

# research snapshot

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## Child Behavioural Problems Are Related To Family Function Through Parent Mental Health

### What is this research about?

Family functioning is defined as how well families communicate, navigate daily life and form positive relationships. Families with a child with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) tend to report lower levels of family functioning than families without ASD. At the same time, for families with ASD, the parent's support and involvement is needed for many therapies for their children. It follows that supporting the family is important to allow the child to thrive. This study examines how child behaviour problems affect family function in families with preschool children with ASD.

### What did the researcher do?

The researchers surveyed 97 parents of preschool-aged children with ASD about their child's behavioural problems, their own stress, depressive symptoms and fatigue using established subscales. The survey was administered online through various ASD-related support groups in Australia. They also asked about their family functioning using a scale measuring things such as strain on relationships, participation in recreational activities, and flexibility and connectedness. Then the researchers looked to see which parent characteristics linked child behaviour and family function.

### What you need to know:

Family function is related to behavioural problems in preschool children with ASD through parent depressive symptoms. Supporting parent mental health and the family unit in turn may help parents to manage child behaviour.

### What did the researcher find?

The researchers found that more child behavioural problems was related to more parent depressive symptoms, stress, and fatigue. However, stress and fatigue levels did not impact family function. Only mental health (more depressive symptoms) in the parent was related to lower family function. The researchers concluded that child behaviour problems are related to parent mental health, which then is linked to family function. The researchers note that their sample had single parents, and those with lower education, as well as a lack of fathers.

### How can you use this research?

It is important to acknowledge the needs of the family while helping the child. Supporting parent mental health and well-being may in turn help manage a child's behavioural problems and enhance overall family function. Types of support include parent social support, exercise, and self-care.

## About the Researchers

Rachel Jellett and Catherine E. Wood are at the Faculty of Health, Arts and Design, Swinburne University of Technology.

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## Citation

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## Keywords

Family Function, Preschool, Parent, Mental Health, Behavioural Problems

This research summary was written by Dr. Jonathan Lai 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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