

Trait emotional awareness in autistic adolescents and young adults

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Background

- Transition from adolescence to adulthood is a significant period of change, marked by an increased expectation of independence, new experiences and changes in levels of support, and has been identified as challenging for autistic youth (Hendricks & Wehman, 2009).
- Emotional awareness is the extent of an individual's ability to identify their own emotional state and that of others; it is a fundamental social skill used in everyday life.
- Little is understood about trait emotional awareness in autism or if it differs from non-autistic individuals.
- This study aimed to explore the levels of emotional awareness of 15-25 year old autistic and non-autistic Australians using the LEAS-Youth (LEAS-Y) a modified version of the levels of Emotional Awareness Scale (Lane et al., 1990; Brenham et al., 2007).



*3 autistic cases excluded due to a co-occurring intellectual disability

Method

- Participants were from the Study of Australian School Leavers with Autism (SASLA) online survey, 167 of whom completed the LEAS-Y.
- The LEAS-Y comprises 8 emotion-driven scenarios modified to be appropriate for young adults primarily in high school or post-secondary education. For each scenario, participants are asked how they would feel and how the other person would feel.

“Someone who has been critical of you in the past pays you a compliment. How would you feel? How would the other person feel?” (Item 15 LEAS)

- The LEAS-Y was scored according to the users' manual (Barchard, et al., 2011) by two trained scorers who were blinded to diagnosis.

Self score (0-4)

- Complexity of response from own point of view

Other score (0-4)

- Complexity of response from others point of view

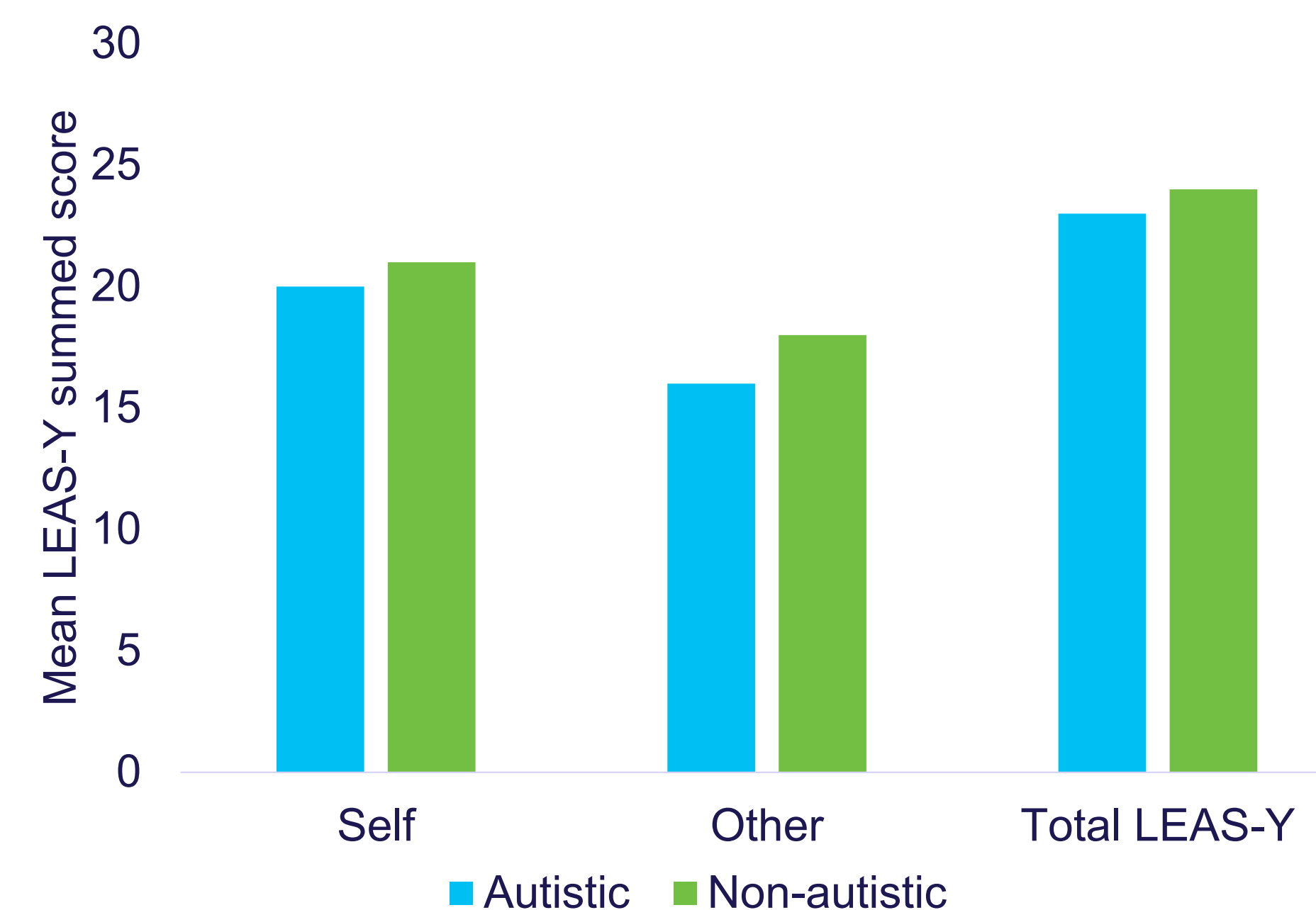
Total item score (0-5)

Total LEAS-Y score (0-40; sum of all 8 items)

- A random sample of cases (35%) were double scored to assess interrater reliability.

Results

- Intra-class correlation coefficients (ICC:2,1) indicated excellent reliability for individual items on the LEAS-Y.
- The LEAS-Y had acceptable internal consistency for Total and Other summed scores for both groups. Self score internal consistency was acceptable for the autistic group but, was low for the non-autistic group.
- Autistic participants:
 - Scored significantly lower on the LEAS-Y Other than the non-autistic group.
 - Did not differ from the non-autistic group for the LEAS-Y Self or Total.



Discussion

- The LEAS-Y had excellent inter-rater reliability.
- The LEAS-Y showed acceptable internal consistency on all three scores for the autistic group.
- Internal consistency for the LEAS-Y Self score was poor in the non-autistic group, suggesting that the LEAS-Y be used with caution among non-autistic individuals.
- Autistic individuals were comparable to non-autistic individuals when identifying their own emotions, but had more difficulty identifying the emotions of others.
- Difficulty identifying emotions in other people likely contributes to the challenges experienced by young autistic adults in navigating their transition into adulthood.

References

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- Hendricks, D. R., & Wehman, P. (2009). Transition from school to adulthood for youth with autism spectrum disorders: Review and recommendations. Focus on autism and other developmental disabilities, 24(2), 77-88.
- Lane, R. D., Quinlan, D. M., Schwartz, G. E., Walker, P. A., & Zeitlin, S. B. (1990). The Levels of Emotional Awareness Scale: A cognitive-developmental measure of emotion. Journal of personality assessment, 55(1-2), 124-134.

Objectives

1. The aim of this study was to determine the reliability of a modified, abbreviated LEAS (LEAS-Y) and to compare the level of emotional awareness of autistic and non-autistic individuals.

For more information

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