



Neurodiverse
Connection

Briefing Report

Autism: Some Vital Research Links.

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Introduction

Since the earliest work into Autism by Sukhareva, nearly 100 years ago (Posar & Visconti, 2017) and the work of Hans Asperger (Asperger & Frith, 1991) and Leo Kanner in the 1940s (Kanner, 1943). There have been many changes, in our knowledge and understanding of Autism.

To begin with a neurodivergent affirming article (Cost et al., 2021). The research team asked 153 families about their Autistic children and their lives. The results showed a positive picture the children were loving, happy, had a zest for life, were caring for others and had a sense of humour, amongst many other positive traits. The researchers noted the growing number of other studies supporting those strengths and positives, including a study of Autistic adults and noting open-mindedness, creativity, love of learning, fairness.

The links that follow in this article will take you to research around honesty, integrity, diligence, empathy, a genuinely different social communication system. This many seem to run against your current understanding of Autism. The research for which is often built around young, middle-class, white, cisgendered boys often with profound support needs and in its earliest forms dates from the 1940s. Because of this early research and the medicalisation of Autism (and other neurodivergences) there has been an assumption that they are just a fault that needs fixing – that one day a scientist will cure this ailment with Potion X. This medicalised and often negative view of Autism through a tragic deficit narrative has persisted. It is frequently coupled with the idea that Autistic people are a financial as well as social burden.

Whilst you may be familiar with the more traditional thinking around Autism and wider neurodivergence, there has for a number of years been a challenge to this school of thought.

In the first instance there is new research focused on the numbers of Autistic people. In their research Roman-Urrestarazu, van Kessel, Allison, Matthews, Brayne and Baron-Cohen (2001), show a rate of about 1 in 30 boys in England being diagnosed Autistic. The start had a large sample size of 7 million children in total. However it is notable that within the study there were very few girls. There is the strong suggestion in the figures that so many areas of England are missing most of the girls from diagnosis. If it is taken that we are missing girls from diagnosis in childhood (and arguably in adulthood) how do we know what Autism is, within this context. If girls are not being diagnosed, it is likely that researchers are not exploring their lived experience due to the aforementioned lack of diagnosis.

With the medicalisation and often incorrect assumptions made about Autism, unusual and often extreme behaviourist approaches have become apparent. This is despite the lack of independent evidence of useful outcomes for the individual, or any actual effect on behaviours of concern. The incorrect belief that Autistic people were empty shells, devoid of caring and empathy, with no clue how to behave like proper humans, led to the alleged gold standard of Autism handling-techniques, Positive Behaviour Support (PBS). It alleged to stop all the so-called challenging behaviour presented by Autism. Such behaviours included dedicated interests or moving in ways that were not considered normalised – such as flapping or other forms of self-stimulation behaviour (also known as stimming). Anything not approved of within the remit of PBS is termed Challenging Behaviour or a Stereotype by behaviourist teams, and therefore must be treated and prevented, often to the detriment of the mental, emotional and physical health of the person under their treatment.

Autism is regarded by many Autistic people as a neurodivergence, or indeed a minority people. Certainly a deeply marginalised group who risks suffer immensely at the hands of some others. Though some have multiple conditions and require a lot of support, it must be stressed that proper support that values and respects all Autistic people and their families, fully, is much needed.

Research and Resources on Autism

What follows is a list of research and resources, full citations plus links to all the research and resources can be found in the reference section at the end of the document.

ABA

Rightful Live Investigates Behavioural Analysis and Support

Video Essay

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1ES9Z1xdWil&t=319s>

This video essay delivered by Alexis Quinn addresses how the gold standard behaviourist approaches do the exact opposite to what's needed, for so many Autistic people. The content is powerful and contains mentions of both self-harm and suicide.

Clinical outcomes of staff training in positive behaviour support to reduce challenging behaviour in adults with intellectual disability: Cluster randomised controlled trial.

Hassiotis, A., Poppe, M., Strydom, A., Vickerstaff, V., Hall, I., Crabtree, J., Omar, R. Z., King, M., Biswas, A., Cooper, V., Howie, W., & Crawford, M. (2018).

Academic Article

<https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/the-british-journal-of-psychiatry/article/clinical-outcomes-of-staff-training-in-positive-behaviour-support-to-reduce-challenging-behaviour-in-adults-with-intellectual-disability-cluster-randomised-controlled-trial/67FB170576C79140E9725DA51525088C>

This three-year longitudinal 2018 study, reviewed the practices of 23 community intellectual disability services in England. The findings show "Staff training in Positive Behaviour Support... did not reduce challenging behaviour. Further research should... endeavour to identify other interventions that can reduce challenging behaviour."

Clinical and cost effectiveness of staff training in the delivery of Positive Behaviour Support (PBS) for adults with intellectual disabilities, autism spectrum disorder and challenging behaviour-randomised trial.

Strydom, A., Bosco, A., Vickerstaff, V., Hunter, R., & Hassiotis, A. (2020).

