



CENTRE FOR AUTISM
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INTRODUCTION

This is a special Middletown Research Bulletin comprising research summaries written by students on the 2023/2024 Graduate Diploma in Autism Studies (GDAS) that is provided in partnership with Mary Immaculate College, Limerick (MIC). The students have summarised articles that are of particular interest and relevance to them.

The Bulletin begins with two interviews: Dr Fiona McCaffrey, a tutor on the course, and Caroline Morris, a student from this year's graduating class.

GDAS is a progression to the MA in Autism Studies, and further details on this and the Graduate Certificate in Autism Studies can be found by following the link <https://www.mic.ul.ie/faculty-of-education/programme/graduate-certificate-diploma-autism-studies>.

Please note that the views represented in this document do not necessarily reflect the views of Middletown Centre for Autism.

The language used in this Bulletin is autism-affirming and neurodiversity-informed. Some of the papers summarised use more medical and deficit-focused terminology and approaches. This Bulletin is created for autistic people, family members and professionals to learn more about research being conducted. The language chosen here is intended to be as inclusive as possible to the broad autism community.

INTERVIEW WITH DR FIONA MCCAFFREY

Brief biography and role on the GDAS course

I have worked in Middletown Centre for Autism since 2007 as head of research and development. I am a chartered psychologist with the British Psychological Society and member of the Division of Academics, Researchers and Teachers in Psychology and a member of the Division of Educational and Child Psychology.

I am a tutor on the GDAS, and I also supported its initial development. Since 2016/2017, the centre has worked with MIC to provide a Graduate Certificate in Autism Studies (GCAS) and it was the graduates of the GCAS who identified further learning needs in the area of autism and requested that we develop a diploma. I was part of the team who developed the GDAS along with Dr Laura Ambrose, Dr Patricia Daly and Kim Maguire as well as my colleagues at Middletown, notably Dr Rachel Ferguson, Majella Nugent and Dr Cat Hughes. Once we developed the materials and proceeded through the academic accreditation process, I was on the initial course board of GDAS and have been working as a tutor and occasional lecturer on the course. So I have been on the journey for both the GCAS and GDAS and later into the Masters in

Autism Studies. The development of the courses has been student led and this has been the most rewarding part of our work; working with a diverse and neurodiverse group of students who are entirely committed to creating a fairer world for their autistic family members, pupils and the broader community.

Fiona, you've supervised some students on the course. Can you tell us what that process is like and how students are supported through the course?

The course is supportive for the students both as a timetabled academic structure and also because our culture on the course is one of support and working together. So in terms of the timetabled sessions, we have a set number of tutorials that we schedule in for small-group supervision; we do these online and in the evenings but we can be flexible to suit the students. The tutorials are important because they give the tutor a chance to get to know the students and their interests and also their concerns. It also gives the students an opportunity to get to know each other and so much support comes from within the small tutorial group. In the tutorials we work through a series of tasks and milestones, and this creates a momentum for the students as they work towards

the set goals, and the tutors provide both written and verbal feedback. At the end of the tutorial sessions the students will have a number of drafts that they have discussed both with the tutors and their colleagues in the tutorial group.

The culture of the course is also one of support. I like to think that we as tutors embody the values that we are teaching about, e.g. being neuroaffirming and strengths based, about different ways of learning and about being flexible and creative. We have long ago adopted the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) as part of our graduate courses and I like to think that we don't just teach it, we deliver it for our students. In this, MIC have been and continue to be leaders in the delivery of UDL in teaching and learning and we continue to learn so much from MIC in how we continue to be a UDL-based course. So this culture of support is embedded in GDAS; we will work with our students and our high levels of student retention are evidence of this.

