Perceived social support in adults with autism spectrum disorder and attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder

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Abstract

Perceived social support (PSS) has been related to physical and mental well-being in typically developing individuals, but systematic characterizations of PSS in autism spectrum disorder (ASD) are limited. We compared self-report ratings of the multidimensional scale of PSS (MSPSS) among age- and IQ-matched groups of adults (18–58 years) with cognitively high-functioning ASD (N = 41), or attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD; N = 69), and neurotypical controls (NC; N = 69). Accompanying group comparisons, we used machine learning random forest (RF) analyses to explore predictors among a range of psychopathological and socio-emotional variables. Relative to both ADHD and NC, adults with ASD showed lower MSPSS ratings, specifically for the friends subscale (MSPSS-f). Across ASD and ADHD, interindividual differences in autism severity, affective empathy, symptoms of anxiety related to social interactions, hyperactivity/impulsivity, and somatization best predicted MSPSS-f. These relationships did not differ between clinical groups. While group comparisons demonstrated greater impairment in individuals with ASD, analysing individuals' characteristics revealed cross-diagnoses similarities in regard to their MSPSS-f relationships. This is consistent with the Research Domain Criteria framework, supporting a trans-diagnostic approach as on the path toward “precision medicine.”