Academic Article

<https://bmcp psychiatry.biomedcentral.com/track/pdf/10.1186/s12888-020-02577-1>

This large scale 2020 research explored the effectiveness of PBS in 23 community intellectual disability services in England with a participant sample base of n=246. The trial was randomised and following the study the results showed no evidence that PBS works to improve behavioural outcomes for those who are Autistic and have a learning disability.

Early intensive behavioral intervention (EIBI) for young children with autism spectrum disorders (ASD).

Reichow B, Hume K, Barton EE, Boyd BA.

Report

https://www.cochrane.org/CD009260/BEHAV_early-intensive-behavioral-intervention-eibi-increasing-functional-behaviors-and-skills-young

The Cochrane Review is an independent audit of whether early interventions such as Applied Behaviour Analysis ('ABA' often now rebranded as Positive Behaviour Support) improve Autistic lives. The conclusion of the report is that there is weak evidence of vague improvement after two years of effort. This raises question as to whether the ABA/PBS is the route of those improvements or whether it would have occurred without intervention as the children studied matured naturally.

Project AIM: Autism intervention meta-analysis for studies of young children.

Sandbank, M., Bottema-Beutel, K., Crowley, S., Cassidy, M., Dunham, K., Feldman, J. I., Crank, J., Albarran, S. A., Raj, S., Mahbub, P., & Woynaroski, T. G. (2020).

Academic Article

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/31763860>

This study is a comprehensive systematic review and meta-analysis of non-pharmacological interventions with Autistic children. The researchers reviewed many different kinds of interventions for Autism, including ABA/PSB. Their findings showed "...when effect estimation was limited to RCT designs and to outcomes for which there was no risk of detection bias, no intervention types showed significant effects on any outcome." Suggestion that interventions of this type do not support Autistic peoples' outcomes.

The Department of Defense Comprehensive Autism Care Demonstration Quarterly Report to Congress Second Quarter, Fiscal Year 2019.

Inhofe, J., M., (2019)

Report

<https://www.altteaching.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/TRICARE-Autism-Report.pdf>

A 2019 report created by the United States of America's Department of Defense. The report found little evidence of any behavioural changes happening at all when ABA was done to children. The report states: "...The majority of TRICARE beneficiaries (76 percent – parent form) had little to no change in symptom presentation over the course of 12 months of ABA services, with an additional nine percent demonstrating worsening symptoms".

The Department of Defense Comprehensive Autism Care Demonstration Annual Report. Report to the Committees on Armed Services of the Senate and House of Representatives.

Donovan, M. P. (2020).

Report

https://therapistndc.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Annual-Report-on-Autism-Care-Demonstration-Program-for-FY-2020.pdf?fbclid=IwAR2VRj3ygZ4nfVsgMY4UNFXn6hxB9kuEGxSIWfx9uwaltEhfsz_NmquhtFo

The 2020 Department of Defense report shows little difference to the 2019 version. Showing no evidence that ABA is doing anything to change or modify behaviour. Additionally, the report states, it may show that the children simply get older and naturally learn additional skills.

Intensive behavioural interventions based on applied behaviour analysis (ABA) for young children with autism: A cost-effectiveness analysis.

Hodgson, R., Biswas, M., Palmer, S., Marshall, D., Rodgers, M., Stewart, L., Simmonds, M., Rai, D. and Le Couteur, A. (2022).

Academic Article

<https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0270833>

This is a 2022 study looking at whether the ABA industry had proven value for money in the UK. The findings showed that the ABA industry did not show proven value for money. Furthermore, the industry had not produced studies that could be relied on, had not undertaken follow-up studies to find out if the reported improvements continued, and therefore had not looked for or addressed long term harms. The study could not recommend ABA as a

value of money intervention. They authors recommended asking Autistic people what support works for them.

Interventions based on early intensive applied behaviour analysis for autistic children: a systematic review and cost-effectiveness analysis.

Rodgers, M., Marshall, D., Simmonds, M., Le Couteur, A., Biswas, M., Wright, K., Rai, D., Palmer, S., Stewart, L. and Hodgson, R. (2020).

Academic Article

<https://www.journalslibrary.nihr.ac.uk/hta/hta24350#/abstract>

A 2020 National Institute of Health Research major systematic review of ABA and similar intensive behaviourist approaches. The findings showed only one long term study had been conducted on early interventions, within that study only 5 of the participants were female and there was no details of the intervention nor a control group. The systematic review reported that there was limited evidence of something changing due to ABA and other similar methods. Notably the study details that not a single research covered in the systematic review explore any harm or harmful outcomes for their participants.

An initial trial of OPT-In-Early: An online training program for caregivers of autistic children.

Dai, Y. G., Thomas, R. P., Brennan, L., Luu, M.-L., Hughes-Lika, J., Reilly, M., Moreno, P., Obe, B., Ahmed, K. B., Berry, L. N., Goin-Kochel, R. P., Helt, M. S., Barton, M. L., Dumont-Mathieu, T., Robins, D. L., & Fein, D. A. (2023).

Academic Article

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/13623613221142408>

This 2022 paper explores whether ABA worked for young children, over a period of some years. The authors found no difference in behaviour between the children undergoing ABA and related behavioural enforcement, and the ones who did not receive the intervention.

