



# Danny Horesh

Bar-Ilan University, Israel

**Day 3- 27.6, Session V- 10:00-11:30**

## **Are PTSD and autism related? A first examination among Israeli adults**

Abstract:

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) has been known to show high co-morbidity with different mental disorders, including anxiety and depression. Previous research indicates that individuals with ASD also face an increased risk of experiencing traumatic events. However, the co-morbidity between ASD and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) has been almost entirely neglected by researchers. In this study, we examined the complex associations between PTSD and autism. We assessed both autistic traits (i.e., autistic features distributed among the general population) and individuals formally diagnosed with high functioning ASD. Overall, our findings reveal that individuals with ASD/individuals with high levels of autistic traits face an increased risk for PTSD, compared to typically developing controls. In addition, we show that among those with ASD, PTSD was best predicted by social stressors, such as bullying and ostracizing. We also identified a unique PTSD clinical profile among those high on autistic traits, characterized by a relative dominance of hyper-arousal symptoms. Finally, we propose several mechanisms, which may underlie the ASD-PTSD connection, including dysregulated emotion and trait anger. Our findings highlight the need to study PTSD among those suffering from an a priori neurodevelopmental vulnerability, rendering them susceptible to trauma and its effects. Importantly, mental health professionals are encouraged to develop more personalized, disorder-specific interventions for traumatized individuals with ASD.