Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response: What is It? and Why Should We Care?

Sir,
We are writing this letter to enlighten the readers of this journal about a novel and somewhat unresearched phenomenon with potential therapeutic applications. Its name is Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response (ASMR).

ASMR is a perceptual sensory phenomenon, likened to meditation, which encompasses a pleasant and calming “tingling” sensation localized to the scalp and neck in those able to experience it.[1] These sensations are triggered by specific auditory and visual stimuli such as whispering, personal attention, and even being the subject of a physician’s clinical examination.[1] People looking to experience ASMR turn to the website “YouTube” where videos have been produced that utilize these triggers. These videos are generally watched by users in a quiet environment to achieve the relaxing effect of ASMR.[1]

Numerous media outlets have reported on ASMR; however, this phenomenon is not very well understood and our attempts to research ASMR on the database “PubMed” only provides three results (at the time of writing this article).

One of these papers was by Ahuja who described how this phenomenon can be caused by being the subject of a clinician’s physical examination and suggests that ASMR may contribute to the therapeutic effects of a routine clinician’s assessment.[2]

Another paper was by Smith et al. and attempted to discover some of the neural underpinnings of ASMR, suggesting that individuals who experience ASMR demonstrate an increased connectivity between certain brain regions in the occipital, frontal, and temporal cortices.[3]

The most clinically relevant paper is a study of 475 people who experience ASMR published by Barratt and Davis who show that ASMR helps users relax, deal with stress, and get to sleep with greater ease.[1] The authors also show that ASMR elicits a positive effect on mood and causes a significant reduction in symptoms of chronic pain for several hours following an ASMR session.[1]

Given the prevalence of sleep disorders, anxiety, and depression in this day and age, it is important to explore every possible avenue with regard to therapeutics. It is obvious that research on this topic is still in its infancy and that publications in the field are few and far between. We also appreciate the difficulty in researching a phenomenon that can only be experienced by a small proportion of people.
and cannot be seen. We do however believe that this intriguing phenomenon should be investigated further to explore its effects and potential as a therapy.

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Conflicts of interest
There are no conflicts of interest.

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