

New study examines social isolation of young adults with autism spectrum disorder

2 May 2013, by Leslie Gibson Mccarthy

Young adults with an autism spectrum disorder (ASD) are more likely to never see friends, never get called by friends, never be invited to activities and be socially isolated.

That's the finding of new research released online this week in the *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders* that studies the social outcomes of young adults with an ASD.

The study is part of a pioneering program of research on adolescents and adults with autism led by Paul T. Shattuck, PhD, associate professor at the Brown School at Washington University in St. Louis. Lead author is Gael I. Orsmond, PhD, associate professor in the department of occupational therapy at Boston University and an expert on the social development of adults with an ASD.

"This is another study from our project that demonstrates the many difficulties awaiting young adults with an ASD once they leave high school," Shattuck says. "Autism is a lifelong challenge for most, and we need to find better ways of supporting people during this transition to adulthood."

The study used data from the National Longitudinal Transition Study 2 and examined [social participation](#) among young adults with autism vs. those with other types of disabilities: [intellectual disabilities](#), emotional/behavioral disabilities or learning disabilities.

The study also focused exclusively on [young adulthood](#), the period, authors say, most crucial in forming and maintaining lifelong relationships.

The findings, over a 12-month period:

- almost 40 percent of youth with ASDs never got together with friends;
- 50 percent never received phone calls or

were invited to activities; and

- 28 percent were socially isolated with no social contact whatsoever.

"Difficulty navigating the terrain of friendships and social interaction is a hallmark feature of autism," Shattuck says. "Nonetheless, many people with autism do indeed have a social appetite. They yearn for connection with others. We need better ways of supporting positive social connection and of preventing social isolation."

More information: link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10803-013-1833-8

Provided by Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis

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