**A POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK TO UNDERSTAND POSITIVE MENTAL HEALTH IN AUTISTIC YOUTH**

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**Objectives:** Positive mental health (PMH) has been conceptualized as the combination of positive psychological and social functioning, rather than just the absence of mental health problems (Keyes, 2002). This includes a continuum ranging from languishing (the absence of PMH) to flourishing (high levels of PMH). No studies have explored this continuum in autistic youth, despite support for its use in young people (Keyes, 2006). Positive Youth Development (PYD) frameworks posit that youth experience more positive outcomes when there is an alignment between an individual’s strengths (e.g., adaptive behaviours) and ecological assets (e.g., environmental supports; Lerner et al., 2010), including in youth with autism (Weiss & Burnham Riosa, 2015). The current study aims to determine the individual and ecological correlates of PMH in autistic youth.

**Method:** Data were collected from 137 family caregivers of youth between 11 and 22 years of age (*M* = 16.81, *SD* = 3.21, 77% male) with a diagnosis of autism and intellectual disability in Ontario (Canada). Caregivers completed surveys on their children’s adaptive behaviours (Maenner et al., 2013; Mazurek et al., 2012), mental health problems (Goodman, 1997), and ecological resources (Coster et al., 2012; Byles et al., 1998; Emerson et al., 2006). PMH was measured using the Six Cs of PYD (Caring, Character, Contribution, Competence, Confidence, Connectedness; Lerner et al., 2005), and three categories were created based on the number that were endorsed, similar to strategies categorizing PMH in adults (Keyes, 2002).

**Results:** Adaptive behaviour and sociocommunicative and functional cognitive ability were significantly higher in the flourishing group compared to the moderate well-being group (both *p* < 0.01), who in turn was higher than the languishing group (both *p* < 0.01). The languishing group had significantly higher severity of mental health problems compared to the flourishing and moderate well-being groups (both *p* < 0.01), though the latter two groups did not differ from each other (*p* = 0.08). Similarly, the languishing group was reported to have lower rates of access to resources to enable participation in home activities (both *p* < 0.01) and school (both *p* $\leq $ 0.001) compared to both other groups, who did not differ from each other (*p* > 0.05). Parents of youth in the flourishing and moderate well-being groups reported higher rates of their own self-efficacy compared to parents of youth in the languishing group (both p < 0.01), though they did not differ from each other (*p* > 0.05). The moderate well-being group had significantly greater family functioning than the languishing group (*p* < 0.05), though there was no difference between the flourishing and moderate well-being groups (*p* = 0.44) and flourishing and languishing groups (*p* = 0.15).

**Discussion/Conclusions:** For autistic youth, flourishing was associated with the highest level of adaptive behaviours, and the presence of any level of PMH was associated with fewer mental health problems, and greater parent self-efficacy, family functioning, and resources/support at home and school. Future research can investigate individual and ecological correlates of dual continua mental health outcomes in autistic youth.

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