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Loneliness, Friendship, and Well-Being in Adults with Autism Spectrum Disorders

What is this research about?

Children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) often experience difficulties establishing and maintaining friendships and frequently report high levels of loneliness. Few studies have looked at the social experiences of adults with ASD. Past research has shown feelings of loneliness can add to negative physical and mental health outcomes in the general population. This study looked at the impact of loneliness in adults with ASD.

What did the researchers do?

A national ASD registry was used to recruit 108 adults with ASD aged 18-26 years old. Participants completed an online survey that asked questions about ASD symptom severity, friendship, loneliness, life satisfaction, anxiety, depression and self-esteem. All participants received a \$15 gift card for their participation.

What did the researchers find?

Those who felt lonely had increased depression and anxiety, and decreased life satisfaction and self-esteem. This was true even after taking ASD

What you need to know:

Adults with ASD may experience high levels of loneliness. Similar to the general population feelings of loneliness in adults with ASD are associated with increased anxiety and depression. Friendship is associated with decreased loneliness.

symptom severity into account. The strongest relationship existed between loneliness and depression, which is consistent with other studies in the general population. Those who had a higher number of friendships were less lonely, that is to say that the quantity of friends plays an important role. The total number of friends predicted self-esteem, depression, and anxiety, even after taking the severity of ASD symptoms into account.

How can you use this research?

This research highlights the high levels of loneliness adults with ASD experience. It also demonstrates the importance of social skills interventions and social programming to assist

adults with ASD increase their social networks. The current findings may not be representative of all adults with ASD. Further research is needed to better understand the social and emotional experiences of adults with ASD.

About the Researchers

Micah Mazurek is involved in the Thompson Center for Autism and Neurodevelopmental Disorders at the University of Missouri.

Citation

Mazurek, M.O. (2013). Loneliness, friendship, and well-being in adults with autism spectrum disorders. *Autism*, 18(3), 223-232.

Keywords

Adults, Anxiety, Autism Spectrum Disorders, Depression, Friendship, Loneliness

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

The Chair is funded by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research in partnership with Autism Speaks Canada, the Canadian Autism Spectrum Disorders Alliance, Health Canada, NeuroDevNet and the Sinneave Family Foundation. Additional funds from the Spectrum of Hope Autism Foundation and support from York University.

For more information, visit the Chair in Autism Spectrum Disorders Treatment and Care Research website at asdmentalhealth.ca

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