Registered Behavior Technicians' Training Experiences for Severe Problem Behavior: A Survey.

Ralston, A. W., & Brown, K. (2023)

Academic Article

<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s40617-023-00809-w>

A 2023 academic article in which the authors examine Registered Behaviour Technicians. 13% reported receiving no initial training. 29% reported receiving no ongoing training when working with clients who showed distress behaviour. Most concerning, 36% reported their client sustained some type of injury as a result of ABA with them. These statistics do not appear to be reported in standard ABA research. Questions arise as to the nature of the injuries and how they were sustained.

An evaluation of intervention research for transition-age autistic youth.

Bottema-Beutel, K., LaPoint, S. C., Kim, S. Y., Mohiuddin, S., Yu, Q., & McKinnon, R. (2023).

Academic Article

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/epub/10.1177/13623613221128761>

This research examined nearly 200 pieces of research into interventions done to Autistic young people. Only 1 in every 100 researches tested for any adverse effects from what they were doing. None ask the Autistic young people if they benefited or if there was harm caused. Due to poor research design the interventions were not show to work.

Ethical Concerns with Applied Behavior Analysis for Autism Spectrum “Disorder”.

Wilkenfeld, D.A., & McCarthy, A.M. (2020).

Academic Article

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/753840/pdf?>

A useful introduction paper from a philosopher and an ethicist focusing on the lack of ethical integrity involved in normalising Autistic children to make them fit better into society's structures.

Evidence of increased PTSD symptoms in autistics exposed to applied behavior analysis.

Kupferstein, H. (2018).

Academic Article

https://henrykdotcom.files.wordpress.com/2018/02/aia_evidence-of-increased-ptsd-symptoms-in-autistics-exposed-to-applied-behavior-analysis.pdf

A pioneering research detailing whether behaviour therapies may lead to an increase in trauma symptoms. This initial research found a potential link between ABA and PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder).

Autism Spectrum Disorder: The Impact of Stressful and Traumatic Life Events and Implications for Clinical Practice.

Fuld S. (2018).

Academic Article

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6061115/>

This research suggests that behaviourists are not checking for underlying mental health conditions before applying behavioural therapies to Autistic people. Often failing to note that the person has PTSD, in turn suggesting that Autism is causing the behaviours and the person is being challenging. As many behaviourists are unqualified in Autism or mental health conditions, (let alone the highly specialist interplay of Autism and PTSD), this raises issues around safeguarding and potential harm.

Innovation in Autism Practice: The Future is Calling

Scottish Autism (November 2018)

Conference proceedings

https://www.scottishautismconference.org/assets/pdf/Conference_Seminar_Stream_Booklet_170718.pdf

On page 23 of these conference proceeding a preview of the research by McGill & Robinson, Lived "Experiences of Applied Behaviour Analysis: Adult Autistic Reflections on Childhood Intervention" is given. It is a qualitative study of 13 Autistic adults who had ABA as children. 10 found it a mostly negative experience, for example listing 'removal of autistic self' and 'increased vulnerability'.

Results and Analysis of the Autistic Not Weird 2022 Autism Survey.

Bonnello, C. (2022).

Web Article

<https://autisticnotweird.com/autismsurvey/>

The 2022 version of the 2018 survey discussed in the next section. Findings include results on ABA from those who experienced the practices. The findings from Autistic people on ABA did not support it as a practice.

Empathy

Empathy Measurement in Autistic and Nonautistic Adults: A COSMIN Systematic Literature Review.

Harrison, J. L., Brownlow, C. L., Ireland, M. J., & Piovesana, A. M. (2022).

Academic Article

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/1073191120964564?journalCode=asma>

Another key misunderstanding is that Autistic people lack empathy. Within this research the researchers explore the Empathy Quotient, the most popular measure of this supposed lack of empathy. They found that is not an accurate measure of empathy or empathetic behaviour when applied to Autistic people. Raising questions as to the mental, emotional and physical cost to Autistic people caused by a measure that is invalid.

Shifts in Behavioral Synchrony in Response to an Interaction Partner's Distress in Adolescents With and Without ASD.

Zadok, E., Gordon, I., Navon, R., Rabin, S. J., & Golan, O. (2022).

Academic Article

<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10803-021-05307-y#Sec18>

Following on from the previous study this work from 2021, found that the 22 autistic adolescent male participants they studied showed equal empathy to their non-Autistic counterparts.

The relationship between moral judgment and cooperation in children with high-functioning autism.

Li, J., Zhu, L., & Gummerum, M. (2014).

Academic Article

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3945921/>

This research article's findings suggest that Autistic children play more fairly with other children than their neurotypical peers.

Empirical failures of the claim that autistic people lack a theory of mind.

Gernsbacher, M. A., & Yergeau, M. (2019).

Academic Article

<https://psycnet.apa.org/fulltext/2019-75285-001.html>

Many people with academic knowledge of Autism will know the term Theory of Mind (The ability to understand that other people have different thoughts and ideas). It had been viewed as a core reason for Autistic deficits. However this large piece of research from 2019 shows that the concept of theory of mind was seemingly based on a series of misunderstandings.