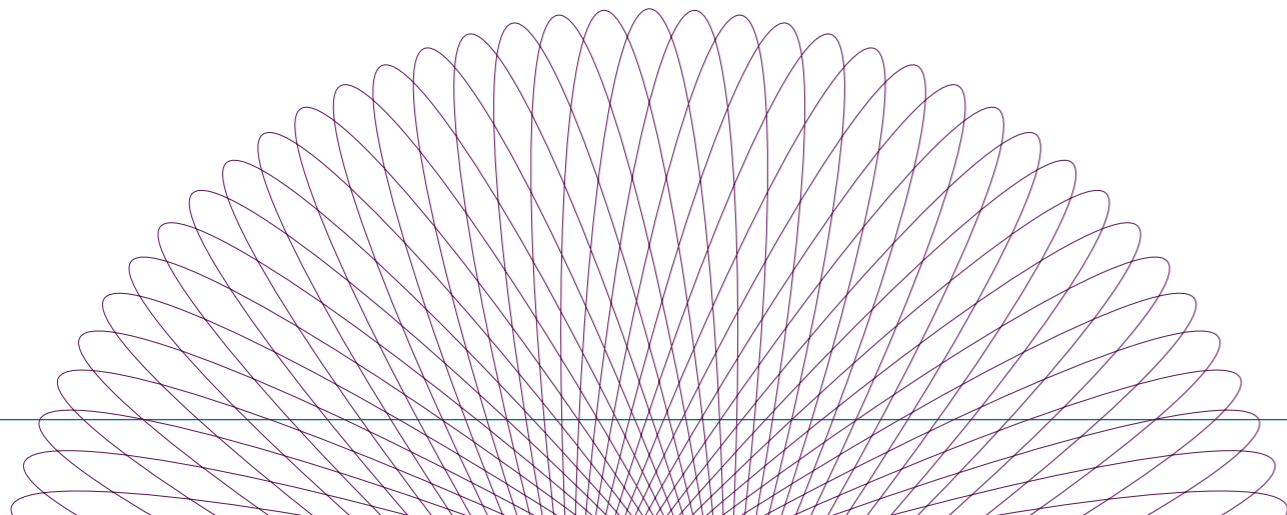
How are autistic voices included in the course to make sure that students are learning from lived experience?

The autistic voice is central in all that we teach. I believe year on year we continue to learn and develop with the autistic voice as the impetus to be better and to strive to deliver teaching and learning that has the potential to support and provoke change that leads to a fairer society for autistic people. We have autistic and neurodivergent tutors and students whose motivation to engage in our course is beyond the academic. This creates a unique space for teaching and learning underpinned by a positive and persistent challenge to ground all aspects of teaching and learning in the autistic experience.

This is observable in how we teach what would normally be considered purely academic subjects, like research methods. We focus on the autistic researcher or the co-produced research, we explore research methods and data collection and its potential impact, we reiterate 'nothing about us without us'.

The GDAS course has been developed for students who want to gain a better understanding of autism research. What are the benefits of focusing on autism research and how can research support the autism community?

We teach our students to question research, to be informed consumers of books and journals. We direct them to the work of autistic researchers and we promote the value of co-production. For me, I think the future of research is autistic-led research – listening to and working on the research priorities of autistic researchers is the only sensible way forward in an academic and policy environment that is striving for inclusion. To this end, we can engage with autistic-led research, and as tutors we need to keep ourselves informed and lead by example in the authors that we read and in the ideas that we want to cultivate as educators. There is definitely a change in culture within the major research conferences. For example, Dr Cat Hughes, who is a tutor on GDAS and a researcher at Middletown, is the first autistic Chair of the Scientific Panel at Autism Europe. Middletown's theme for Autism Acceptance Month was 'we grow by listening' and for me this is the best statement to finish on and something that we will continue to do on our graduate courses in partnership with MIC.



INTERVIEW WITH CAROLINE MORRIS, GDAS STUDENT

What attracted you to the graduate programmes in Autism Studies offered at Mary Immaculate College?

I decided to do the graduate programme in Autism Studies due to a lack of supports and services for neurodiverse family members. At the time I felt that in order to support family members, I needed to understand autism and the experiences of autistic individuals on a deeper level so I could provide person-centred supportive, inclusive strategies. I was curious and wanted to learn more about different profiles of autistic individuals and the differences between boys and girls.

Can you give us a brief description of what you learned from the courses and how your learning impacted your daily practice/life?

Throughout the graduate programme I gained a vast amount of knowledge about the cognitive theories of autism and how they apply to lived autistic experiences. I gained in-depth knowledge and skills regarding sensory processing, behaviour and anxiety, including person-centred strategies to support individuals. My learning gave me the confidence both personally and professionally to challenge stigmas and previously held assumptions about autism from individuals, practitioners and professionals. Learning how to conduct research and critically analyse literature enriched my knowledge and understanding of autistic experiences in topics that have received little attention, including menopause and late diagnosis, and friendship experiences of autistic individuals. My personal and professional growth has exceeded my expectations.

I feel confident in my ability to advocate with autistic individuals and their families, ensuring that problems are not placed inside the autistic person and considerations not limited to challenges associated with the double empathy theory. For example, we must also consider the environment, behaviour of supporting adults, sensory sensitivities and interoception. Furthermore, I feel confident engaging with assessment reports and tools and to critically engage with research regarding autism.

How did you fit in studying around life and work?

