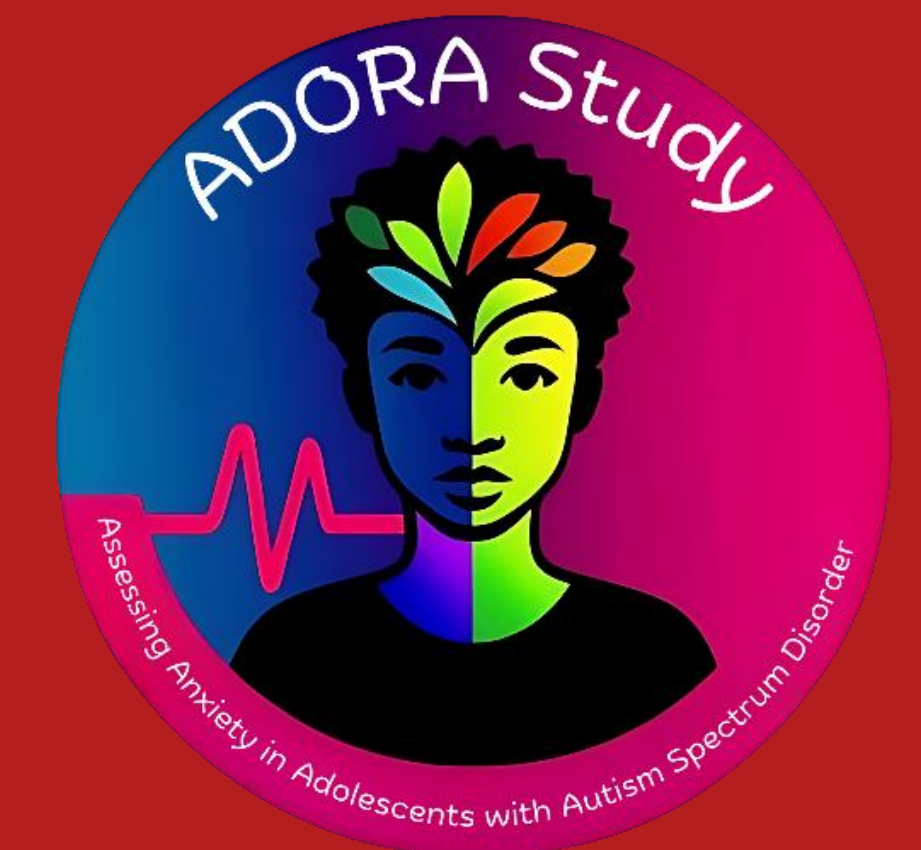


Discrepancies Between Parent- and Child-Reported Anxiety Symptoms in Autistic and Non-Autistic Youth



Rachel C. Resnick*, Heather A. Yarger, Ph.D.
Department of Psychology, University of Maryland, College Park



Background

- Anxiety is one of the most common co-occurring conditions in youth on the autism spectrum (ASD; referred to as autistic youth) and can manifest differently compared to non-autistic youth, making it difficult to identify anxiety in autistic youth.
- The Screen for Child Anxiety-Related Emotional Disorders (SCARED; Birmaher et al., 1997) is a gold-standard measurement tool that aims to provide a dual-informed perspective (i.e., from both parents and youth) of anxiety symptoms (Behrens et al., 2020). However, discrepancies between parent and child reports have been observed, suggesting a need for further analysis of whether discrepancies in anxiety symptoms vary by diagnostic group (autistic or non-autistic).
- The aim of the current study was to evaluate whether discrepancies existed between parent and self-reported anxiety symptoms and if there was a difference between diagnostic groups.
- We hypothesized that a) significant discrepancies would exist between parent- and child-reported anxiety symptoms, and b) that there would be a mean difference between the autistic and non-autistic groups.

Methodology

Participants:

- 32 (16 autistic, 16 nonautistic) parent-child dyads within a larger study assessing anxiety in autistic and nonautistic youth (the ADORA Study).

Assessments and Measures:

- The Screen for Child Anxiety-Related Emotional Disorders (SCARED)*
 - A 41-item questionnaire was given on a Likert scale with separate versions for the parent and for the child.
 - The severity of symptoms was rated on a 0-2 point rating scale, with 0 meaning not true or hardly ever true and 2 meaning true or often true.
 - The items are coded on an ordinal scale.

