

Bryson, S.E., Bradley, E.A., Thompson, A. & Wainwright, A. (2008). Prevalence of autism among adolescents with Intellectual Disabilities. *The Canadian Journal of Psychiatry*, 53, 449-449.

Previous research examining the prevalence of autism in individual's with an Intellectual Disability (ID) are limited due to a number of factors, particularly: 1) conflicting diagnostic criteria for Autism and ASD; and 2) lack of standardized diagnostic measures that reflect developing diagnostic criteria. These factors may have lead to lower prevalence estimates of Autism in ID, specifically mild ID. The present study aims to provide population-based data on the prevalence of Autism in Canadian adolescents with ID, using the Autism Diagnostic Interview-Revised (ADI-R; a standardized diagnostic caregiver interview).

Intellectual Disability was defined as an IQ of 75 or below (mild ID, IQ = 50 to 75; severe ID, IQ <50). Individuals ranged between 14 and 20 years of age and were recruited from Southern Ontario. First, individual's IQ were assessed using the either the Weschler Intelligence Scale for Children (WISC-R) or the Weschler Adult Intelligence Scale (WAIS-R), depending on the individual's chronological age. During the next session, caregiver's completed the ADI-R, which assessed functioning in three domains; communication, socialization, and repetitive or rigid behaviors.

### **Key Findings:**

**1 Overall:** Of individuals with ID ( $n = 171$ ), 43 (13 females and 30 males) or 27.9% met ADI-R criteria for autism, that is, scores on all three domains exceeded the diagnostic cut-off for autism

### **2 Gender Differences**

**1** There were significantly more males in the autism-mild ID group

**2** Similarly, when collapsing groups (autism and non-autism), there were significantly more males in the mild ID group compared to females

**3** However, when collapsing across groups (autism and non-autism), the percentage of males and females with severe ID did not differ

### **4 Previous Diagnosis of Autism**

**1** Of the 43 individuals who met ADI-R criteria for autism, 20 (47%) had previously received a diagnosis of autism or had been described as having autistic features

### **4 Clinical Impressions**

**2** Overall, the ADIR-positive autism group had previously been diagnosed with significantly more psychiatric disorders (e.g., mood,

inattentive, hyperactive) than the non-autism ID group.

The findings from the present study indicate that 28.2% of individuals with ID were identified with autism; This prevalence estimate is higher when compared to other studies examining autism in ID populations. Additionally, these findings suggest that less than half of the adolescents who met ADI-R criteria for autism had previously been diagnosed. This underdiagnosis is likely to lead to lack of required services, as well as an increase in behavioural and psychiatric problems in individuals with autism and ID because their autism is not well understood.