

Comorbid psychiatric disorders explain increased risk for self-harm in autism spectrum disorders

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A population-based study revealed reasons behind elevated suicide risk, attempted suicides, and other selfharm, which require special health

care, among a and young adults with autism spectrum disorders. Comorbid disorders, especially non-affective psychoses and the affective and anxiety disorders, explained the risk.

The new study conducted at the University of Turku showed that the [autistic children](#) and youth did not have an elevated risk for accidental death. The higher risk for the premature mortality was associated with natural causes. In those cases, the risk was relatively highest among females and among subjects with intellectual disability.

"This observation is in the line with earlier studies. The result is probably connected to the fact that autistic females have a higher risk for [intellectual disability](#) and, for example, to epilepsy than males," says Postdoctoral Researcher Elina Jokiranta-Olkonieni from the Department of Child Psychiatry of the University of Turku, Finland.

The results were the same when other factors, such as the mother's socio-economic status or the [psychiatric disorders](#) among the family members, were taken into consideration.

Core symptoms of autism make it more difficult to receive help for other psychiatric symptoms

The risk of self-harm in autistic adolescents and [young adults](#) is approximately double compared to their peers. Based to the results, it is important that public health care is able to identify their psychiatric symptoms as early as possible and offer efficient care.

"The challenge is that the core symptoms of autism, in other words, the difficulties of social intercourse and communication, can make it more difficult to search for help and thus it is difficult to identify the psychiatric disorders and provide efficient care," Jokiranta-Olkonieni

says.

The study was based on the national FIPS-A birth cohort, in which, with the help of different register information, the mortality and self-harm risks of autistic person born between 1987-2005 was compared to a control group. The study contained 4,695 persons, which had the diagnosis of [autism spectrum disorders](#), and 18,450 control persons.

More information: Elina Jokiranta-Olkonien et al. Risk for Premature Mortality and Intentional Self-harm in Autism Spectrum Disorders, *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders* (2020). [DOI: 10.1007/s10803-020-04768-x](#)

Provided by University of Turku

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