

## Summary of Research Findings

### Exploring gender profiles in anxiety symptoms in children on the autism spectrum.

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#### Overview

- We asked parents to rate their children's anxiety symptoms and then we compared the anxiety symptoms of male and female children.
- We found that overall, boys and girls on the autism spectrum had similar anxiety symptoms and behaviours. More girls than boys were reported to show physical signs of anxiety, such as feeling shaky.
- This information helps us to understand the whether the experiences of anxiety are the same or different in boys and girls on the autism spectrum.

#### Why did we do this study?

- Research has found that anxiety is more common in children on the autism spectrum than children who are not on the autism spectrum. Most of the previous research has focussed on anxiety in boys on the autism spectrum. We wanted to find out if girls on the autism spectrum experienced similar or different anxiety symptoms to boys.

#### What did we do?

- Parents who had a child on the autism spectrum in the Longitudinal Study of Australian Students with Autism project were invited to participate in this project, which is supported by The Cooperative Research Centre for Living with Autism (Autism CRC).
- We had parents of 24 boys and 24 girls complete a measure rating the child's anxiety symptoms and compared the results of boys and girls.
- We matched the boys and girls in the study on other characteristics that might affect their anxiety symptoms, such as age, autism characteristics, and ability. This allowed us to compare the anxiety symptoms of boys and girls who were similar in other ways.

#### What did we find?

- Boys and girls on the autism spectrum had similar scores for total anxiety, performance anxiety, separation anxiety and anxiety related to uncertainty.
- Girls were reported to show physical signs of anxiety more often than boys, especially feeling shaky.
- Girls were also reported to worry about doing badly on their school work more often than boys.

#### What does this mean?

- Boys and girls on the autism spectrum may be equally likely to experience anxiety. This result is interesting because in children who are not on the autism spectrum, girls are more likely to have a diagnosis of anxiety than boys. So, it is possible that the symptoms of anxiety are different for children on the autism spectrum compared to children who are not on the autism spectrum.
- It is important to consider the individual child's characteristics and environment when supporting children on the autism spectrum who also experience anxiety.

#### Where are we sharing this study?

This research has been published in the *Research in Autism Spectrum Disorders* and is available by putting "<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rasd.2020.101601>" into google.