11,521 people answered this autism survey. Warning: The results may challenge you.

Bonnello, C. (2018).

Web Article

<https://autisticnotweird.com/2018survey/>

This web survey addresses the question – Do Autistic people have empathy, or compassion and general practical caring? The results suggested that most Autistic people do have empathy, compassion and general caring. Bonnello research which also looked at results for those Autistic people who also had learning difficulties, or who also were non-speaking. Within the Autistic with academic learning difficulties 57.32% said they had intense empathy. Within the non-verbal group 62.61% reported intense empathy.

Egocentric biases and atypical generosity in autistic individuals.

Tei, S., Fujino, J., Itahashi, T., Aoki, Y., Ohta, H., Kubota, M., Hashimoto, R.I., Nakamura, M., Kato, N. and Takahashi, H.,(2019).

Academic Article

<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/aur.2130>

This research showed that Autistic people tend to share out money more fairly than others. It suggested that Autistic people were freed from the social bias that leads others to make unfair decisions because they feel a social tie to another person.

What are replicable aspects of the Broader Autism Phenotype among college students?

The answer is not reduced prosocial behaviors.

Riccio, A., Kapp, S. K., Daou, N., Shane, J., & Gillespie-Lynch, K. (2020).

Academic Article

<https://online.ucpress.edu/collabra/article/6/1/6/113051/What-are-Replicable-Aspects-of-the-Broader-Autism?searchresult=1>

a 2020 paper which showed that people with higher Autism scores still do as much to help others as their neurotypical peers.

Autistic adults show enhanced generosity to socially distant others.

Forbes, P. A., Chaliani, I., Schilbach, L., & Kalenscher, T. (2022).

Academic Article

<https://psyarxiv.com/n2mt5/>

A 2022 paper on Autistic strengths, which states: "... Autistic adults were more generous than neurotypical participants, especially to socially distant others, such as strangers... Additionally, we extend previous work showing that autistic individuals are less susceptible to framing effects – whether monetary decisions are framed as potential losses or gains – supporting the view of ‘enhanced rationality’ in autism. Our results show that the differences seen in autism, as well as posing certain challenges, can also have prosocial consequences."

Those with autism make good social psychologists.

Hathaway, B. (2019).

Web Article

<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2019-09-autism-good-social-psychologists.html>

Hathaway presents research that suggests Autistic people are on average better at predicting social psychological phenomena.

Double Empathy Problem

Diversity in Social Intelligence

University Led Project

<http://dart.ed.ac.uk/research/nd-iq/>

This University-Led research project showed that Autistic people genuinely do speak a different social language, and work very well with other Autistic people, collaborating and sharing. The problems happen when there's one Autistic person and one non-Autistic person trying to collaborate, because both misunderstand one another. - See the work on the Double Empathy Problem by Dr Damian Milton (discussed above).

Dr Damian Milton Profile

Academic Profile

<https://www.kent.ac.uk/social-policy-sociology-social-research/people/1419/milton-damian>

Dr Damian Milton's Double Empathy work, and many other very useful papers, can be found at his university profile. A useful resource for those working with Neurodivergent/Neurotypical blended environments.

The double empathy problem

Milton, D. (2018)

Web Article

<https://network.autism.org.uk/knowledge/insight-opinion/double-empathy-problem>

A widely held incorrect opinion in the field of Autism is that it is rare for Autistic people to struggle with sensory difficulties. This may stem from the lack of empathy from non-Autistic people that is noted in this web article by Dr Damian Milton, father of the Double Empathy Problem.

Deficits or differences? A new methodology for studying pragmatic language in autism spectrum disorder (Doctoral dissertation).

Salt, M. (2019).

Doctoral Dissertation

https://macsphere.mcmaster.ca/bitstream/11375/25433/2/Salt_Mackenzie_2019April_PhD.pdf

This research shares the same observation as the previous work. Autistic people communicated and work with Autistic people without problems. The dissertation suggests that

issue arising are a misunderstanding between neurotypes, and not a deficit on the part of the Autistic party.

Atypical social communication is associated with positive initial impressions among peers with autism spectrum disorder.

Granieri, J. E., McNair, M. L., Gerber, A. H., Reifler, R. F., & Lerner, M. D. (2020).

Academic Article

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/1362361320924906?journalCode=auta>

This research showed that Autistic people communicate well with one another and enjoy one another's company.

Neurotype-matching, but not being autistic, influences self and observer ratings of interpersonal rapport.

Crompton, C. J., Sharp, M., Axbey, H., Fletcher-Watson, S., Flynn, E. G., & Ropar, D. (2020).

Academic Article

<https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.586171/full>

This large 2020 study shows similar finding to the previous works discussed. Autistic people get on well with each other. This would suggest issues with the myths and stereotypes surround Autistic people as having a so-called social deficit.

Autistics Make Others Uncomfortable, Instantly.

