



BACKGROUND

- Young adults with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) often exhibit deficits in social skills relating to social communication and social reciprocity (Laugeson 2017).
- Prior research suggests that the severity of autism symptoms may be related to the development of depressive symptoms (Sterling et al. 2008).
- Further research suggests that individuals with ASD without intellectual disabilities may be more aware of their social deficits, possibly contributing to lower self-esteem, higher distress, and depression (Barnhill & Smith-Myles 2001).
- However, there is a paucity of research directly investigating whether levels of self-awareness of autism symptoms are associated with depression among this population.
- In order to inform the development of more targeted interventions, it is important to understand the relationship between self-awareness and depression in young adults with ASD.

OBJECTIVE

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between self-awareness of autism symptoms and depression among young adults with ASD without intellectual disabilities. We hypothesized that young adults with ASD who reported higher awareness of their autism symptoms would report greater levels of depression.

METHODS

PARTICIPANTS

- $N = 100$ young adults with ASD without intellectual disabilities presenting for treatment through the UCLA PEERS[®] Clinic, an evidence-based, caregiver-assisted, social skills intervention.
- Age range = 17-35 years ($M = 22.51$, $SD = 3.89$)
- Gender: Males = 72; Females = 28
- Ethnicity: 69% Caucasian ($n=69$), 11% Asian American ($n=11$), 8% Latino ($n=8$), 1% African American ($n=1$), and 11% Other ($n=11$).

MEASURES

- Social Responsiveness Scale (SRS-2; Constantino & Gruber 2012).
 - Measure of autism symptoms related to social responsiveness.
- Major Depression Inventory (MDI; Olsen et al. 2003).
 - Measure of self-reported depressive symptoms.

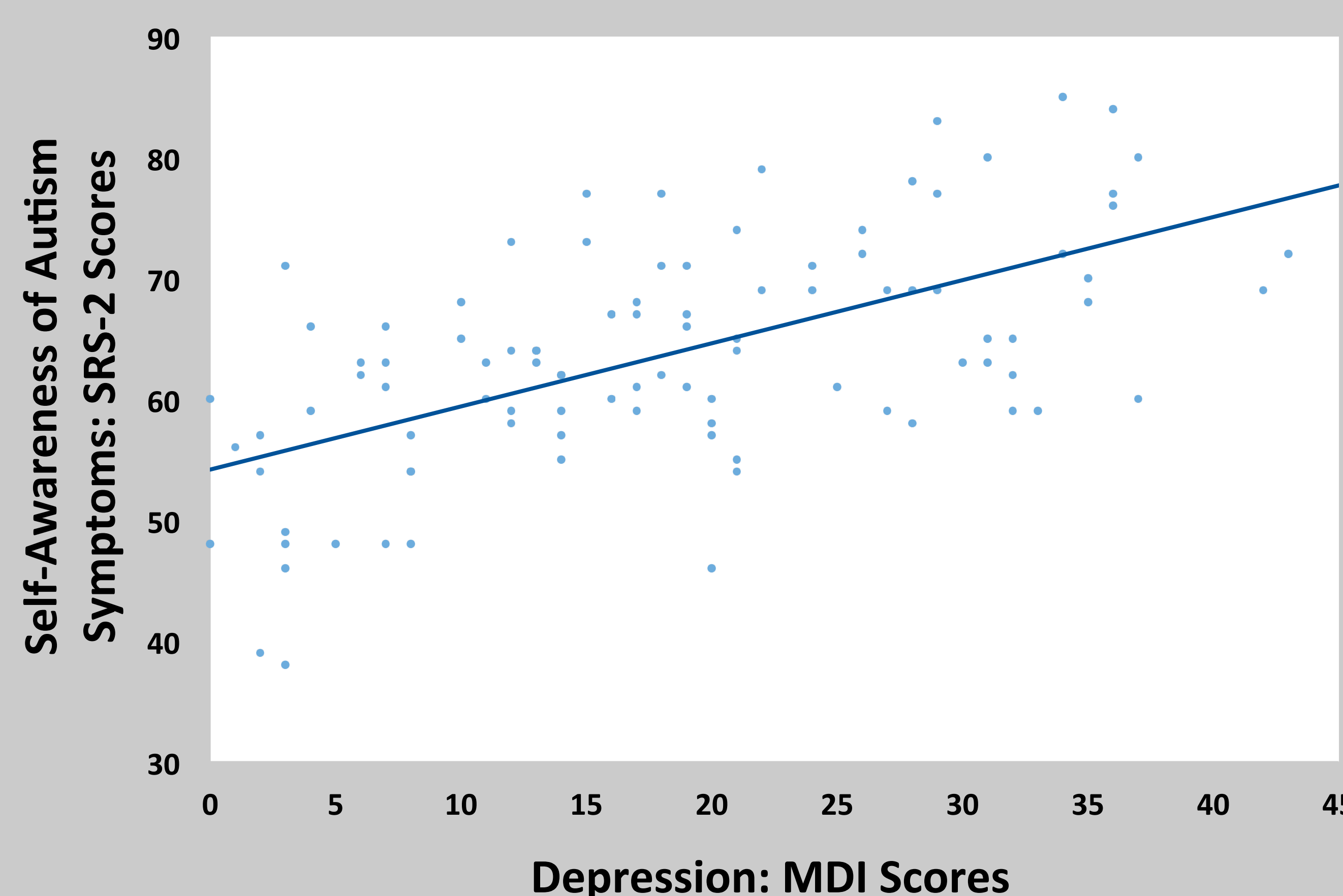
PROCEDURES

- In order to assess for clinically elevated ASD symptoms, caregivers completed the SRS-2 and only young adult participants with a total score ≥ 60 were included in the study.
- To assess for self-awareness of depressive symptoms, young adults completed the MDI prior to treatment.
- To assess for levels of self-awareness of autism symptoms, young adults completed the SRS-2 prior to treatment.

RESULTS

- Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated to examine the relationship between self-awareness of autism symptoms on the SRS-2 and depressive symptoms on the MDI among young adults with ASD.
- Results revealed a significant positive correlation between total scores on the SRS-2 and the MDI ($r = .612$; $p < .001$).
- Young adults with ASD who present with greater awareness of autism symptoms demonstrated higher levels of depression on the MDI.

Correlation of Self-Awareness of Autism Symptoms and Depression



DISCUSSION

- Findings suggest that young adults with ASD who exhibit greater awareness of their autism symptoms also exhibit greater levels of depression.
- These results demonstrate the importance of understanding the risks associated with greater self-awareness of social difficulties among individuals with ASD.
- Although interest and motivation for social interactions are crucial components in forming relationships, the awareness of social deficits related to autism may contribute to increased depressive symptoms.
- Further investigation might examine the influence that greater awareness of autism symptoms and social deficits may have on treatment outcome following social skills intervention for young adults with ASD.

REFERENCES

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