

# Having Older Siblings Is Associated with Lower Rates of Depression, ADD/ADHD, Anxiety and Behavior Problems Among Children with ASD

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## Abstract

### Objective

Within the social determinants of mental health framework, this article investigated whether children with ASD who have older siblings are less likely to experience depression, anxiety, behavior problems or have ADD/ADHD after controlling for standard social determinants of mental health such as household income, parental education and adverse childhood experiences (ACEs).

### Methods

Using the National Survey of Children's Health 2011–2012, children with ASD spectrum disorders ( $n = 1624$ ) were categorized into three groups: only child, oldest child and has older siblings. Design corrected cross-tabulations, univariate and multivariate logistic regressions were estimated.

### Results

The three groups of children with ASD were comparable in demographic characteristics (except age), ACEs, and parent-reported ASD severity. Children with ASD who had older siblings were significantly less likely to experience depression, anxiety or behavior problems. They were also less likely to have been diagnosed with ADD or ADHD. Adjusted odds ratios ranged from 0.12 to 0.53 indicating robust associations.

### Conclusions for Practice

Children with ASD who have older siblings were less likely to have comorbid mental health disorders than other children with ASD. Conversely, oldest and only children with ASD were at increased risk for these disorders. Further research is needed to understand how this protection is conferred on children with ASD, and whether it can be adapted into interventions for only and oldest children with ASD.