Assessing the Validity of the Social Communication Questionnaire in Adults with Autism Spectrum Disorders and Intellectual Disability

About the Presenter:

Whitney Brooks is a doctoral student in the IDD-Clinical Psychology program. Her research interests include screening measures for adults with ASD; IDD and psychiatric diagnoses (dual diagnoses); aggressive and challenging behavior in adults with ASD; gender differences in ASD symptoms, and quality of life in adults and adolescents with ASD. Whitney is a Behavioral Support Specialist at the Nisonger Center and serves as a facilitator for the Women of Aspirations, a social skills and activity group for young women with ASD.

Assessing autism spectrum disorders in adults is a challenging task, as ASD symptoms change over time and early developmental history may be unavailable for many adults. This study assessed the diagnostic validity of the Current version of the Social Communication Questionnaire (SCQ), an autism rating scale, in a sample of adults with intellectual disability (ID). Participants included 52 individuals, aged 19 to 40 years (mean age = 28.6 years, SD = 6.0), who were recruited from agencies serving individuals with ID, a large university center for intellectual and developmental disabilities, and the Autism Society of Ohio. Parents and/or support staff completed the SCQ Current and SCQ Lifetime (when applicable) versions and measures of participants’ behavior and adaptive functioning. The optimal cutoff score of the SCQ Current version in this sample was 12, which yielded a sensitivity of .80 and specificity of .65. Analyses were repeated in a subset of participants in the ID-only group with high and low level of behavioral problems, and comparable sensitivity and specificity values were found. Although the SCQ Current version was not specifically designed to screen for ASDs in adults, it may be a useful tool for screening individuals whose early developmental history is unavailable. A lower cutoff score than the authors originally proposed is recommended for use in adults, which is consistent with research indicating that autism symptoms improve with age.