentioned before, all of them failed to elicit stapedius reflexes.

The conditions in the test situation were as usual: balance pressure between ear canal and middle ear cavity; pure discontinued tone stimulation and sensibility reduction of the impedancemeter (No. 2) to maximalize the stability of the system.

Although some psychological reasons could be put forward to explain this fact we should like: to gather more information confirming or rejecting this absence of stapedius muscle contraction in autistic children (as defined) or other well-established child pathologies and to ask for fundamental physiological research about it. This symptom, among others, could be helpfull in the different tasks of the differential diagnosis in this early mental disease.

Summary

It has been observed although neither confirmed nor explained that autistic (non-deaf) children have no intratimpanic reflex in the impedance measurements.

Attention and information is drawn to this paradoxical fact.