



Massachusetts General Hospital
Founding Member, Mass General Brigham

IX. Emotional Dysregulation in Youth with Autism

GAGAN JOSHI, MD

Associate Professor of Psychiatry
Director, The Bressler Program for Autism Spectrum Disorder
Rovee Endowed Chair in Child Psychiatry
Massachusetts General Hospital
Harvard Medical School
Boston, Massachusetts USA



HARVARD MEDICAL SCHOOL
TEACHING HOSPITAL



High Risk for Severe Emotional Dysregulation in Psychiatrically Referred Youth with Autism Spectrum Disorder: A Controlled Study

Gagan Joshi^{1,2,3} · Janet Wozniak^{1,2,3} · Maura Fitzgerald^{1,2} · Stephen Faraone^{4,5} · Ronna Fried^{1,2,3} · Maribel Galdo^{1,2} · Stephannie L. Furtak^{1,2} · Kristina Conroy^{1,2} · J. Ryan Kilcullen^{1,2} · Abigail Belser^{1,2} · Joseph Biederman^{1,2,3}

© Springer Science+Business Media, LLC, part of Springer Nature 2018

Abstract

To assess prevalence and severity of emotional dysregulation (ED) in psychiatrically referred youth with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). ASD youth (N= 123) were compared to youth with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and controls. The majority of psychiatrically referred youth with ASD had positive Child Behavior Checklist-ED (CBCL-ED) profile that was significantly higher than in youth with ADHD (82 vs. 53%; $p < 0.001$). The severe emotional dysregulation (SED) profile was significantly greater in ASD youth than ADHD (44 vs. 15%; $p < 0.001$). In the presence of SED profile ASD youth suffered from greater severity of autism, associated psychopathology, and psychosocial dysfunction. Greater than expected prevalence of SED in psychiatrically referred youth with ASD that identifies distinct clinical correlates associated with severe morbidity and dysfunction.

Keywords Autism spectrum disorder · Emotional dysregulation · CBCL · Youth



Emotional Dysregulation

Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL) Profile of Emotional Dysregulation (ED)

ED profile based on the composite T-scores of CBCL subscales:

- Inattention
- Aggression
- Anxious/Depressed

<u>CBCL-AAA Subscales Composite T-Score</u>	<u>Level of Emotional Dysregulation (ED)</u>
<180	Low/No ED
≥180	<u>Presence of ED</u>
≥ 180 and <210 (≥1SD & <2SD) <small>(t-score of ≥60 on each CBCL-AAA subscales)</small>	Deficient Emotional Self Regulation (DESR)
≥210 (≥2SDs)	Severe Emotional Dysregulation (SED)

Emotional Dysregulation profile reflects problems with inattention, aggression, and anxiety–depression



CBCCL – ED Profile

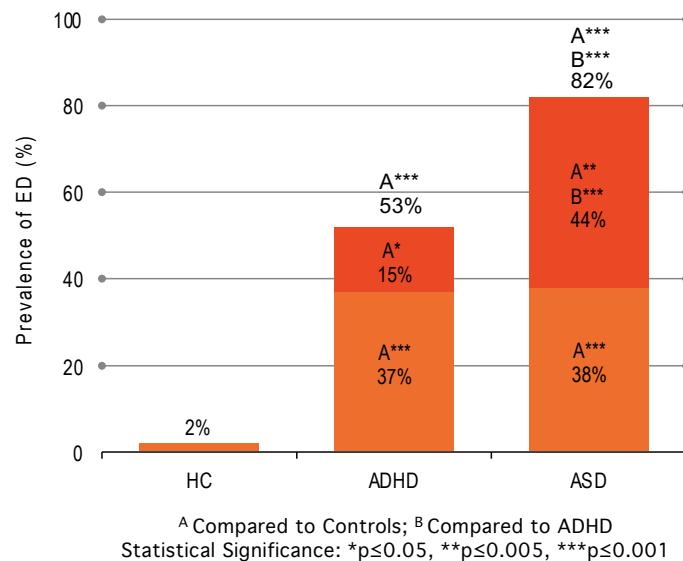
Anxiety-Depression Subscale	Aggression Subscale	Attention Subscale
<u>Anxiety Items [N=8]:</u>		
1. Fears s/he has to be perfect	1. Argues a lot	1. Acts too young for his/her age
2. Fears going to school	2. Cruelty, bullying or meanness to others	2. Fails to finish things s/he starts
3. Worries	3. Demands a lot of attention	3. Confused or seems to be in a fog
4. Fears certain animals, situations, or places	4. Destroys his/her own things	4. Can't sit still, restless or hyperactive
5. Fears s/he might think or do something bad	5. Destroys things belonging to others	5. Can't concentrate or pay attention for long
6. Self-conscious or easily embarrassed	6. Disobedient at home	6. Daydreams or gets lost in his/her thoughts
7. Nervous, high-strung, or tense	7. Disobedient at school	7. Impulsive or acts without thinking
8. Too fearful or anxious	8. Gets in many fights	8. Poor school work
<u>Depression Items [N=5]:</u>	9. Physically attacks people	9. Inattentive or easily distracted
9. Feels too guilty	10. Screams a lot	10. Stares blankly
10. Talks about killing self	11. Stubborn, sullen, or irritable	
11. Feels worthless or inferior	12. Sudden changes in mood or feelings	
12. Cries a lot	13. Sulks a lot	
13. Complains that no one loves him/her	14. Suspicious	
	15. Teases a lot	
	16. Temper tantrums or hot temper	
	17. Threatens people	
	18. Unusually loud	