Wyatt, C. S. (2018)

Web Article

<https://www.tameri.com/wordpress/autisticme/2018/01/13/autistics-make-others-uncomfortable-instantly/>

This web article discusses how many non-Autistic people form instant unfair negative judgements about autistic people, the moment they meet an Autistic person judgements are formed, even before the Autistic person has time to say or do anything.

Behaviour

Sleep problems in children with autism and other developmental disabilities: A brief report.

Valicenti-McDermott, M., Lawson, K., Hottinger, K., Seijo, R., Schechtman, M., Shulman, L., & Shinnar, S. (2019).

Academic Article

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0883073819836541>

This research shows a large sleep deficit for many Autistic people. This could lead to irritability and lack of patience.

Impact of student-teacher relationship quality on classroom behavioral engagement for young students on the autism spectrum.

Losh, A., Eisenhower, A., & Blacher, J. (2022).

Academic Article

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1750946722001143>

Another stereotype of Autistic children is that they have poor behaviour in school, this research suggests this stems from teachers who are aggressive and cold towards Autistic children. This research shows the clear benefit of Autistic children experiencing warm, caring, safe relationships from teachers in schools. The result from these positive relationships was positive behavioural outcomes. The AT-Autism organisation's Synergy programme is worth exploring for ways in which schools can retrain their teachers and achieve great results with Autistic children. The outcome of this research suggest that it better to intervene with the adults in schools, not the child.

EEG abnormalities as a neurophysiological biomarker of severity in autism spectrum disorder: A pilot cohort study.

Nicotera, A.G., Hagerman, R.J., Catania, M.V., Buono, S., Di Nuovo, S., Liprino, E.M., Stracuzzi, E., Giusto, S., Di Vita, G. and Musumeci, S.A. (2019).

Academic Article

<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10803-019-03908-2>

Another potential reason for seemingly aggressive behaviour, epileptiform (electrical) unusual activity in the brain. This article states: "Aggressive behaviours were observed in all patients with epileptiform abnormalities. Conversely, the 85.7% of patients in the no-EEG abnormalities group did not show aggressive behaviours. Statistical analysis confirmed that the epileptiform

abnormalities were correlating with a higher incidence of aggressive behaviour or tantrums ($p < 0.01$).....88.8% of patients in the epileptiform abnormalities group were experiencing self-harm behaviour..." Further research following this article is need as there is potential for meltdowns to be an electrical storm of some kind. Again, this suggest issues with ABA/PBS use in this context – as it could be viewed as punishment for an uncontrollable subconscious act.

Autism and The Myths around Violence.

Memmott, A. (May, 2020).

Blog Post

<https://annsautism.blogspot.com/2020/05/autism-and-myths-around-violence.html>

Ann Memmott's well researched blog post, debunking the myth that Autistic people are more violent than the general populace. Memmott suggest that research indicates that Autistic people are less violent than the neurotypical population.

What interests young autistic children? An exploratory study of object exploration and repetitive behavior.

Jacques, C., Courchesne, V., Meilleur, A. A. S., Mineau, S., Ferguson, S., Cousineau, D., ... & Mottron, L. (2018).

Academic Article

<https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0209251>

This 2018 research shows that Autistic stimming (repetitive behaviour such as flapping or tapping) doesn't stop exploratory learning. Furthermore it helps regulate and calm individuals.

Toward a phenomenological account of embodied subjectivity in autism.

Boldsen, S. (2018).

Academic Article

<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11013-018-9590-y>

This article is about the purpose and essentiality of Autistic stimming. This raises further questions within the ABA/PBS models and must be stressed that unless a stimming behaviour is causing damage to the person or those around them, the behaviour is not to be stopped.

Implications of capacity in the classroom: Simplifying tasks for autistic children may not be the answer.

Remington, A., Hanley, M., O'Brien, S., Riby, D. M., & Swettenham, J. (2019).

Academic Article

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0891422218302531>

This research from 2019 suggests that Autistic children demonstrated excellent background-scanning abilities in classrooms, pointing to a superior ability to use senses to scan for danger.

Criminal Justice

Adults with autism spectrum disorder and the criminal justice system: An investigation of prevalence of contact with the criminal justice system, risk factors and sex differences in a specialist assessment service.

Blackmore, C. E., Woodhouse, E. L., Gillan, N., Wilson, E., Ashwood, K. L., Stoencheva, V., Nolan, A., McAlonan, G. M., Robertson, D. M., Whitwell, S., Deeley, Q., Craig, M. C., Zinkstok, J., Wichers, R., Spain, D., Roberts, G., Murphy, D. G., Murphy, C. M., & Daly, E. (2022).

Academic Article

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/13623613221081343>

This research retrospectively reviewed 1570 adults aged 17-75 over a 17 year period (2003-2020). This large-scale research found that Autistic people were far less likely to be involved in criminal behaviour than their neurotypical counterparts.

Victimization and Perpetration Experiences of Adults With Autism.

Weiss, J. A., & Fardella, M. A. (2018).

Academic Article

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5980973/>

This article suggests that Autistic people more likely to suffer incidents that cause PTSD/cPTSD. Indicating that large numbers are attacked or treated badly by non-Autistic people. In their study of 45 Autistic adults in Canada this research found that Autistic people were more likely to be the victims of crime and no more likely to be a criminal.