Initially it was hard to get the balance right, especially during assignment times; however, I learned over time that small deadlines within the work gave me the focus I needed to engage with the workload. Going from full-time work in GCAS to part-time work in GDAS allowed more time to focus on assignments. Unfortunately, life can throw curve balls when least expected and while it is a juggle to balance it all, linking with other students, writing support and lecturers for support when needed, along with carving out family time, was essential throughout the course.

What advice would you give parents and professionals thinking about taking part in the postgrad diploma in Autism Studies?

I would say to go for it. It will be hard and there may never seem a right time, but it will be worth it in the end. My biggest piece of advice is to reach out for any support necessary from the start – don't wait until stress and worry take over. Find a structure and routine that works for you, as we all learn differently, and what works for one person may not work for you.

EVERYDAY EXPERIENCES OF INCLUSION IN PRIMARY RESOURCED PROVISION: THE VOICES OF AUTISTIC PUPILS AND THEIR TEACHERS

This article was reviewed by Christina Casserly.

In Ireland there are notable figures like Adam Harris, Elaine McGoldrick and Mary Doherty. All of these autistic people have shared personal information and insights of their experiences. All are adults. There is still an absence of research that involves children, specifically primary-school-aged children. As a teacher, Christina has had the privilege of working with autistic children for over 20 years. She is very interested in the voice of the student and their insight into what works for them in school and what does not work.

BACKGROUND

In recent years there has been an increase in and a demand for research that includes the autistic voice. It is the perspective that has been absent from much of the research and literature. Fletcher-Watson et al. (2018) speak of meaningful input from autistic people in research that in turn leads to relevant benefits. Research highlights that including the autistic voice makes research topics and experiences positive and meaningful to autistic people. However, some researchers have emphasised that the voices of children and those with additional educational needs are notably absent from research. Research shows that autistic young people can and should contribute to the discussion on educational provision and change.

There is a clear need to involve the autistic voice of primary-school-aged children in research about their educational experiences to make a positive and meaningful impact on current and future practice.

RESEARCH AIMS

This paper seeks to gain the perspective of autistic students about their everyday school experiences and transitions between the special and mainstream classroom. From the perspectives of the students and teachers, the authors wanted to improve current practice within the school.

RESEARCH METHODS

The authors decided on a small-scale qualitative study, believing this to be more useful to teachers. The researchers co-created a visual storyboard with school staff and used this to access the views of five male autistic students aged 9–11 years. The methodology focused on understanding various aspects of their lives, including transitions between special education and mainstream classes. Additionally, interviews were conducted with six staff members from the resource base to gain further perspectives.

The setting where the research took place was the students' resource base and it occurred during the regular class timetable with familiar staff. Students were encouraged to draw and write about a day at school. The researcher asked the children questions about their storyboards, the activities and times of the day they liked or found difficult. The conversations were audio recorded. A week later staff engaged in an interview that took place in a separate room and was audio recorded.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

The results of the study were divided into four sections addressing the following: structure and routine, friendship and peers, support and communication, and dual identity.

The students displayed preference for the structure and routine of their base classroom.

Staff reported that transitions or ‘the in between times’ proved most difficult for the students. These findings are consistent with what we know about autism. Transitions have been identified as stressful for autistic children, especially when the child hasn’t been prepared for them. Friendship and peers were important to the students and many of them reported having a number of friends. Some, however, found it difficult and felt lonely. Staff had strategies in place to support but felt there needed to be some education about autism for the mainstream pupils. Staff felt that the students were supported well by them throughout the school day both in the base and in mainstream. Overall, the students had a positive response to the idea of dual identity, i.e. being part of both the base and mainstream class. The staff also reported positively overall to this aspect.

STUDENT OPINION

The authors themselves acknowledge quite a number of limitations within the study, including the small sample, focus on one resourced provision and one day on the storyboard. In addition, the staff were involved in developing the research questions, designing the methodology and authoring the paper, as well as being participants in the study. This could have resulted in researcher bias as the questions may have been influenced by what staff wanted to research. It could also influence how they answered the questions and the information provided. However, it could also have contributed to the study being a success. The questions could be focused on areas they wanted to improve. Staff knowing the students may also have aided the study.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

There were some positive outcomes and changes to current practice within the school because

of this study. These changes could easily be implemented in other schools and include:

- Collaboration between staff and students to direct changes within the school.
- Affording students more time to transition and preparing students for change to increase predictability and reduce anxiety.
- Offering the students choice about activities they engage in.
- Using a visual calendar to prepare the student for what activity is expected to occur across the month.

Autistic voices need to be central to decisions about how we include and educate our autistic children. This paper clearly outlined that when we collaborate with students, reflect and review current practice, it results in positive and meaningful outcomes for autistic students and teaching staff.

