Mental Health of Youth With Autism Spectrum Disorder and Gender Dysphoria

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Youth with either autism spectrum disorder (ASD) or gender dysphoria (GD) alone have also been shown to be at greater risk for mental health (MH) concerns; however, very little research has considered how cooccurring ASD and GD may exacerbate MH concerns. The purpose of this study was to examine associations between ASD, GD, and MH diagnoses (anxiety, depression, eating disorder, suicidality, and self-harm) among US adolescent populations. This is a secondary analysis of a large administrative dataset formed by 8 pediatric health system members of the PEDSnet learning health system network. Analyses included descriptive statistics and adjusted mixed logistic regression models testing for associations between combinations of ASD and GD diagnoses and MH diagnoses as recorded in the patient's electronic medical record. Based on data from 919 898 patients aged 9 to 18 years, adjusted mixed logistic regression indicated significantly greater odds of each MH diagnosis among those with ASD alone, GD alone, and cooccurring ASD/GD diagnoses compared with those with neither diagnosis. Youth with cooccurring ASD/GD were at significantly greater risk of also having anxiety (average predicted probability, 0.75; 95% confidence interval, 0.68-0.81) or depression diagnoses (average predicted probability, 0.33; 95% confidence interval, 0.24-0.43) compared with youth with ASD alone, GD alone, or neither diagnosis. Youth with cooccurring ASD/GD are more likely to also be diagnosed with MH concerns, particularly anxiety and depression. This study highlights the need to implement developmentally appropriate, gender-affirming MH services and interventions for youth with cooccurring ASD/GD.

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