



Rates and risk factors of psychiatric disorders in children with Autism Spectrum Disorders

What is this research about?

Previous research has shown that people with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) are at risk of having mental health problems, like anxiety or depression. However, more research is needed to understand what these risks are, and the types of psychiatric disorders that occur most often. The present study looked at the rates and types of psychiatric disorders found in youth with ASD. The study also investigated the risk factors for psychiatric disorders.

What did the researchers do?

The researchers used a sample of 112 children (ages 10 – 14 years) with a diagnosis of ASD. The researchers assessed them for other child psychiatric disorders through a parent interview. Parents completed the Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Assessment-parent version (CAPA), which is an interview used to diagnose child psychiatric symptoms and disorders.

What did the researchers find?

The results showed that 70% of the children with ASD had at least one other psychiatric diagnosis, in addition to the diagnosis of ASD.

What you need to know:

High rates of psychiatric disorders, including anxiety, attention disorders, and oppositional disorders, occur in children with ASD. Children with ASD who also have epilepsy may have a higher risk of having a psychiatric disorder. Children should be screened for potential mental health problems following a diagnosis of ASD so that interventions can support families with mental health issues.

They also found that 41% of children had two or more psychiatric diagnosis. The most common problems included:

- anxiety disorders (42%, with the most common being social anxiety);
- attention disorder (28%);
- or oppositional disorders (30%).

The presence of epilepsy was found to increase the likelihood of having a psychiatric disorder. The severity of autism, child intellectual functioning, family characteristics, and type of school, were not related to the having a psychiatric disorder .

How can you use this research?

This study showed that youth with ASD have a great risk for an associated mental health problem. If a child has ASD, they should be

screened for potential mental health problems, so that any associated issues can be flagged early and addressed before they become severe. Interventions are needed to help support the mental health of youth with ASD.

About the Researchers

Dr. Emily Simonoff is a professor and researcher in the Child and Adolescent Psychiatry department at King's College London. She received both her BA in Psychology and Social Relations and her MD from Harvard University. Dr. Simonoff's main research interests include learning disabilities, ADHD, autism, antisocial behaviour, genetics, and epidemiology.

Citation

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Keywords

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This research summary was written by Stephanie Fung for the Chair in Autism Spectrum Disorders Treatment and Care Research. This research summary, along with other summaries, can be found at asdmentalhealth.ca/researchsummaries

About the Chair

The Chair in Autism Spectrum Disorders Treatment and Care Research is dedicated to studying ways to improve the mental health and well-being of people with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) and their families in Canada.

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