Procedure:

- R Analyses:*
 - Pearson's *r* Correlational Test
 - Independent Samples *t*-Test
 - Paired Samples *t*-Test

Table 1		
Participant Demographics		
Variable	Autistic (n = 16)	Nonautistic (n = 16)
Age at Visit (Mean, SD)	12.77, 1.12	12.66, 1.24
IQ (Mean, SD)	105.25, 13.97	111.44, 13.16
Sex (%(n))		
Male	56.3 (9)	12.5 (2)
Female	37.5 (6)	87.5 (14)
Nonbinary	6.3 (1)	0
Race (%(n))		
Black/African American	25 (4)	25 (4)
Asian	6.3 (1)	31.3 (5)
White	56.3 (9)	25 (4)
More than one race	12.5 (2)	18.8 (3)
Ethnicity (%(n))		
Hispanic or Latino	6.3 (1)	18.8 (3)
Not Hispanic or Latino	93.8 (15)	81.3 (13)

Table 1. Participant Demographics

Results

Independent Samples *t*-Test:

- There was a significant mean difference between the discrepancies for the autistic and non-autistic groups ($t = -3.33, p = .002$), with a higher rate of discrepancy in the non-autistic group (95% CI [-25.28, -6.02]).

Paired Samples *t*-Test:

- There was a significant difference between parent-reported and child-reported anxiety symptoms ($t = -3.00, p = .01$), such that parent anxiety symptom ratings were 7.4 points lower than child anxiety symptoms (95% CI [-13.33, -2.5]).

Pearson's *r* Correlational Test:

- Parent and child-reported anxiety symptom scores were not statistically significantly correlated ($r = 0.33, p = .07$).

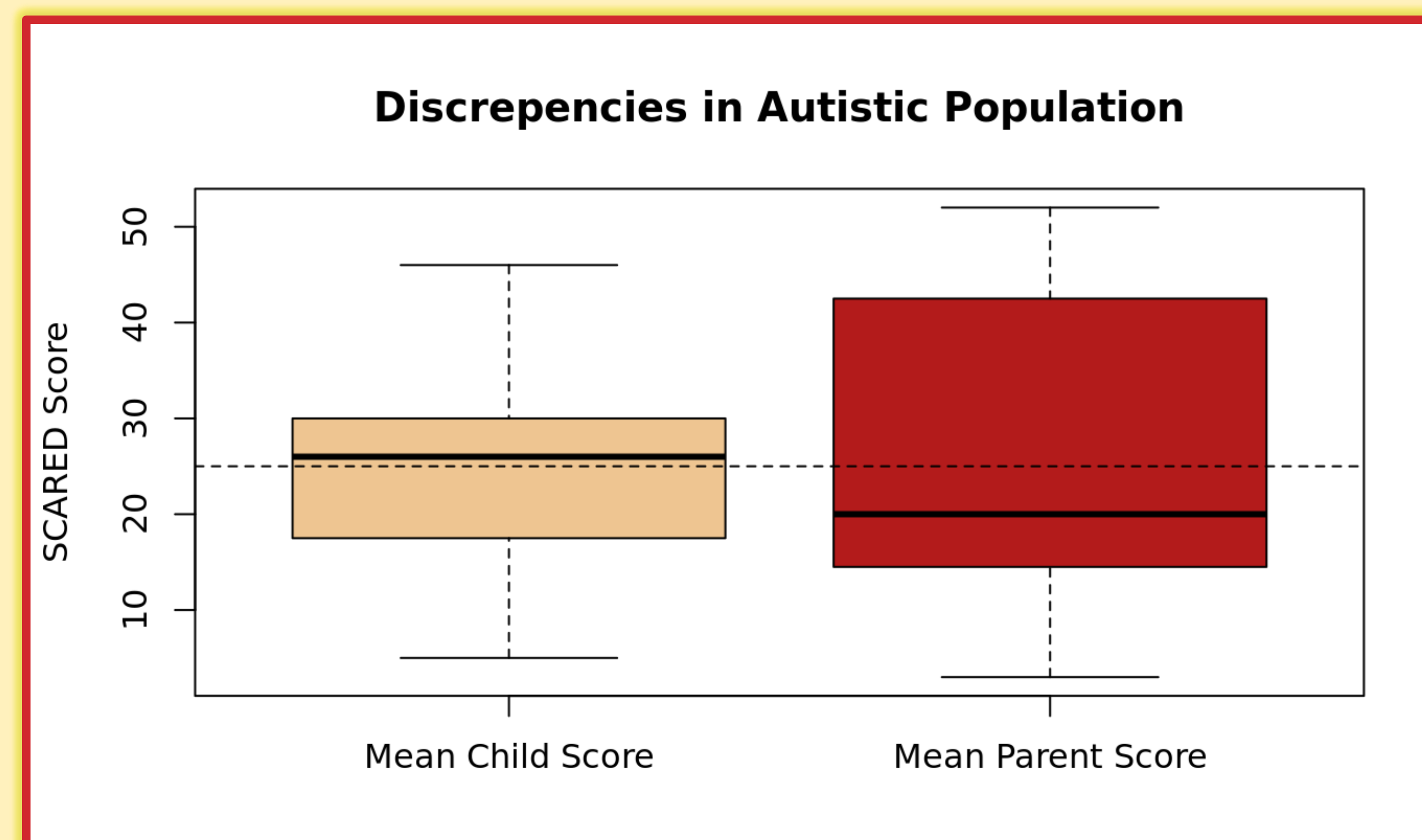


Figure 1. Boxplots comparing mean child- and parent-reported anxiety scores on the SCARED within the autistic group. The dashed line represents the score indicating the clinical presence of anxiety (25).

