

College students with autism have high rate of suicidal thoughts

March 7 2018, by Kendall Teare



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Over the next decade, about 247,000 young adults with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) are expected to enroll in universities, colleges, or technical/vocational schools. Because post-secondary education is expected to present new challenges to individuals with ASD, new scholarship is being conducted to assess how ready post-secondary

education is to serve a larger population with ASD.

Under the leadership of Yale's Dr. Fred Volkmar, the March 2018 special issue of the *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders* focused on the college experiences of students with ASD. Volkmar, the Irving B. Harris Professor in the Child Study Center and editor-in-chief of the *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, also has a study coming out in the March 2018 special issue about the self-reported academic, social, and [mental health](#) experiences of post-secondary students with ASD. This study is a cornerstone of the journal's post-secondary [student](#)-focused January issue.

In the October study, Volkmar and his team found that nearly three-quarters of respondents reported lifetime suicidal behaviors. The researcher concluded that although this study—the first to systematically address this topic in college students with ASD—must be replicated, the rates at which post-secondary students experience suicidal ideation "deserves immediate attention and consideration from all Disability Support and Mental Health/Counseling staff at post-secondary institutions."

Initial research suggests that students with ASD possess "a fairly unique profile of challenges and needs" compared to students with other disabilities such as ADHD, the team reports. For students with learning disabilities like ADHD, resources at the post-secondary level often take the form of testing or academic accommodations (i.e., extra time on exams or separate test rooms), which may not be as helpful for or fully meet the needs of students with ASD, said the researchers.

Instead of specialized academic support, said the researchers, this study suggests that students with ASD need additional resources to bolster their social and mental health such as "programs designed to build social skills/networks (e.g., peer-mentor programs, ASD housing/clubs), and

improved availability and quality of counseling/psychological services."

"This kind of institutional support could go a long way in helping these students become fully integrated into their campus environment and in helping them succeed while enrolled in post-secondary education," said Volkmar, senior author on the study. "Given that the successful completion of a post-secondary degree is a significant predictor of positive adult outcomes in ASD populations—impacting the likelihood that an individual will be able to find employment, obtain financial independence, and live independently—it is imperative that we further investigate the ways that post-secondary institutions can best support their growing population of students with ASD."

More information: Scott L. J. Jackson et al. Brief Report: Self-Reported Academic, Social, and Mental Health Experiences of Post-Secondary Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder, *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders* (2017). [DOI: 10.1007/s10803-017-3315-x](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-017-3315-x)

Scott L. J. Jackson et al. Preface: Special Issue—College Experiences for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder, *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders* (2018). [DOI: 10.1007/s10803-018-3463-7](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-018-3463-7)

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