Anxiety and Aggression in Adolescents with Autism Spectrum Disorders Attending Mainstream Schools

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Participants

• 104 high schools students
  – Years 7 to 12
  – Ages 12 to 18
  – 84 male, 20 female
  – 52 with an autism spectrum disorder
    • HFA
    • Asperger syndrome
    • Autistic disorder without intellectual disability
  – 52 typically developing students matched for age and gender

• 12 schools in Hunter Central Coast region
• 62 teachers
Measures

- Anxiety:
  - Revised Children’s Manifest Anxiety Scale – Second Edition (RCMAS-2)
- Anger
  - Adolescent Anger Rating Scale (AARS)
- Behaviour
  - Student Behavior Survey (SBS)
Anxiety

- RCMAS-2
- Self-report
  - Total Anxiety
  - Physiological Anxiety
  - Worry
  - Social Anxiety
  - Inconsistency Index and Defensiveness (Lie) Scale
Anger

- AARS
- Self-report
  - Total Anger
  - Instrumental Anger
  - Reactive Anger
  - Anger Control
Behaviour

- Teacher report
- Adjustment Problems
  - Heath Concerns
  - Emotional Distress
  - Unusual Behaviour
  - Social Problems
  - Verbal Aggression
  - Physical Aggression
  - Behaviour Problems
Results

- Students with ASDs who attend mainstream high schools
  - report higher levels of anxiety and reactive anger than their peers,
  - are reported by their teachers to engage in more aggressive behaviours, and
  - are at higher risk of being suspended from school.
Results

• The results suggest that

  – autism moderates the relationship between social anxiety and physical aggression
    • Increased anxiety is associated with increased physical aggression for students with autism but not for the control group

  – anger control moderates the relationship between autism and physical aggression
    • For the ASD group, a high level of self-reported anger control skills was associated with low levels of physical aggression. At low and average levels of anger control, physical aggression was high.
Physical Aggression v Social Anxiety
Physical Aggression v Reactive Anger
Reactive Anger v Social Anxiety
Physical Aggression vs. Anger Control

[Graph showing the relationship between Physical Aggression - T score and AC-T score with data points and trend lines.]
Reactive Anger v Anger Control
Questions?
Medications

- SSRIs – Lovan, Zoloft etc.
- SNRIs – Pristiq, Strattera
- Antipsychotics – Risperdal, Seroquel
- Methylphenidate – Ritalin
- Clonidine - Catapres