Anxiety and depression in adolescents with ADHD and autism spectrum disorders; correlation between parent- and self-reports and with attention and adaptive functioning.


Abstract

BACKGROUND:
Adolescents with attention-deficit/hyperactive disorder (ADHD) or autism spectrum disorder (ASD) are at high risk of anxiety and depression. This is important to identify in the clinical assessment to understand its impact.

AIMS:
The aim of this study is to investigate the correlation between parent- and self-reports of anxiety and depression in adolescents with ADHD or ASD, as well as the correlation with adaptive functioning and performance on an attention test.

METHOD:
A total of 65 adolescents with an ADHD diagnosis (n = 24) or an ASD diagnosis (n = 41) filled out Beck Youth Inventories of Emotional and Social Impairment (BYI) to assess depression and anxiety and completed a Continuous Performance Test (QbTest) measuring ADHD symptoms. Parents of the participants completed the internalizing domain in the Five to Fifteen questionnaire (FTF), measuring symptoms of anxiety and depression, and the Vineland Adaptive Behavior Scales (VABS) about the adolescent’s adaptive functioning.

RESULTS:
Approximately a third of the study group self-reported substantial internalizing mental symptoms not always recognized by parents, and not always obvious in adaptive function or performance at ADHD test. Correlations between BYI and FTF were low. The BYI depression inventory correlated negatively with VABS and positively with activity level in a subgroup medicated for ADHD. There was a stronger correlation between girls BYI and FTF results as compared with boys.

CONCLUSIONS:
The results highlight the need for identification of anxiety and depression, using both self- and parent report. Present anxiety and depression symptoms do not seem to affect the clinical assessment of ASD and ADHD.