

research snapshot

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How Can We Predict Psychiatric Symptoms in Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder?

What is this research about?

Some children with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) show other symptoms of psychiatric disorders outside of ASD. The goal of this study was to identify the factors that predict psychiatric problems, such as: attention disorders, oppositional disorders, anxiety, depression, and language or social problems. The current study examined medical history, child characteristics, and family environment as potential risk factors for psychiatric problems. The researchers also investigated the relationship between psychiatric symptoms and children's social and school performance.

What did the researcher do?

The researchers asked the parents and teachers of 238 children with ASD (ages 6 to 12 years) to complete questionnaires. They were asked about their child's education, behavior, and history on language and social development. Parents and teachers completed the Child Symptom Inventory-4 (CSI-4) and the Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL). The researchers also included a parent interview, observations of the child, and previous evaluations by other clinicians.

What did the researcher find?

Many of the risk factors reported by parents were related with specific psychiatric symptoms. These included pregnancy complications that were related to the child's mood disorders, and the use of

What you need to know:

There are many risk factors that predict specific psychiatric symptoms in children with ASD. For example, a family history of psychiatric problems can predict child psychiatric symptoms. Clinicians should be aware of the relationship between risk factors and psychiatric symptoms when they are considering a particular treatment or intervention. Also, parent and teacher reports should both be considered when making decisions about a child's academic or social functioning. More research needs to be done that includes the children in the questionnaire process, such as administering the questionnaires directly to the children and asking for their input.

medication, which was associated with attention disorders. Also, family history of psychiatric problems was predictive of child psychiatric symptoms. However, a family history of ASD was not predictive of the child's symptoms. Teacher reports showed that early special education was related to less severe attention problems. In addition, psychiatric symptoms were found to be related to specific school and social performance. In school, children with ASD were rejected less by their peers in special classes than in regular classes. Also, children with more severe attention problems had lower academic scores compared to their peers.

How can you use this research?

This study showed that there is a complex

relationship between risk factors and psychiatric symptoms. Understanding the relationship between these factors and psychiatric symptoms will help clinicians make better decisions about which intervention is best suited for each child. Although views may be different, it is important to incorporate reports from parents and teachers in planning interventions for children with ASD and potential mental health problems. For school settings, it is also important to consider psychiatric symptoms when evaluating academic performance or making decisions about classroom placement (for example, a regular vs. a special class).

About the Researchers

Dr. Gadow is a professor in the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Science at Stony Brook University.

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This research summary was written by Daniela Donoso for the Chair in Autism Spectrum Disorders Treatment and Care Research. This research summary, along with other summaries, can be found on our [blog](#) and at asdmentalhealth.ca/research-summaries

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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