Is there a relationship between cyber-dependent crime, autistic-like traits and autism?

Payne, K. L., Russell, A., Mills, R., Maras, K., Rai, D., & Brosnan, M. (2019).

Academic Article

<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10803-019-04119-5>

This Autism and crime paper, outlines the myth that "A diagnosis of autism was associated with a decreased risk of committing cyber-dependent crime". Debunking this myth, their findings report that people diagnosed as Autistic are less likely to commit cyber-crime.

Mental Health

The Vulnerability Experiences Quotient (VEQ): A study of vulnerability, mental health and life satisfaction in autistic adults.

Griffiths, S., Allison, C., Kenny, R., Holt, R., Smith, P., & Baron-Cohen, S. (2019).

Academic Article

<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/aur.2162>

This 2019 article is a study showing how many negative life experiences Autistic people endure, and the impact on our health and well-being. The paper shines light on reasons behind behaviour that resembles trauma symptoms. Outlining the traumatic experiences of Autistic people.

Risk markers for suicidality in autistic adults.

Cassidy, S., Bradley, L., Shaw, R., & Baron-Cohen, S. (2018).

Academic Article

<https://molecularautism.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s13229-018-0226-4>

Cassidy, Bradley, Shaw and Baron-Cohen report that if autistic people are having to mask their Autism (which most behaviourist approaches teach them to do), their risk of suicide rises. They state in the paper "Camouflaging significantly predicted suicidality in the ASC (Autism) group."

What is autistic burnout? A thematic analysis of posts on two online platforms.

Mantzalas, J., Richdale, A. L., Adikari, A., Lowe, J., & Dissanayake, C. (2022).

Academic Article

<https://www.liebertpub.com/doi/full/10.1089/aut.2021.0021>

a 2021 paper on poor mental health outcomes and burnout caused by forcing Autistic people to live inauthentic lives, including links between masking and suicide.

Death by suicide among people with autism: beyond zebrafish.

South, M., Costa, A. P., & McMorris, C. (2021)

Academic Article

<https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamanetworkopen/fullarticle/2774847>

A powerful 2021 research article on how Autistic people can avoid suicide, and the connection between masking and exhaustion & poor outcomes.

Experience of trauma and PTSD symptoms in autistic adults: risk of PTSD development following DSM-5 and non-DSM-5 traumatic life events.

Rumball, F., Happé, F., & Grey, N. (2020).

Academic Article

<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1002/aur.2306>

April 2020, the researcher looking at Autism and trauma, noting that in their study of 59 Autistic people, multiple participants appeared to have had PTSD. The range of traumatic events experienced is vast, however they report that only 1 in 10 Autism service providers actually checked for traumatic events or consider PTSD.

Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders

<https://www.springer.com/journal/10803>

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-020-04393-8>

Academic Journal

This academic journal proves bracing statistics and background on autism and suicide. Including leading academics such as Sarah Cassidy. One study published in the Journal provides evidence that perceptions of burdensomeness, reduced social belonging and exposure to traumatic life events are significantly associated with lifetime suicidality in Autistic adults and addressing these is vital to reduce suicide rates. However, this study also highlights the importance of understanding how these feelings are experienced and communicated by Autistic people and ensuring that our current measures and clinical practices capture these. This study also highlights the fact that a model of suicidal behaviour that works for Autistic people may need to be tailored to reflect distinct experiences, communication and social preferences of Autistic people. Public policy should urgently address rates of stigmatising and abusive traumatic experiences of Autistic people.

Internet addiction and attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder symptoms in adolescents with autism spectrum disorder.

Kawabe, K., Horiuchi, F., Miyama, T., Jogamoto, T., Aibara, K., Ishii, E., & Ueno, S. I. (2019).

Academic Article

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0891422219300472>

Stereotypes suggest that Autistic people more likely to be addicted to alcohol, drugs, internet, etc. This 2019 article with a large sample base refutes this stereotype. They found no link to the main addiction areas. Suggestion that Autistic people are no more likely to be addicted to something than their neurotypical counterparts.

Autism traits, sensory over-responsivity, anxiety, and stress: A test of explanatory models.

Amos, G. A., Byrne, G., Chouinard, P. A., & Godber, T. (2019).

Academic Article

<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10803-018-3695-6>

This article looks at autistic sensory difficulties and notes a strong link between sensory over stimulation and anxiety. The authors recommends better sensory environments for Autistic people to reduce their levels of anxiety.

IQ Test

Relative influence of intellectual disabilities and autism on mental and general health in Scotland: a cross-sectional study of a whole country of 5.3 million children and adults.

Kinnear, D., Rydzewska, E., Dunn, K., Hughes-McCormack, L. A., Melville, C., Henderson, A., & Cooper, S. A. (2019).

Academic Article

<https://bmjopen.bmj.com/content/9/8/e029040.full>

This is a useful newer paper showing the results from a whole country (Scotland) during 2011. It was taken at that point, around 1 in 7 autistic children also had an intellectual disability. There are questions to be asked as to the validity of the IQ test used. It could be argued that if they used the Raven's Progressive Matrices they would have found less intellectual disability (details of the Matrices can be found in the next article).

