

# Multi-Informant Discrepancies of Mental Health in Autistic Adolescents



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## Introduction

- Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a neurodevelopmental disorder characterized by restricted and repetitive patterns of behaviors, interests, and activities, as well as, differences in reciprocal communication abilities (APA, 2013; CDC, 2023).
- Prior research highlights the importance of a multi-informant approach, as well as utilizing parent-child informant discrepancies, in order to examine aspects of child psychopathology (De Los Reyes, 2011).
- Within multi-informant studies, there are typically notable informant discrepancies between the parent and adolescent regarding the adolescent's mental health (Baumgartner et al., 2020).
- Prior multi-informant research studies examining autistic adolescents have found informant discrepancies regarding the child's social functioning ability (Lerner et al., 2012); however, there is a lack of research examining informant discrepancies between parents and autistic adolescents regarding the adolescent's mental health symptoms.
- The current study examined informant discrepancies between dyads (mother-father, mother-adolescent, father-adolescent) in a sample of autistic adolescents regarding adolescent depressive and anxiety symptoms.

## Method

### Procedure

- Participants included 117 autistic adolescents (10- to 17-year-olds).
- Both autistic adolescents and their parents completed a series of questionnaires related to the adolescent's mental health.
- Parents completed questionnaires regarding their child's depressive and anxiety symptoms, and adolescents completed self-report measures of their own depressive and anxiety symptoms.

### Measures

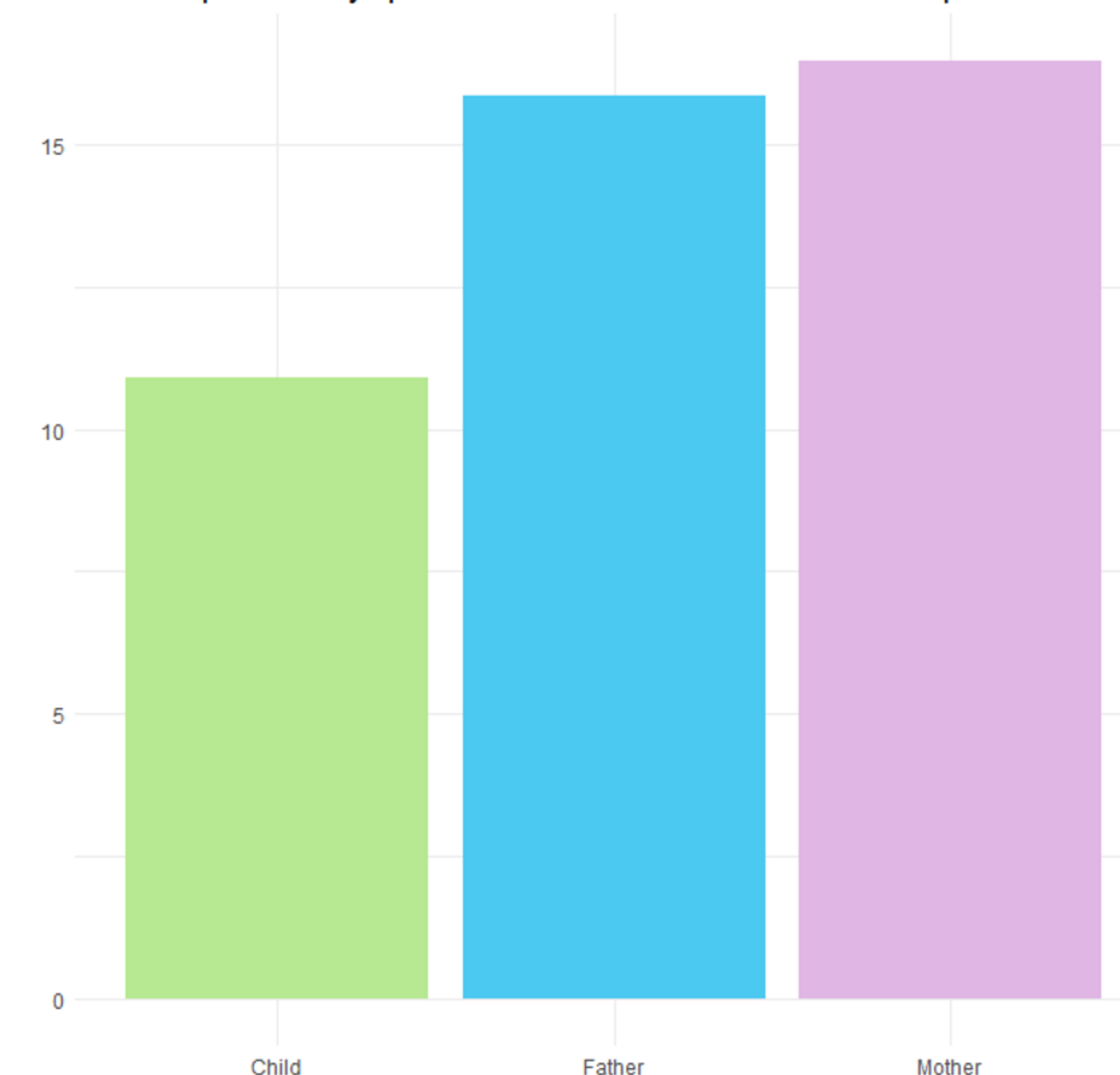
- Children's Depression Inventory (CDI; Kovacs, 1981)
- Screen for Child Anxiety Related Emotional Disorders (SCARED; Birmaher et al., 1997)