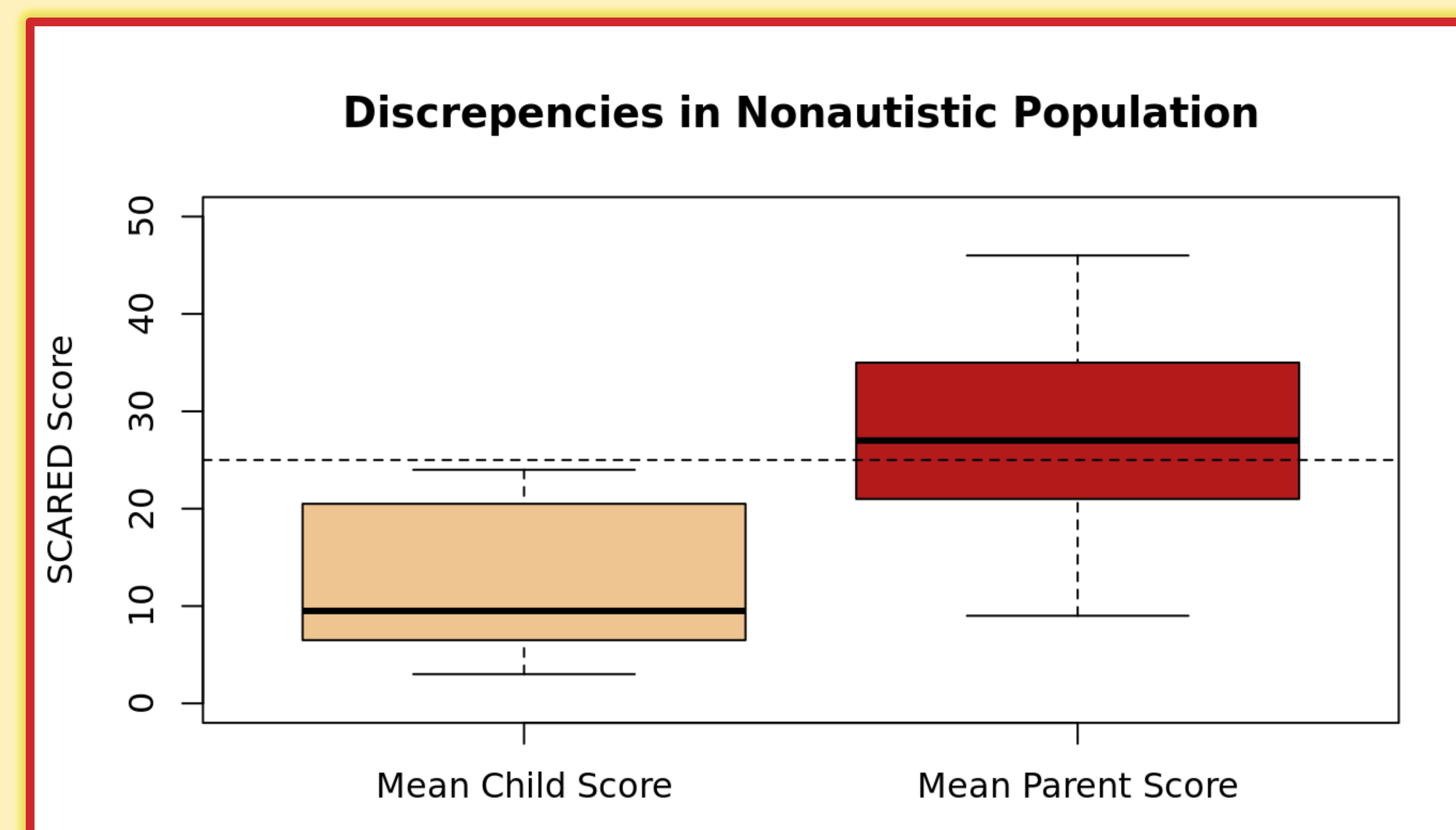


Figure 2. Boxplots comparing mean child- and parent-reported anxiety scores on the SCARED within the nonautistic group. The dashed line represents the score indicating the clinical presence of anxiety (25).

