

Adults with Asperger's Syndrome at Risk for Depression

Transition into adulthood for people with Asperger's syndrome is often accompanied by a lack of support services, and poor outcomes in terms of health and social difficulties, quality of life, limited occupational potential, social exclusion and isolation, and high rates of depression. Adults with Asperger syndrome are much more likely to think about and attempt suicide than those in the general population, according to a study published in *The Lancet Psychiatry*.

In a clinical cohort study, researchers conducted a retrospective analysis of clinical survey data from adults newly diagnosed with Asperger's syndrome at a specialist diagnostic clinic in England. Patients completed a self-report questionnaire before clinical assessment, recording lifetime experience of depression, suicidal ideation, and suicide plans or attempts, along with self-reported measures of autistic traits and empathy. The researchers compared the rate of suicidal ideation in the sample with published rates of suicidal ideation in the general population and other clinical groups. They also assessed associations between depression, autistic traits, empathy, and likelihood of suicidal ideation and suicide plans or attempts.

The study found that the lifetime experience of suicidal ideation for adults with Asperger's syndrome was more than nine times higher than in the general population in England and significantly higher than rates previously reported in other clinical groups with medical and psychiatric conditions. Among adults with Asperger's syndrome, those with depression were four times more likely to have suicidal thoughts and twice as likely to plan or attempt suicide, compared to those without depression. Those who planned or attempted suicide also had a significantly higher level of self-reported autistic traits than those who did not.

According to study co-leader Dr. Sarah Cassidy, of the Autism Research Centre at Cambridge University, these findings lend support to anecdotal reports of increased rates of suicidal ideation in adults with Asperger's syndrome, and depression as an important potential risk factor for suicidality in adults with this condition. Because adults with Asperger's syndrome often have many risk factors for secondary depression (e.g., social isolation or exclusion, and unemployment), the findings emphasize the need for awareness and appropriate service planning and support to reduce risk in this group of individuals.

Cassidy, S., Bradley, P., Robinson, J., Allison, C., McHugh, M., & Baron-Cohen, S. (2014). Suicidal ideation and suicide plans or attempts in adults with Asperger's syndrome attending a specialist diagnostic clinic: a clinical cohort study. [Lancet Psychiatry](#) , 1, 142–47.



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