



# Suicidal Ideation and Attempts in Broader Autism Phenotype

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## **Abstract**

Evidence suggests that individuals within the broad autism phenotype often exhibit associated psychiatric symptoms, particularly related to suicide, depression and self-harm. As for these symptoms, Previous research suggests that cognitive inflexibility prospectively increases vulnerability to suicidal ideation. The current study investigated whether individual cognitive characteristics, specifically executive functions such as cognitive flexibility, inhibition and planning, are associated with occurrence of suicide ideations and attempts, self-harm behaviors and depressive symptoms in adults within the broad autism phenotype. A total of fifty-eight young adults (age 18-30) completed a survey of autistic traits degree, depression symptomatology, self-harm history and suicide prototype, ideations and attempts, as well as four executive functions tasks measuring cognitive flexibility, inhibition and planning. Out of these fifty-eight non-diagnosed participants, thirteen met the criteria of autistic traits. Social broad autism phenotype traits were significantly associated with low executive functions skills, as well as higher rates of suicidal and other related psychiatric symptoms. In addition, both autistic traits and cognitive flexibility predicted suicidal symptoms and ideation, suggesting that executive functions play a big role in the relationship between the broad autistic phenotype and suicide. The present findings suggest that even in the absence of marked social and communicative impairments that signify the potential need for a clinical diagnosis, those with higher levels of ASD traits may be more susceptible to depression, self-harm, and suicidal thoughts and ideation than others in the general population. It may point to a need for developing interventions that would increase cognitive flexibility. Such interventions may be particularly helpful in decreasing continued risky psychological symptoms among individuals from the autistic continuum.