Gender-specific differences in autism Spectrum cognitive profiles: Wechsler intelligence scales versus Raven's progressive matrices.

Ostrolenk, A., & Bertone, A. (2016).

Academic Article

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/318470420_Gender-Specific_Differences_in_Autism_Spectrum_Cognitive_Profiles_WIS_vs_

Following on from the previous article. This work details how researchers and practitioners have been measuring autistic IQ incorrectly.

Health

Chronic Pain and Health-Related Quality of Life In Women with Autism and/or ADHD: A Prospective Longitudinal Study.

Asztély, K., Kopp, S., Gillberg, C., Waern, M., & Bergman, S. (2019).

Academic Article

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6804669/>

Another reason for behaviour is physical pain. This research shows how many Autistic people are in chronic pain from various medical commonly co-occurring things including hypermobility and Ehlers Danlos Syndrome. This is study on females who are Autistic or have ADHD found that more than three-quarters were in chronic pain. This suggest potential issues with ABA/PBS when the behaviour that is deemed inappropriate stems from the person being in untreated pain.

Face individual identity recognition: a potential endophenotype in autism.

Minio-Paluello, I., Porciello, G., Pascual-Leone, A., & Baron-Cohen, S. (2020).

Academic Article

<https://www.repository.cam.ac.uk/handle/1810/306126>

This study addresses face recognition difficulties (prosopagnosia or face-blindness). They authors state: "The Autistic group showed significant evidence of face recognition difficulties". More than a third of the Autistic people in the study had difficulties identifying people from their faces, in neurotypical groupings it is about 1 in 40 people with that difficulty. As such Autistic people risk being seen as rude or cold when they have merely not recognised someone.

Speech and Language

Understanding definitions of minimally verbal across instruments: Evidence for subgroups within minimally verbal children and adolescents with autism spectrum disorder.

Bal, V. H., Katz, T., Bishop, S. L., & Krasileva, K. (2016).

Academic Article

<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/jcpp.12609>

This is a research on autism and using spoken language. Which calls into question the stereotype that many Autistic people cannot speak. This article studied 1470 children of approximately 10 years old. The findings showed that only 63 of them could not use more than a handful of words. They noted that many of the children had good skill levels in other aspects. With some of the participants using text, technology of other sorts, sign language etc rather than speech. The article suggest that some may develop more spoken language at an older age. This article address the issue of non-spoken language and it is worth noting that Autistic individuals should be supported to communicate, and Speech & Language Therapists are often a good source of help and ideas for this where needed.

Eye-tracking reveals agency in assisted autistic communication.

Jaswal, V. K., Wayne, A., & Golino, H. (2020).

Academic Article

https://www.nature.com/articles/s41598-020-64553-9?fbclid=IwAR18FIGxt77C65JtUITrNXiqsnMQaSJbzn7gNIRId_oQGEyW5F-toSLWen4

Another untrue Autism myth is that Autistic people who do not use spoken language or a computer keyboard cannot possibly communicate using other methods, e.g. pointing to letters on a board. This article debunks this myth, showing that eye tracking technology supports that non-verbal Autistic people can communicate. It is worth noting here, that should someone say, "This Autistic person cannot use spoken words so it's my job to speak for them", it is vital to check what they mean. If the Autistic person has truly delegated authority to them to speak and explained their views to them using their own methods first this is acceptable. If they've decided to speak for them without asking the Autistic person, this is not acceptable (unless a very young child or unconscious/in a coma). It is crucial to enable communication.

The Systematic Review and Meta-analysis of Oral Sensory Challenges in Children and Adolescents with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

Chaware, S. H., Dubey, S. G., Kakatkar, V., Jankar, A., Pustake, S., & Darekar, A. (2021).

Academic Article

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8533039/>

Eating disorders and speech and language situations are discussed in this Systematic Review. The results show that differences in mouth, tongue, sensory system are behind a range of eating and speech and language issues. This includes voice tone, notably Autistic people are often accused of being 'rigid' because they cannot eat or drink certain things, or rude because they may sound bored or angry. Mouth differences are a possible reason for this issue. through working with a good Occupational Therapist and Speech & Language Therapist it is possible to decode potential difficulties and sort solutions.

Autistic listening. Presented at Aural Diversity, Leicester, UK

Davies, W. (2019, November)

Conference Presentation

<https://salford-repository.worktribe.com/output/1361259/autistic-listening>

This conference presentation presents the concept that some Autistic people have better hearing and processing of sound, than the wider population.

Specialist Interests

Characterization of Special Interests in Autism Spectrum Disorder: A Brief Review and Pilot Study Using the Special Interests Survey.

Nowell, K. P., Bernardin, C. J., Brown, C., & Kanne, S. (2021).

