

# The Relationship Between Parental Depression and Anxiety and Dysregulation in Preschool Children with and without Autism Spectrum Disorder

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# Background

- Our current knowledge on the causes of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) are evolving with additional research.
- Similarly, we are learning about the different expressions of this condition in early childhood.
- Previous research has found that maternal anxiety and depression has been associated with an expression of ASD characterized by:
  - mild language and motor delays
  - dysregulation: a lower ability to manage emotional responses including sadness, anger, frustration or irritability
- Dysregulation can include increased behavioral and emotional problems as well as problems with sleep.
- It is important to understand the relationship between conditions in the parents and different clinical presentations of ASD in the child
  - Increased understanding may strengthen our ability to recognize and understand this condition
  - Identify potential underlying factors that may contribute to ASD

# Goal of research

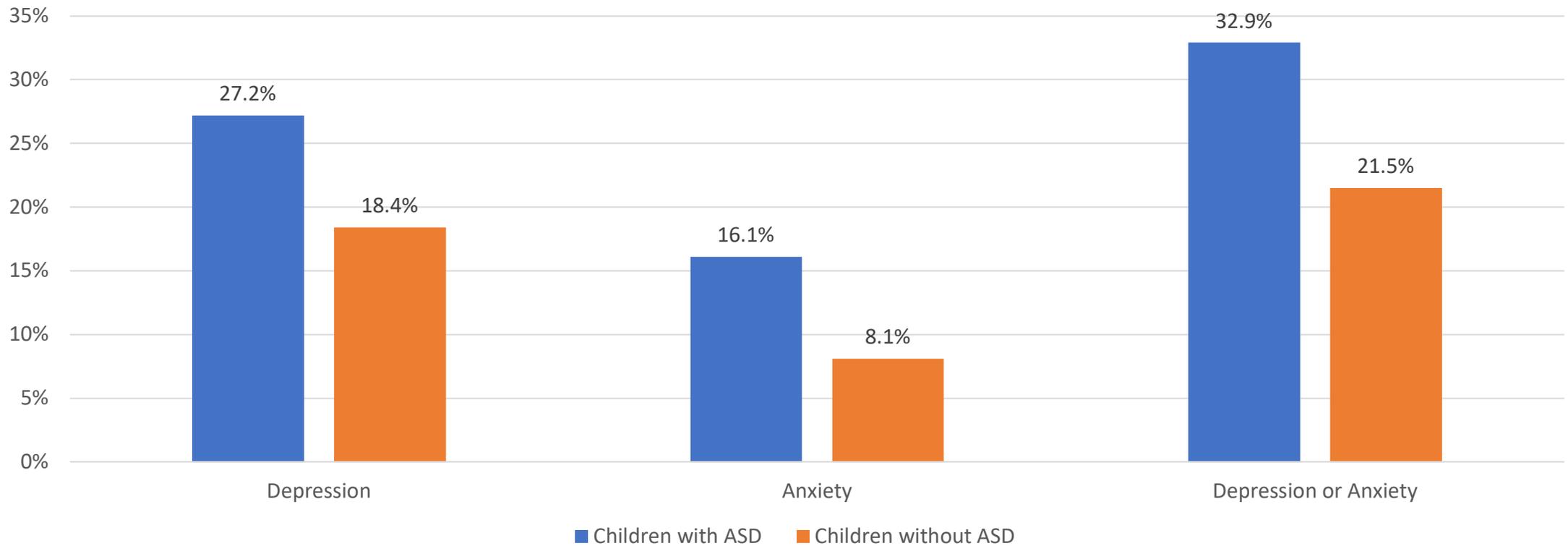
- To identify specific associations between parental anxiety and depression and the presence of dysregulation among children with ASD in SEED.
  - We will also examine the association parental anxiety and depression and the presence of dysregulation among children without ASD in SEED.
- We will evaluate the relationship between both maternal and paternal anxiety and depression
- Further, if a relationship is detected, we will explore specific aspects of externalizing, internalizing and sleep problems

# Specific aspects of dysregulation measured in SEED

- Dysregulation in SEED was assessed using a questionnaire called the Child Behavior Checklist for Preschool Children.
- It was completed by interviewing the caregivers (largely mother)
- Analysis of the answers was used to create indicators of the extent to which the children had:
  - Externalizing issues: actions that direct problematic energy towards others. Characterized by impulsiveness, disruptive conduct, aggression and inattention.
  - Internalizing behaviors: actions that direct problematic energy towards the self. Characterized by anxiety, depression, emotional reactivity, withdrawal.
  - Sleep issues

# Findings: Maternal Depression and Anxiety

Prevalence of Maternal Anxiety and Depression and Children with and without ASD in SEED



# Findings: Maternal Depression and Anxiety

Among mothers of children with ASD, maternal anxiety and depression with more common among:

- non-Hispanic white mothers compared to other ethnic and racial groups
- mothers born in the US compared to mothers born in other countries
- native English speakers compared to mothers that speak another language in the home
- mothers of children with ASD that have intellectual disability