Youth suffering from Emotional Dysregulation exhibit the above-mentioned cluster of behaviors

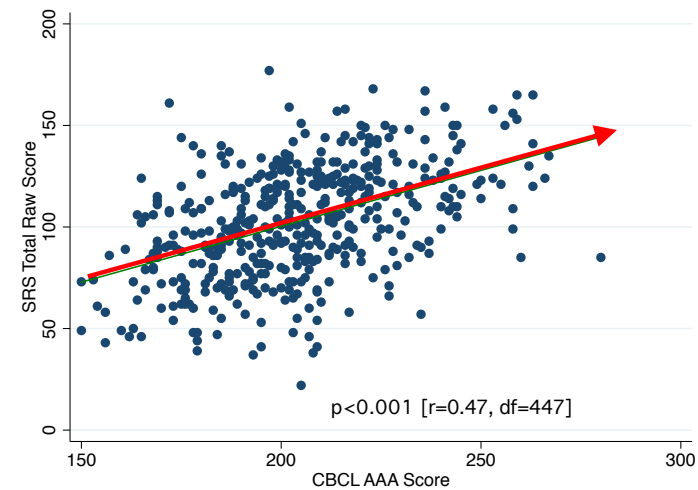


Emotional Dysregulation in ASD

Child Behavior Checklist - Emotional Dysregulation Profile (CBCL-ED)



High Prevalence of ED in Youth with ASD

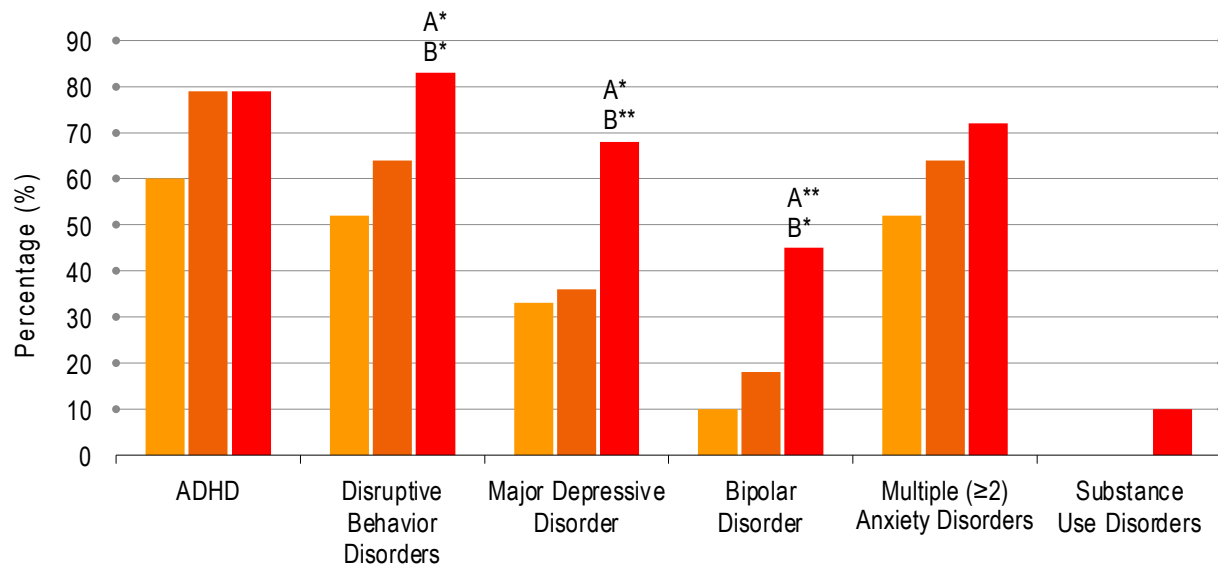


Positive correlation between severity of ED & Autism



Profile of Psychiatric Disorders

Rates of Psychiatric Disorders



■ ASD-ED ■ ASD+DESR ■ ASD+SED A=versus ASD; B=versus ASD+DESR; Statistical Significance: *p<0.05; **p<0.005

Increased risk for Disruptive Behavior Disorder, Major Depressive Disorder, and Bipolar Disorder in the presence of Emotional Dysregulation in youth with Autism