Academic Article

<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10803-020-04743-6>

A core misconception is that Autistic people have obsessive interests that interfere with functioning and must be prevented. In this research nearly 2000 young Autistic individuals were surveyed. The research showed that their dedicated interests were a joy to them, rarely interfered, and may lead to useful careers and benefits for them and society. Amongst the most popular focuses of attention were art, music, animals, reading. These findings counter traditional stereotypes of Autistic people specialist interests being mainly in the field of STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics).

Autism, intense interests and support in school: From wasted efforts to shared understandings.

Wood, R. (2021).

Academic Article

<https://tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/00131911.2019.1566213>

This article works to debunk myths surround Autistic special interests. This paper explaining that many autistic children use specialist subjects as a way to learn and to thrive. They are essential tools for many Autistic people.

Mapping the autistic advantage from the accounts of adults diagnosed with autism: A qualitative study.

Russell, G., Kapp, S. K., Elliott, D., Elphick, C., Gwernan-Jones, R., & Owens, C. (2019).

Academic Article

<https://www.liebertpub.com/doi/pdf/10.1089/aut.2018.0035>

This 2019 research details Autistic strengths and Autistic advantages from the accounts of Autistic adults.

Labels

The misnomer of ‘high functioning autism’: Intelligence is an imprecise predictor of functional abilities at diagnosis.

Alvares, G. A., Bebbington, K., Cleary, D., Evans, K., Glasson, E. J., Maybery, M. T., Pillar, S., Uljarević, M., Varcin, K., Wray, J., & Whitehouse, A. J. (2020).

Academic Article

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/1362361319852831>

There are numerous myths of Autistic people being two neat categories, "high functioning" and "low functioning", based on their IQ. This research details that there is no binary high-low, everyone has their own description of how they function, based on age, other diagnoses and a host of other factors. This research would suggest that it is now time to drop the terms high and low functioning as harmful and historic terms.

Avoiding ableist language: Suggestions for autism researchers.

Bottema-Beutel, K., Kapp, S. K., Lester, J. N., Sasson, N. J., & Hand, B. N. (2021).

Academic Article

https://www.liebertpub.com/doi/10.1089/aut.2020.0014?fbclid=IwAR2kokur4miUxHGtQ0vrEiT5D8Akoxy8k3-OIFcMTRttpo2pE-TGI_2uSQU&

This is a very useful article about not using ableist, negative language about Autistic people, and which respectful terms are appropriate.

Race

"Autism in black, Asian and minority ethnic communities: a report on the first Autism Voice UK Symposium".

Kandeh, M.S., Kandeh, M.K., Martin, N. and Krupa, J. (2018).

Academic Article

<https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/AIA-12-2018-0051/full/html>

This 2018 paper discusses Autistic people in Black and Asian Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities, and the need to be sensitive to cultural, religious and ethnic factors, as well as the impact of multiple areas of marginalisation & difficulties obtaining diagnosis, especially for girls (thanks to the early myths associating autism with white boys).

Sexuality and Gender

Sexual orientation and gender-identity in high functioning individuals with autism spectrum disorder (Doctoral dissertation, Deakin University).

George, R. (2016).

Doctoral Dissertation

https://scholar.google.com/scholar_url?url=https://dro.deakin.edu.au/articles/thesis/Sexual_orientation_and_gender-identity_in_high_functioning_individuals_with_autism_spectrum_disorder/21109054/1/files/37451827.pdf&hl=en&sa=T&oi=gsb-gga&ct=res&cd=0&d=1334938516881276053&ei=iUolZdimKMqpy9YPp-6B8AM&scisig=AFWwaeYF-jdXDmcjLsGLLvnZG8sG

With regards to gender and sexuality. This 2016 doctoral dissertation shows that the spectrum of both gender and sexuality is hugely varied within the Autistic Community.

LGBTQ+ and autism spectrum disorder: Experiences and challenges.

Hillier, A., Gallop, N., Mendes, E., Tellez, D., Buckingham, A., Nizami, A., & OToole, D. (2020).

Academic Article

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7430467/>

Useful and clear article on the impact on multiple areas of marginalisation, for Autistic people. With a focus on the LGBTQ+ Autistic experiences and challenges.

Additional Research

The Participatory Autism Research Collective

Research Group

<https://participatoryautismresearch.wordpress.com/about/>

AND

Autscope

Autistic-led Conference

<http://www.autscope.org/>

Both PARC and Autscope are a community for people who want to promote Autistic involvement in Autism research. The focus of both groups is Autistic-led, Autism research.

Conclusion

These are just a few examples of research papers showing positives, and showing Autistic people to be generally good, honest, caring citizens, speaking a different (not broken) social language, and learning from specialised focus. However, Autistic people are greatly at risk from some non-Autistic people, and greatly at risk from inappropriate application of therapies that fail to take account of autistic reality, gender, sexuality, ages, personalities, communication methods, motives, PTSD, other co-occurring conditions and needs.

As we reach the mid-2020s it is time to move on from the shame-filled, ableist language of the 1940s and 1950s, with its misunderstandings, negativity, scaremongering and desperation to control people for being different.

We urge you to go and communicate with the people involved, finding plenty more autism-positive materials, and ways that actually help autistic people. Ways involving respect, responsibility, collaboration, partnership and shared journeying together.

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