

## **Abstract**

Parents of children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) are dealing with stressful situations. The frequency and intensity of such situations may increase as the severity of ASD increases, resulting in the development of post-traumatic stress symptoms. The current study aimed to examine the moderating role of parental regulatory flexibility in the relationship between ASD severity and PTSD symptoms as a function of the family structure. A sample of 64 parents of ASD-diagnosed children participated in the study. All the parents were married, but the birth order of their ASD child differed. The children were assessed for ASD severity, and their parents were evaluated for regulatory flexibility and PTSD symptoms. The results revealed that for parents of a firstborn ASD child and poor regulatory flexibility, greater ASD severity was associated with elevated levels of PTSD symptoms, whereas, for parents with high regulatory flexibility, no such relationship was found. In parents with an ASD child that is not a firstborn (i.e., second and onward) who exhibit poor regulatory flexibility, there was no significant relationship between the child's ASD severity and the tendency to develop PTSD symptoms, whereas for parents with high regulatory flexibility, there was a significant positive relationship between the child's ASD severity and the tendency to develop PTSD symptoms. The findings highlight the need to differentiate between parents as a function of the birth order of their ASD child. Moreover, it suggests that regulatory flexibility may facilitate adaptive behaviors only for some parents, while a more rigid approach may be more efficient for others. Tailored interventions that aim to advance regulatory flexibility may promote well-being and ultimately enhance the quality of life of parents who have a firstborn ASD child.