

# Socio-Emotional Skills: Comparison Between Typical Children and Children with Intellectual Disabilities

UQAM | Chaire de déficience intellectuelle et troubles du comportement  
Université du Québec à Montréal

Carole Légaré, B.Sc., Diane Morin, Ph.D. and Nathalie Poirier, Ph.D.  
Research Chair on Intellectual Disability and Challenging Behaviors, Université du Québec à Montréal



## Background

Socio-emotional skills are important in child development. They will allow him to adapt and function in society. (Halberstadt et al., 2001)

Socio-emotional skills may be considered through the theory of mind, and the concepts of social adjustment and emotion regulation (Nader-Grosbois, 2014).

**Theory of Mind** refers to the ability to interpret one's own and other people's mental and emotional states, understanding that each person has unique motives and perspectives (Bee & Boyd, 2011).

**Emotion Regulation** refers to the processes by which we influence which emotions we have, when we have them, and how we experience and express them (Gross, 2002).

**Social Adjustment** reflects "the extent to which children attain socially desirable and developmentally appropriate goals" (Yeates et al., 2007, p.4).

Several studies report that **children with intellectual disabilities (ID)**, when **compared to their peers with typical development**, present **difficulties** in terms of their **social** (Baker et al., 2007) and **emotional skills** (Abbeduto et al., 2004; Alevriadou & Giaouri, 2011; Charman & Campbell, 2002; Thirion-Marissiaux & Nader-Grosbois, 2008a, 2008b; Williams et al., 2005).

Moreover, it has been reported that **children with ID** find it **difficult to express and regulate their emotions**, and to **understand the emotions** others can experience (Brun & Mellier, 2004).

These difficulties can be a **hindrance to their social inclusion**.

## Objective

This project is part of a wider study that includes several objectives. The present objective is to compare **socio-emotional skills** of **typical children** and **children with ID** based on their mother's perceptions.

We present here our preliminary results.

## Methods

**Participants:** 33 mothers of typical children  
11 mothers of children with ID

**Criteria for inclusion:** being the mother of a **typical child** aged between **3 and 6 years old** or of a **child with ID** aged between **6 and 13 years old**. Mothers whose child have either Williams Syndrome, Fragile X Syndrome or Autism Spectrum Disorder are excluded.

**Instruments: Child Development Inventory** (Duyme & Capron., 2010), to obtain the developmental age of children.

**Theory of Mind Inventory** (Hutchins et al., 2010), to evaluate mothers' perceptions of their child's theory of mind.

**Emotion Regulation Checklist** (Shields & Cicchetti, 1997), to evaluate their perceptions about emotional regulation of their child.

**Social Adjustment for Children Scale** (Hughes et al., 1997), to evaluate their perceptions about their child's social skills.

**Procedure:** Mothers responded to the questionnaires using an online survey. They were recruited through Facebook and by rehabilitation centers for people with ID. Recruitment is still

underway.