Among mothers of children without ASD, maternal anxiety and depression with more common among:

- non-Hispanic white mothers compared to other ethnic and racial groups
- Mothers with lower levels of education
- Mothers living in poverty
- mothers born in the US compared to mothers born in other countries
- native English speakers compared to mothers that speak another language in the home

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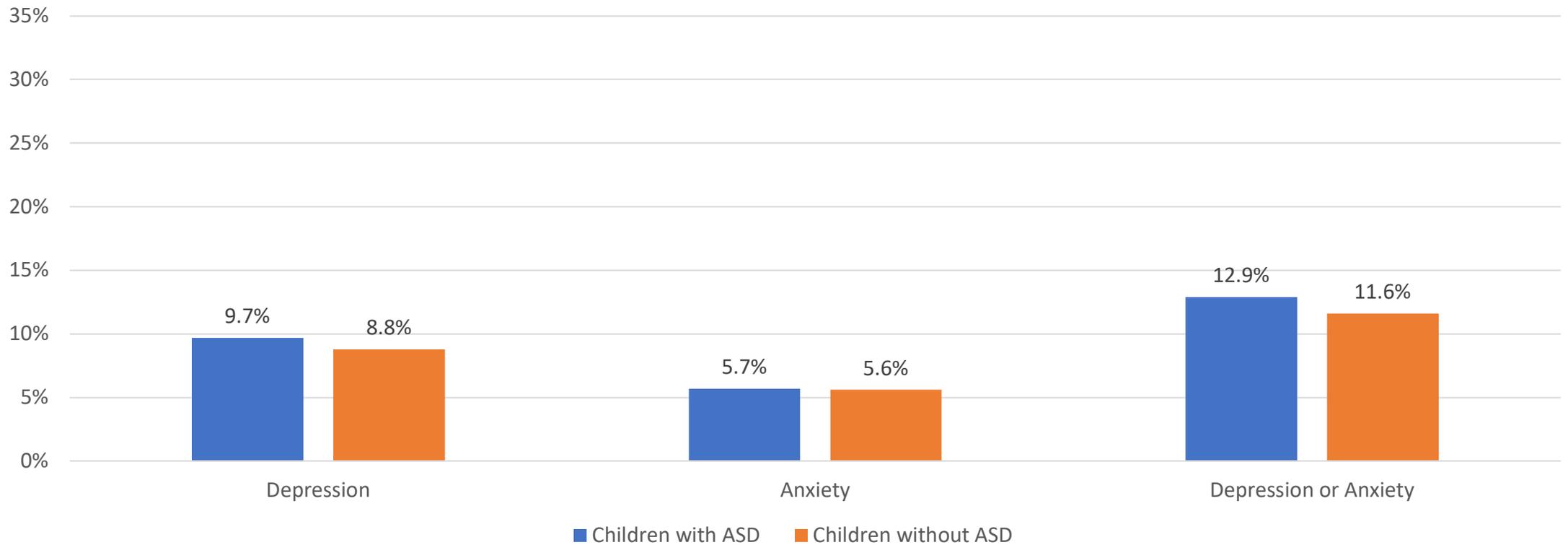
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- Mothers with lower levels of education
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# Findings: Relationship between Maternal Anxiety and Depression and Dysregulation in Children

Among Children with ASD	Among children without ASD
Externalizing	Externalizing
-Attention problems	-Attention problems
-Aggression problems	-Aggression problems
Internalizing	Internalizing
-Emotional reactivity	-Emotional reactivity
-Anxiety/depression	-Anxiety/depression
	-Withdrawal
Sleep problems	Sleep problems

# Findings: Paternal Depression and Anxiety

Prevalence of Paternal Anxiety and Depression and Children with and without ASD in SEED



# Findings: Paternal Depression and Anxiety

Among fathers of children with ASD, paternal anxiety and depression with more common among:

- non-Hispanic white fathers compared to other ethnic and racial groups
- fathers born in the US compared to fathers born in other countries
- native English speakers compared to fathers that speak another language in the home
- fathers of children with ASD that have intellectual disability

Among fathers of children without ASD, paternal anxiety and depression with more common among:

- non-Hispanic white fathers compared to other ethnic and racial groups
- fathers born in the US compared to fathers born in other countries
- native English speakers compared to fathers that speak another language in the home

# Findings: Relationship between Paternal Anxiety and Depression and Dysregulation in Children

Among Children with ASD	Among children without ASD
No associations	Externalizing
	-Aggression problems
	Internalizing
	-Emotional reactivity
	Sleep problems

# Next steps

- To determine if the relationships detected are independent of family income, parental education level, country of origin and intellectual disability in the child.
- Determine if pharmacological treatment for parental depression or anxiety changes the nature of the detected relationship with child dysregulation.
- Determine how our findings could inform early detection or screening for ASD.
- Consider how gender-specific norms for treatment of parental depression could influence our findings.