

Autism and religion: anxiety or uncertainty?

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1 Introduction: first study

In an explorative study on **Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)** and God representations among Dutch orthodox Protestants, the God representation was characterized by **more anxiety**, compared to psychiatric patients without ASD or non-patients. The more autistic traits were reported, the more this anxiety increased. On an item level, this anxiety was typified by **uncertainty**

(Schaap-Jonker, Sizoo, Schothorst- van Roekel & Corveleyn, 2013).

2 Remaining questions: second study

1. Are these anxious and uncertain feelings of those with ASD are specific to the religious domain?
2. Are these God representation traits specific to those with ASD?
3. Are earlier results specific to orthodox Protestants?

► We are performing a follow-up study in which patients with ASD were compared to patients with an anxiety disorder and a control group of non-patients (*work still in progress*)

3 Measurement instruments and analysis

Dutch Questionnaire of God Representations

(Schaap-Jonker, Eurelings-Bontekoe, Jonker & Zock, 2008)

- *Feelings towards God*: Positive Feelings, Anxiety, Anger
- *Beliefs on God's Actions*: Supportive, Ruling/ Punishing, Passivity

For this study, new items were added to the Anxiety-scale; Principal Component Analysis was performed.

[Brief Symptom Inventory & Temperament & Character Inventory]

4 Preliminary results regarding types of anxiety towards God

Again, ASD-patients (N=35 at the moment) report two types of anxiety:

- **Anxiety** that is related to **guilt** (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.80$)
Items: fear of being punished, fear of making wrong choices, fear of being ignored, fear of being rejected, guilt, fear of being abandoned
- **Anxiety** that is related to **being not good enough** (Cr.'s $\alpha = 0.87$)
Items: fear of failing, dissatisfaction, fear of being not good enough

5 Summary

- Results suggest that among patients with ASD, anxiety towards God not a clear, well-defined construct, but has multiple aspects.
- Again, two types of religious anxiety were found: anxiety that is related to guilt and anxiety that is related to being not good enough.
- The former type refers to one's *actions or behaviour*, the latter to one's *being and identity*.

Schaap-Jonker, H., Sizoo, B., Schothorst-van Roekel, J. & Corveleyn, J. (2013). Autism spectrum disorders and the image of God as a core aspect of religiousness. *International Journal for the Psychology of Religion*, 23 (2), 145-160.

Schaap Jonker, H, Eurelings-Bontekoe, E.H.M., Zock, H. & Jonker, E.R. (2008). Development and Validation of the Dutch Questionnaire God Image. *Mental Health, Religion and Culture*, 11, 501–515.