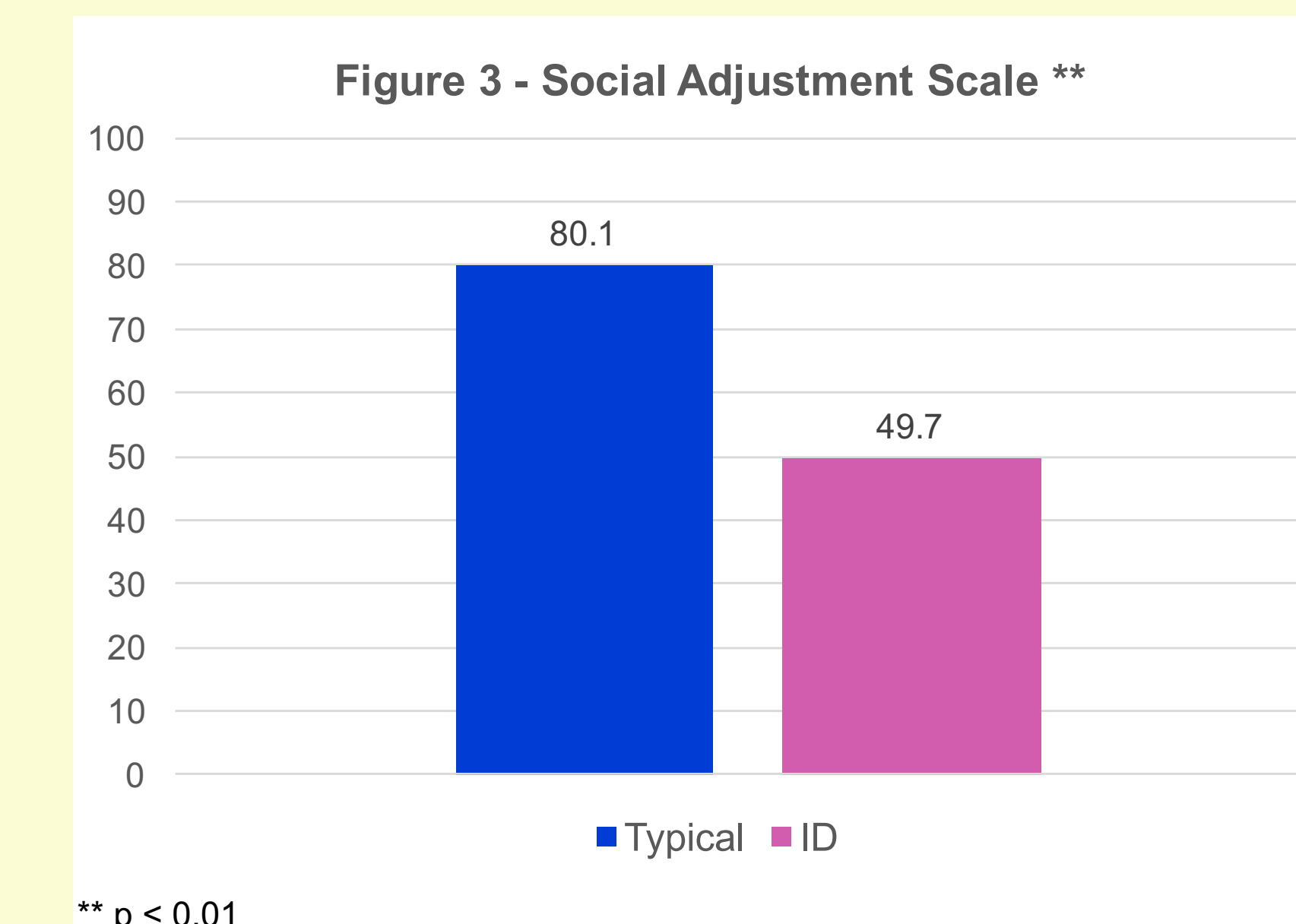
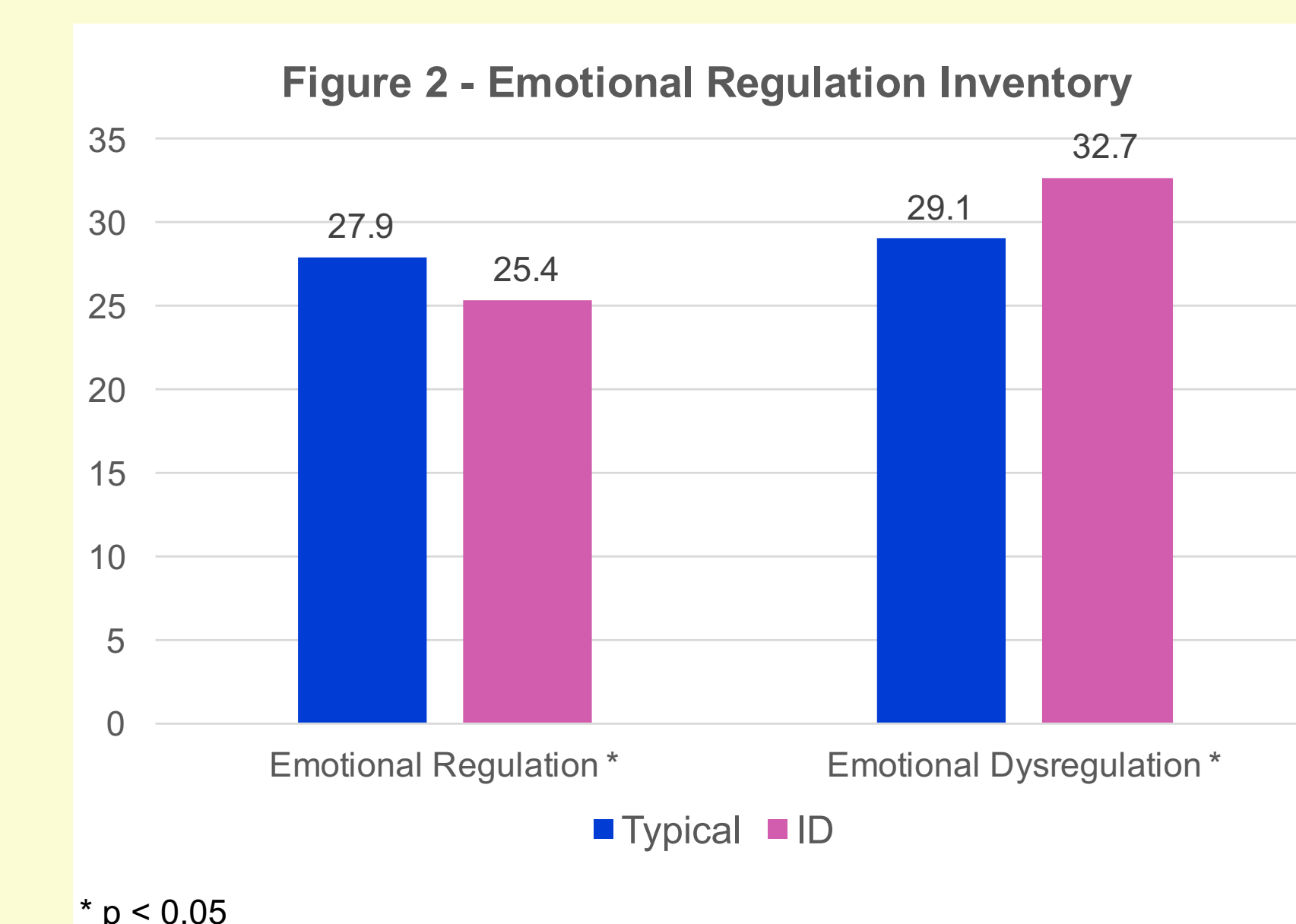
