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Autism traits linked to risk of depression, suicidal thoughts in people with psychosis

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People with autism traits who have psychosis are at a greater risk of depression and thoughts of suicide, new research has found.

The research, led by Professor Stephen Wood at Orygen, the National Centre of Excellence in Youth Mental Health, showed that, among people with psychosis, depressive symptoms and thoughts of self-harm were not because of the psychosis, but instead were linked to the level of autism traits a person had.

"The more autism traits people with psychosis had, the lonelier and more hopeless they felt and were more likely to think about suicide," Professor Wood said.

"When a person presents with a psychotic illness, such as schizophrenia, they are at an increased risk of self-harm or suicide. People with autism are also at a heightened risk."

Professor Wood's team explored how the two might be related by reviewing people with a clinical diagnosis of psychosis and those without. "What we found was that with both groups the more autism traits a person had, the more likely they were to have depressive symptoms and suicide ideation."

The research has been published in the journal *Schizophrenia Research*.

Professor Wood said to prevent people attempting suicide it was important to identify those most at risk. "Our study shows that a person's level of autism traits is an extremely important marker in helping identify those people with psychosis at risk of suicide," he said.

"What we need to do now is improve care for people with high levels of autism traits who develop a psychotic illness. This means better training for clinical staff to support people with both autism and psychosis, and the need to ask about autism traits in clinical assessments."

Source:

<https://www.orygen.org.au/About/News-And-Events/2017/Autism-traits-psychosis>
