

EMPATHY MEASUREMENT IN AUTISM

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Introduction: A deficit in empathy is so often assumed in autistic individuals, that poor social outcomes are treated through empathy interventions without investigating other contributing factors. To target interventions to client needs, we need to determine whether an empathy intervention is required, or whether poor social outcomes are best improved through an alternative focus of support. Practitioners often overlook the fact that our understandings of empathy in autism are limited by the measures we use, and some do not evaluate client empathy at all, instead assuming a client will need an empathy intervention simply because they are autistic. Practitioners, therefore, need access to high quality empathy measures to determine whether an empathy intervention is the best approach for their autistic clients. The quality of these measures is paramount.

Method: A systematic literature review was conducted to examine the measurement properties of empathy self-reports used with both autistic and predominant neurotype adults. Articles were obtained from 7 databases, followed by ancestral searching for grey literature. I, an autistic researcher, will discuss how we critically evaluated the evidence for some of the most popular empathy measures, and will discuss the implications for research and practice.

Results: The systematic review obtained data on several empathy self-reports, including the Empathy Quotient and the Interpersonal Reactivity Index. Preliminary findings will be discussed, including how features such as poor reliability and non-literal language may bias the scores of autistic people.

Discussion: This study highlights gaps in our knowledge about measuring empathy in autistic adults and considers how these gaps affect our knowledge of empathy in the autistic population. Finally, I will propose solutions to improve empathy measurement for autistic adults. Improved measurement will help clinicians to determine where an empathy intervention is the best approach to supporting an autistic client with social difficulties.