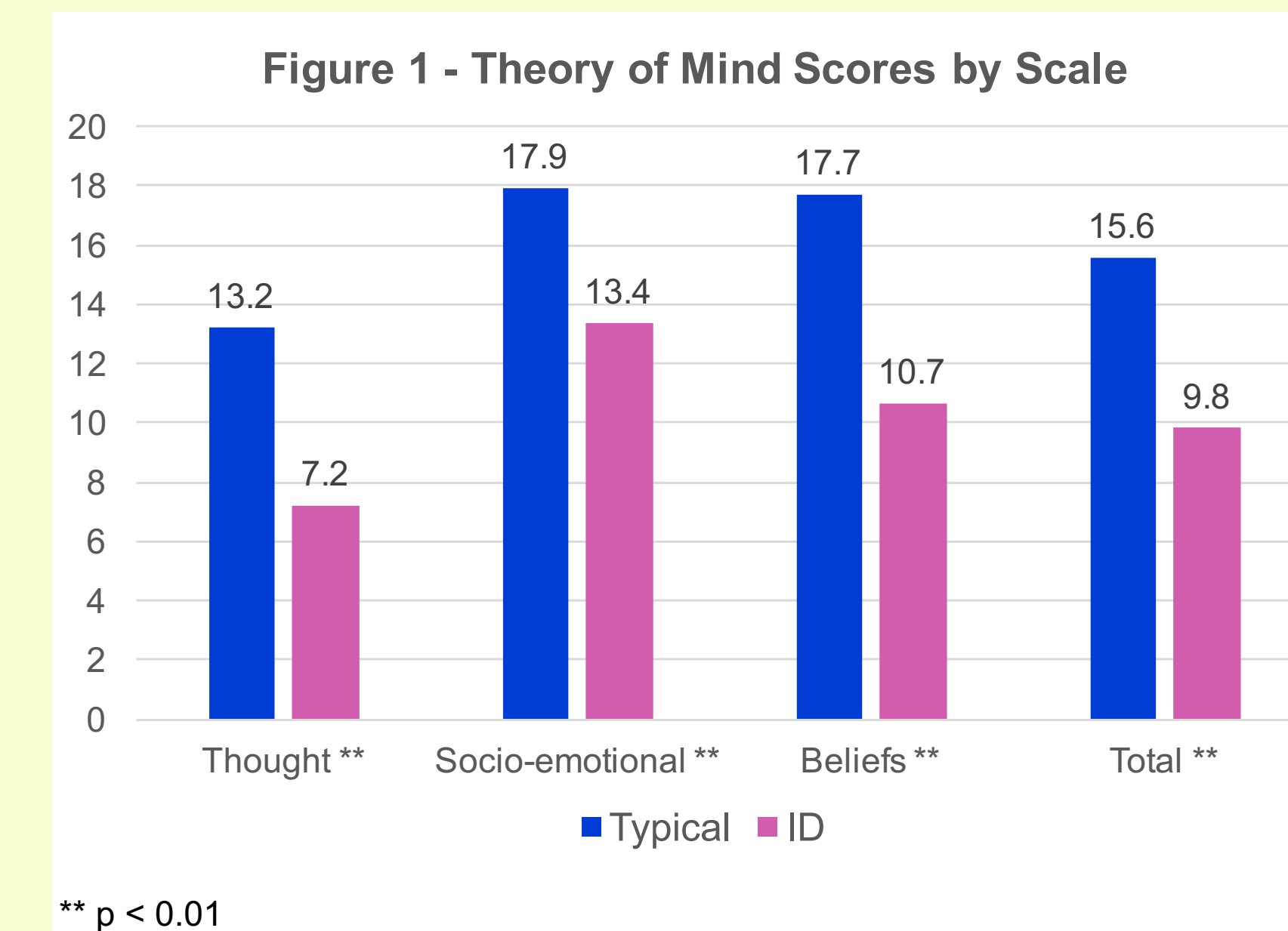
## Preliminary Results