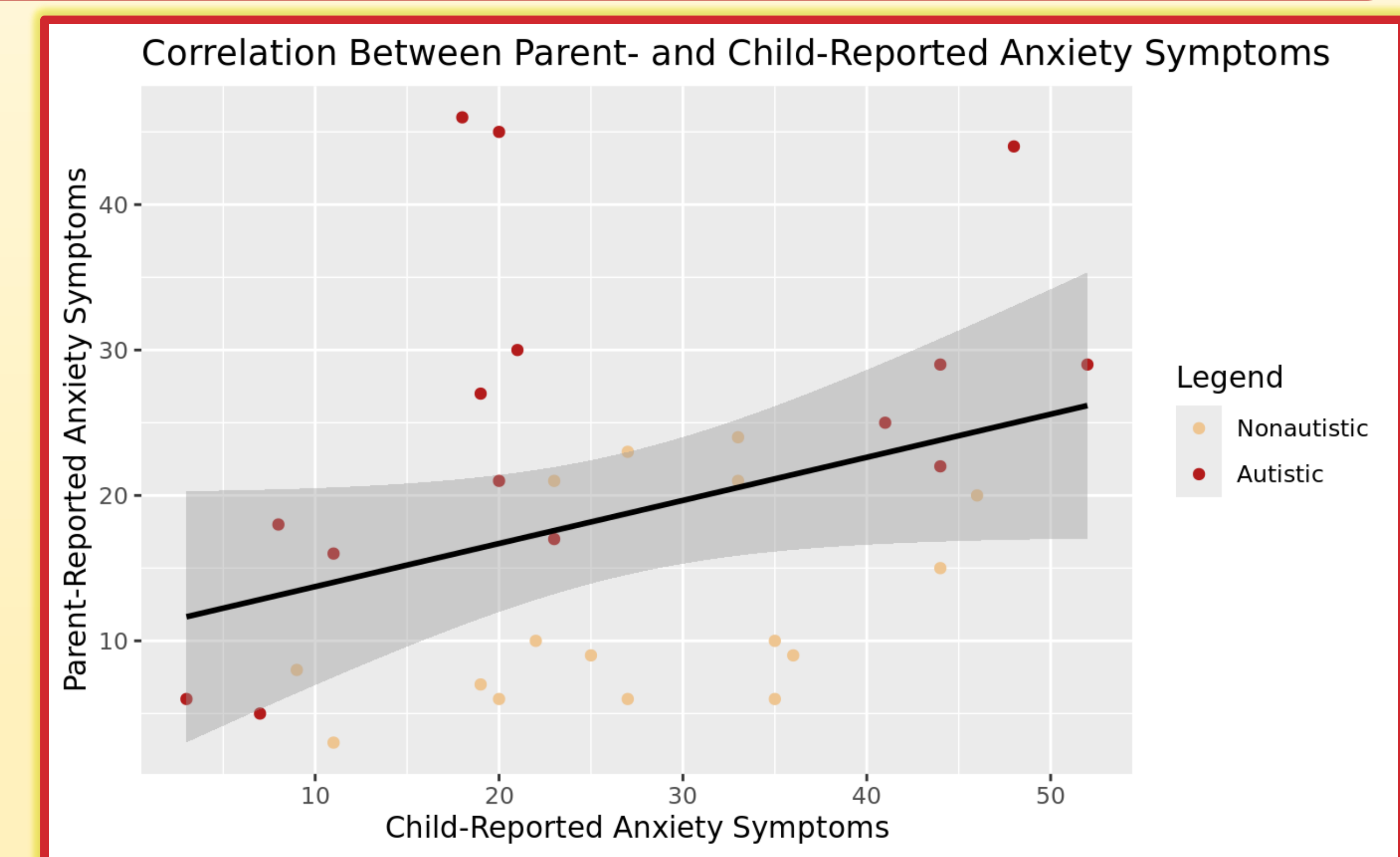


Figure 3. Scatterplot depicting the relationship between child-reported and parent-reported anxiety symptoms in autistic and nonautistic participants. Each point represents an individual participant. The solid line represents the line of best fit with a shaded 95% confidence interval.

Discussion

Takeaway:

- A significant mean difference in parent- and child-reported anxiety symptoms was observed between the autistic and non-autistic groups
- Parents and their children in the autistic group reported similarly on anxiety symptoms.
- There was a statistically significant discrepancy between parent- and child-reported anxiety in the non-autistic group.
 - Parents were more likely to report higher rates of anxiety symptoms than their children.

Limitations:

- The sample used for the present study was small ($N = 32$).
- There may have been a potential impact of completing questionnaires at home versus in the lab setting.

Future Directions:

- Investigation as to why parents of nonautistic youth report more anxiety symptoms than their children when compared to parents of autistic youth.
 - Explore whether there is a trend in which symptoms parents report higher on
- Investigating if discrepancies in reported anxiety predict future outcomes
- Potential predictors of these discrepancies should be explored
 - Alexithymia, IQ, Age, etc.

References

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1_sC1YUju3wpfMtXuSdE5yzfYNwoOq1XjUFascrWs8xU/edit?usp=sharing