



MONASH University



Southern Health

Title: The Phenomenology, Diagnosis and Assessment of Comorbid Depression in Young People with Autistic Disorder

Institution: The Monash University Centre for Developmental Psychiatry & Psychology

Researchers: Rafaela Karas (Doctorate of clinical psychology candidate)

Professor Bruce Tonge (Main Supervisor), Dr David Moseley and Dr Nicole Rinehart (Co-supervisors)

Expected finish dates: February 2011

Young people with autism experience significantly higher rates of psychopathology (73.5%) than those with an intellectual disability (ID) alone. Depression is the most commonly described psychiatric disorder in autism, however we still do not know enough about how depression presents in people with autism and how it can best be assessed, in order to help with treatment. The principal aim of the project is to assess for the presence of depression in young individuals with autism, and investigate the usefulness of various assessment methods.

We are seeking participants with a pre-determined diagnosis of autism aged between 15-25 years old (high functioning to severe Intellectual Disability). The participation of the parent/legal guardian will also be required. The person with autism **does not** need to have a pre-existing diagnosis of depression.

Participation in this study involves:

- * A clinical interview with the parent/legal guardian and young person (where possible), designed to assess the young person's current state of mental health and well-being.
- * The parent/guardian of each adolescent answering short questionnaires
- * A cognitive (intellectual) assessment will be offered to the young person, if one has not been recently conducted
- * The young person to complete a brief computer task to assess various motor and cognitive symptoms associated with depression.

Each participant will be provided with a **free** comprehensive assessment outlining the young person's cognitive abilities and current emotional functioning. The assessment will be accompanied by a summary report of the interview with recommendation, which may be of use when planning the services the young person receives.

It is hoped that the study will provide clinically useful information and inform mental health professionals about the presentation, assessment and diagnosis of depression in autism so that right treatment and services are offered. It may also help develop tools to measure depression in autism.

If you are interested in participating in this research please contact Rafaela Karas on 9501 2415 or rafaela.karas@med.monash.edu.au