T-tests were performed to evaluate whether the variables of **theory of mind**, **social adjustment** and **emotion regulation** differ between typical children and children with ID.

Significant differences were found for **theory of mind** (Figure 1), for **emotion regulation** (Figure 2) and for **social adjustment** (Figure 3).

Table 1 - Average Age of Mothers and Children

Group	Children		Mothers
	Chronological	Developmental	
Typical (n=33)	4.7	5.2	36.2
ID (n=11)	9.8	3.8	39.8



## Discussion

As expected, **mothers of children with ID** perceived their child as having **less socio-emotional skills** than mothers with **typical children**.

Our results are consistent with those of Alevriadou & Giaouri (2011) and of Thirion-Marissiaux & Nader-Grosbois (2008a, 2008b), that children with ID present a delay in the development of their **theory of mind** compared to typical children.

With respect to **emotion regulation**, our results are in line with those of Berkovits & Baker (2014) and Gerstein et al. (2011), who observed that children with ID have more difficulties regulating their emotions.

Moreover, as reported by Fiasse et Nader-Grosbois (2012), who also used the **Social Adjustment for Children Scale**, we observed that children with ID were perceived as being less socially adjusted than typical children.

In light of these findings, children with ID would probably benefit from a program that fosters the acquisition of emotional and social skills.

It should also be noted that parents play a major role in the transmission of socio-emotional skills (Eisenberg, 1998a; Grusec et Davidov, 2007). Actually, the **Parental Socialization of Emotion** model proposed by Eisenberg et al. (1998) explains that the way parents react to emotions, the way they discuss them with their children and the way they express their emotions influence the development of the their child's socio-emotional skills.

The variables of this latter model, that we did not consider in this analysis, will be included as part of our broader study. This will help us understand whether mothers play a role in the differences in socio-emotional skills observed between typical children and children with ID.

**Limits:** It is important to note that the results presented here are preliminary and that the evaluation of the children's socio-emotional skills are based on their mother's perceptions. Hence, some mothers may have over or underestimated their child's skills.