

Maternal migration, prenatal stress and child autistic traits: insights from a population-based cohort study

Drs. Anne de Leeuw^{1,2}, Dr. Wietske Ester^{3,4}, Dr. Koen Bolhuis⁵, Prof. dr. Hans Hoek^{1,2,6}, Prof. dr. Pauline Jansen^{5,7}
1 Parnassia Academy, The Hague, NL 2 University Medical Center Groningen, NL 3 Curium Leiden University Medical Center, NL 4 SARR Expert Center for Autism, Youz Rotterdam, NL 5 University Medical Center Rotterdam, NL 6 Columbia University New York, USA 7 Erasmus University Rotterdam, NL Correspondence: A.E. de Leeuw. E: a.deleeuw@youz.nl



BACKGROUND

There is emerging evidence for an increased risk of Autism Spectrum Disorder in children of immigrant parents. To date, the mechanisms underlying this relationship are poorly understood.

AIM

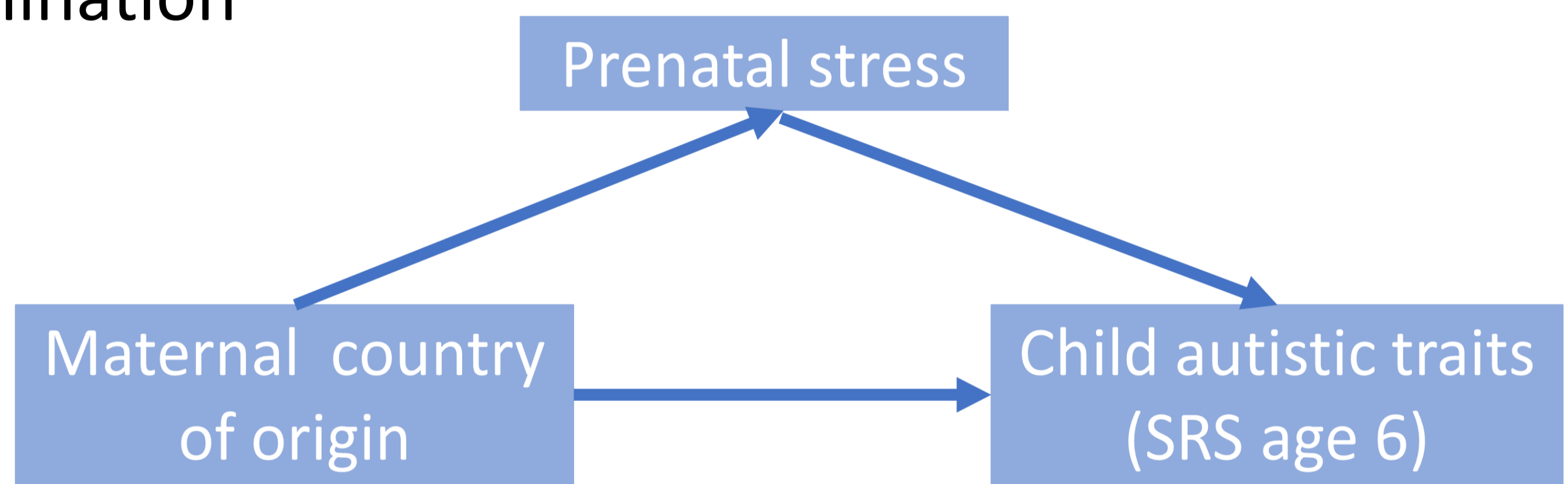
To explore the mediating effect of prenatal stress in the association between maternal immigrant status and child autistic traits.

METHODS

📍 Rotterdam, The Netherlands

👤 N= 4727, 1773 (38%) with a migration background.

Mediators psychopathology, self-esteem, stressful life events, family functioning, long-term difficulties, social support, perceived discrimination



RESULTS

Stress indicators with the highest mediating effect: perceived discrimination and symptoms of psychopathology.

🕒 Up to half (47%) of the association between maternal country of origin (outside-Europe) and child autistic traits was mediated by prenatal stress indicators ($B_{\text{indirect}} = 0.035$, CI 0.027 - 0.043).

↑ Higher autistic-trait scores in children of mothers with a migration background ($p < 0.001$).

↑ More reported stress in mothers with a migration background in almost all aspects of life ($p < 0.05$).

CONCLUSION

Maternal stress during pregnancy, especially related to perceived discrimination and symptoms of psychopathology, seems to be an important mediator in the association between maternal migration background and child autistic traits in the Netherlands.

