

research snapshot

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A High Number of Significant Life Events for Adults with Autism

What is this research about?

Significant life events (such as changing residences, being harassed, or losing friends) are known to be associated with psychiatric conditions in the general population and in adults with intellectual disabilities. This study looked at how often and what types of significant life events individuals with Asperger Syndrome (AS) experience.

What did the researchers do?

The researchers surveyed 51 adults with AS from across Ontario (average age was 34 years old). Participants were recruited from AS support agencies and advocacy groups, and from email lists associated with these organizations.

Individuals completed an online survey with a checklist of life events they experienced over the last two months. This checklist was based off a questionnaire that has been used in past developmental disability research and included items about changes in roommates, changes in staff/caregivers, and recent trauma/abuse. Individuals also completed a brief scale measuring their distress. All participants had the option of completing their surveys online, by telephone interview, or on paper; most preferred online surveys.

What you need to know:

Adults with AS frequently experience significant life events, particularly regarding unemployment and financial problems. It is important to ensure that they receive appropriate supports, as these changes can be distressing.

What did the researcher find?

The most frequently reported life events included: unemployment; financial problems; mistreatment; disruptions in interpersonal relations; change in living arrangements; and disruptions of routine at work or school.

Most participants (76.5%) reported that they experienced at least one significant life event during the past two months. Over half (58.8%) had experienced at least two events, and 41.2% had experienced at least three.

The number of life events that participants experienced was associated with their reported levels of distress. Individuals who experienced a greater number of life events also reported higher levels of distress.



ASD
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How can you use this research?

These results suggest that individuals with AS frequently experience significant life events, particularly with respect to unemployment, financial problems and interpersonal stressors. We need to find ways of helping them deal with these stressful changes.

About the Researchers

Alexander Milovanov, BSc., is a graduate student in the Clinical Psychology program at the University of Waterloo.

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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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