### Data Analytic Plan

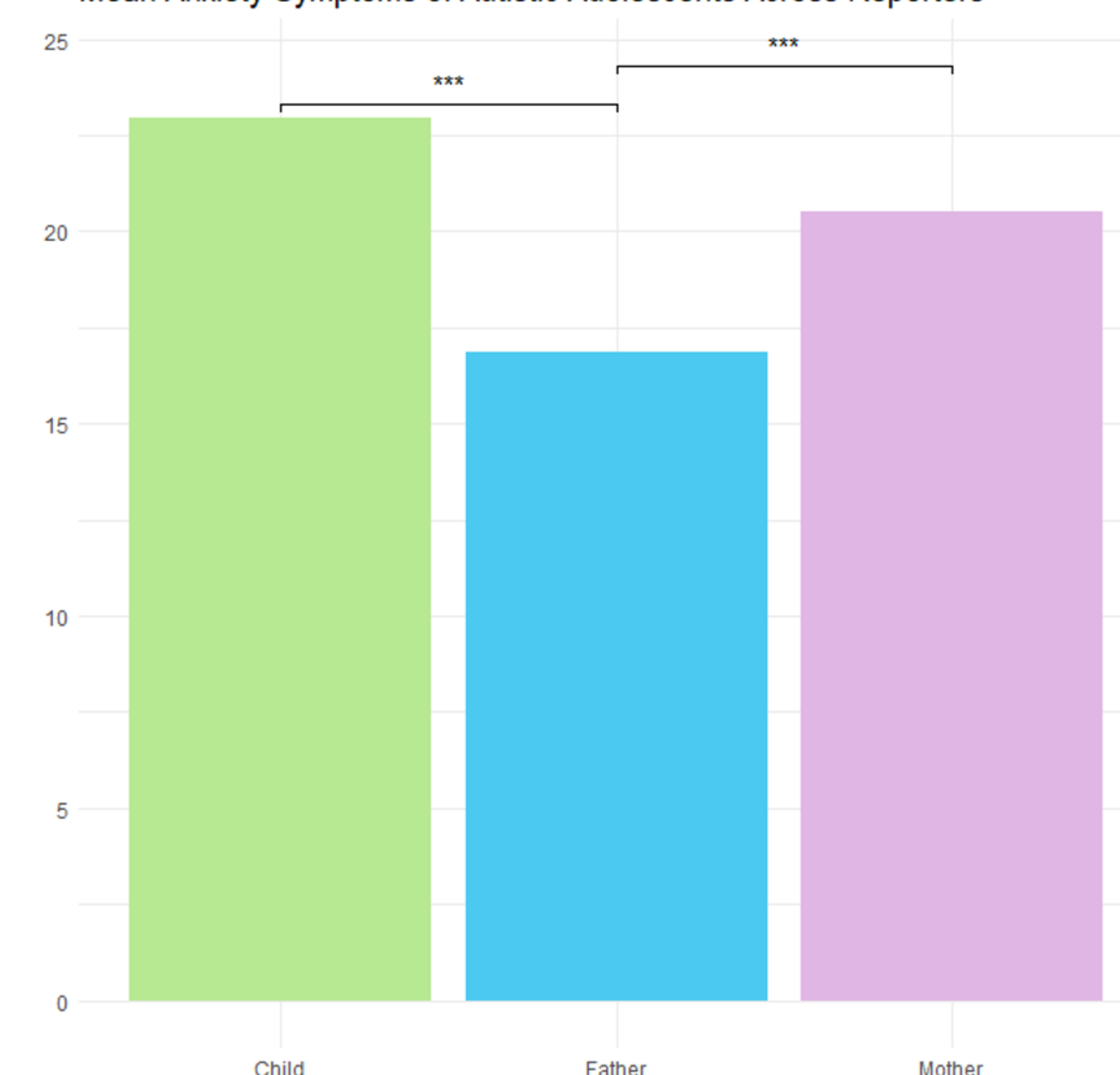
- A series of *t*-tests were conducted to examine whether there were discrepancies in ratings of depressive and anxiety symptoms between parents and their child.
- For each mental health outcome, a series of three *t*-tests were conducted including: mother versus father report, mother versus adolescent report, and father versus adolescent report.

## Results

Mean Depressive Symptoms of Autistic Adolescents Across Reporters



Mean Anxiety Symptoms of Autistic Adolescents Across Reporters



## Discussion

- For depressive symptoms, all *t*-tests were non-significant ( $p > .05$ ) suggesting that mothers, fathers, and adolescents agreed in the ratings of adolescents' depressive symptoms.
- For anxiety symptoms, there was a significant difference between both mother versus father report,  $t(117) = 3.30, p < .001$ , as well as father versus adolescent report,  $t(115) = -4.18, p < .001$ . These results revealed that mothers and adolescents are reporting higher anxiety symptoms than fathers. In addition, there was no difference between mother and adolescent report of anxiety symptoms ( $p > .05$ ), suggesting that mothers and adolescents agreed in the ratings of adolescents' anxiety symptoms.
- The results of the current study suggest that family members generally agree on the rating of the adolescents' depressive symptoms; however, there are discrepancies in the ratings of adolescents' anxiety symptoms, with fathers reporting fewer anxiety symptoms as compared to the mother and adolescent report.
- These discrepancies highlight the importance of including multiple informants when examining child psychopathology.
- Future research should consider possible predictors (i.e., symptom severity, child gender, parent mental health) of these discrepancies.

## References

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