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## The Role of Positive Family Processes In Change In Autism Symptoms and Maladaptive Behaviours Into Adulthood

### What is this research about?

The frequency and severity of the core symptoms of autism spectrum disorder (ASD) change throughout the lifespan. Also, there are different maladaptive behaviours that interfere with everyday activity (e.g., self-harm, aggression) which can occur across the lifespan. With age, some people with ASD improve in these domains and some do not, but it is still unclear what drives that change. One aspect that may influence these changes is the quality of the parent-child relationship. In this study, researchers follow individuals with ASD over an 8.5 year period and examine the maternal-child relationship as well as changes in symptoms and maladaptive behaviours. The researchers hypothesized that there would be an overall improvement in autism symptoms and maladaptive behaviours. In addition, they thought that the extent and rate of change would be related to clinical symptoms as well as age. In terms of family dynamics, the authors expected that higher levels of maternal praise and quality of the mother-child relationship would lead to lower symptom severity and maladaptive behaviours.

### What did the researchers do?

Three hundred and thirteen participants with ASD (from 10-49 years old) were recruited in Massachusetts and Wisconsin. This study was conducted over 8.5 years, in which there were five time points to collect data. They measured things

### What you need to know:

Changes in ASD symptoms severity and levels of maladaptive behaviours occur across the lifespan of individuals with ASD. This study found that symptom severity and maladaptive behaviours do not get worse as individuals age. Higher quality of mother-child relationships, specifically, maternal praise, was correlated with having less maladaptive behaviours.

like ASD symptoms, maladaptive behaviours, mother-child relationship quality, and maternal praise at each time point and examined the relationship between measures.

### What did the researchers find?

The researchers found that there was an overall pattern of improvement as individuals aged. The most improved domains were repetitive stereotyped behaviours and verbal communication impairments. Maladaptive behaviours were mostly improved or remained stable over time. Having an intellectual disability (ID) led to less improvement in maladaptive behaviours compared to their peers without ID. Families reporting higher quality of mother-child relationships led to lower asocial and maladaptive behaviours at the end of the study. Increase in maternal praise for the child also was beneficial to decrease maladaptive behaviours.

## How can you use this research?

This study highlights the role of positive family interactions for individuals with ASD. It provides evidence that interventions targeting the overall emotional climate may improve the long-term outcomes for individuals with ASD.

## About the Researchers

Woodman (PhD) is a Lecturer at the Department of Psychological and Brain Sciences, University of Massachusetts-Amherst, USA.

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## Citation

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## Keywords

Symptoms, Maladaptive Behaviours, Praise, Mother-Child Relationship Quality

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](#) and at [asdmentalhealth.ca/research-summaries](http://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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