

Autism 2025

7th European Autism Congress

May 22-23, 2025

Paris, France

Natalie Reger et al., Journal of Autism -Open Access

How Does Adaptive Functioning Relate to Anxiety and Depressive Symptoms in Adolescents with ASD?

Natalie Reger^{1,2}, Kathryn Van Eck,

¹University of Kentucky, ²Kennedy Krieger Institute, ³Johns Hopkins School of Medicine, USA

- Adolescents with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) face challenges in adaptive functioning, which refers to the skills we use to navigate our daily lives¹.
- Deficits in adaptive functioning stem from developmental and sociocultural expectations for personal independence and community interaction that exceed one's current skillset.
- These deficits can lead to heightened stress levels and may also contribute to internalizing symptoms like anxiety and depressive symptoms, a significant concern for adolescents with ASD².
- 55% of youth and adolescents with ASD meet criteria for an anxiety disorder, and an adolescent with ASD is four times more likely to experience depression compared to the general adolescent population^{3,4}.
- However, a notable gap exists in research regarding the relationship between adaptive functioning and internalizing symptoms among adolescents with ASD; thus, further investigation is needed to better understand this association to improve support for this population.

Research Question: How do deficits in adaptive functioning relate to anxiety and depressive symptoms in adolescents with ASD?

Hypothesis: We hypothesize that lower adaptive functioning will be related to increased anxiety and depressive symptoms for adolescents with ASD.

Methods : Procedures & Participants: COPE is an ongoing project providing accessible group therapy to adolescents aged 11-17 years with ASD who have had stressful or traumatic experiences. The COPE study received IRB approval from the institution where the study was conducted. This study used caregiver-reported responses collected prior to participation in the COPE clinical service (N=21). Parents completed online surveys through Zoom appointments with a research assistant.

Biography

Natalie Reger is affiliated with the University of Kentucky and the Kennedy Krieger Institute. Her work focuses on advancing research and clinical practice in developmental and behavioral health, with a particular interest in supporting children and families affected by neurodevelopmental conditions.

nreg2@gmail.com