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‘IT’S NOT JUST IN MY HEAD, AND IT’S NOT JUST IRRELEVANT’: AUTISTIC NEGOTIATIONS OF MENOPAUSAL TRANSITIONS

This article was reviewed by Caroline Morris.

As a mother and professional with an interest in the life course of autistic women, Caroline wanted to gain insight into the intersection of menopause symptoms, autistic traits and if diagnosis is prevalent during this time for women. Caroline was particularly interested in finding out the positive and negative journeys of menopausal autistic women.

BACKGROUND

The intersection of autism and menopause has been largely overlooked until recently, despite the profound impact it can have on women. It’s noted that autism is often underdiagnosed in girls, with many only receiving diagnoses in adulthood. This delayed recognition means that many women may have to adapt to their autistic identity simultaneously with navigating the changes brought on by menopause, leading to significant challenges in maintaining a sense of self.

The double empathy problem, negative narratives and limited research on the autistic experience of menopause all highlight the urgent need for the autistic voice in research and practice to provide person-centred supports and services. From the limited research available, findings suggest that for autistic women, perimenopause and menopause are anxious times associated with negativity and limited professional awareness and understanding. Consequently, there’s a pressing need for greater understanding and support for those facing the dual complexities of autism and menopause.

RESEARCH AIMS

The aim of this study was to identify and understand the positive and negative aspects of menopausal transition, the impact on identity and well-being, and the navigation of supports through an autistic lens.

RESEARCH METHODS

Approval for this study was granted by the author’s Institutional Review Board. Eligibility to take part in the study included being assigned female at birth, being based in the United Kingdom (UK), no intellectual disability, reached perimenopause or menopause, professional or self-identified diagnosis.

Seven autistic females (aged 39 to 63 years, mean=49.4) were recruited via social media and interviewed online by a 22-year-old cisgender autistic researcher. Of the seven participants, age of recognition of autism ranged from 37 to 60 years (mean=46.8), and the onset of menopausal changes ranged from 34 to 56 years (mean=41.7). In the UK, menopause is usually identified through self-report of menstruation in the past 12 months: four participants identified as post-menopausal, three identified as perimenopausal.

Interviews were transcribed and participants were given the opportunity to member check the content. Interview transcriptions were then coded and analysed thematically by both authors.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

This study aimed to understand the lived experiences of peri-menopausal and menopausal autistic women using a qualitative research method. A semi-structured format and flexibility to explore issues provided space for participants to discuss their experiences, which resulted in three emerging themes:

- Uncertainty about Changes pertained to the struggles in recognising and understanding physical and emotional shifts during early menopause.
- Growing Self-Awareness and Self-Care highlighted transformative mid-life events shaping self-perception.
- Navigating Support Options outlined challenges in accessing support.

The progression of menopausal symptoms and autistic traits were acknowledged by participants as contributing to their late diagnosis. The participants described positive and negative experiences using language including 'awareness', 'relief', 'natural', 'difficult', 'in your mind', 'anxiety', 'confusing' and 'unsettling'. Other studies report similar findings, including positive and negative experiences of menopause, the road to diagnosis (Moseley et al., 2021), lack of support and heightened sensory changes.

STUDENT OPINION

This study provides a clear understanding of the lived experiences of menopause for autistic women, drawing on positive and negative constructs. Although lacking in diversity, it does provide an insight to autistic experiences regarding uncertainty about change, self-awareness and navigating supports. While all women experienced

negative associations with menopause, some found this transition empowering, contributing to their late autism diagnosis.

The authors demonstrate validity and rigour providing a clear aim, method application and process applied to the topic. Recruitment and interview strategies are clearly explained and both positive and negative experiences of menopause, including the importance of further research, are discussed by participants and documented by the authors, focusing on the voice of the autistic community. However, given the small sample size and lack of a comparison group, it could be argued that this study lacks the experiences of a more diverse group of autistic and non-autistic individuals during menopause.

With limited research in the area of menopause and autism, and inadequate training and education of professions across healthcare environments, it is vital going forward that a deeper understanding of camouflaging, autism, menopause and the impact on ageing are explored through an autistic lens.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

Continued professional development is highlighted throughout this study for all practitioners in the area of autism, menopause and the intersection of symptoms. Understanding camouflaging and internalised traits may promote earlier diagnosis, reducing gender bias and incidents of overshadowing by professionals (Hull et al., 2020). Accessible information related to this topic should be available across all healthcare settings and environments, ensuring that the communication needs of autistic people are paramount, complementary to peer support. Researchers and professionals should work together with the autism community to reduce the double empathy problem. As little

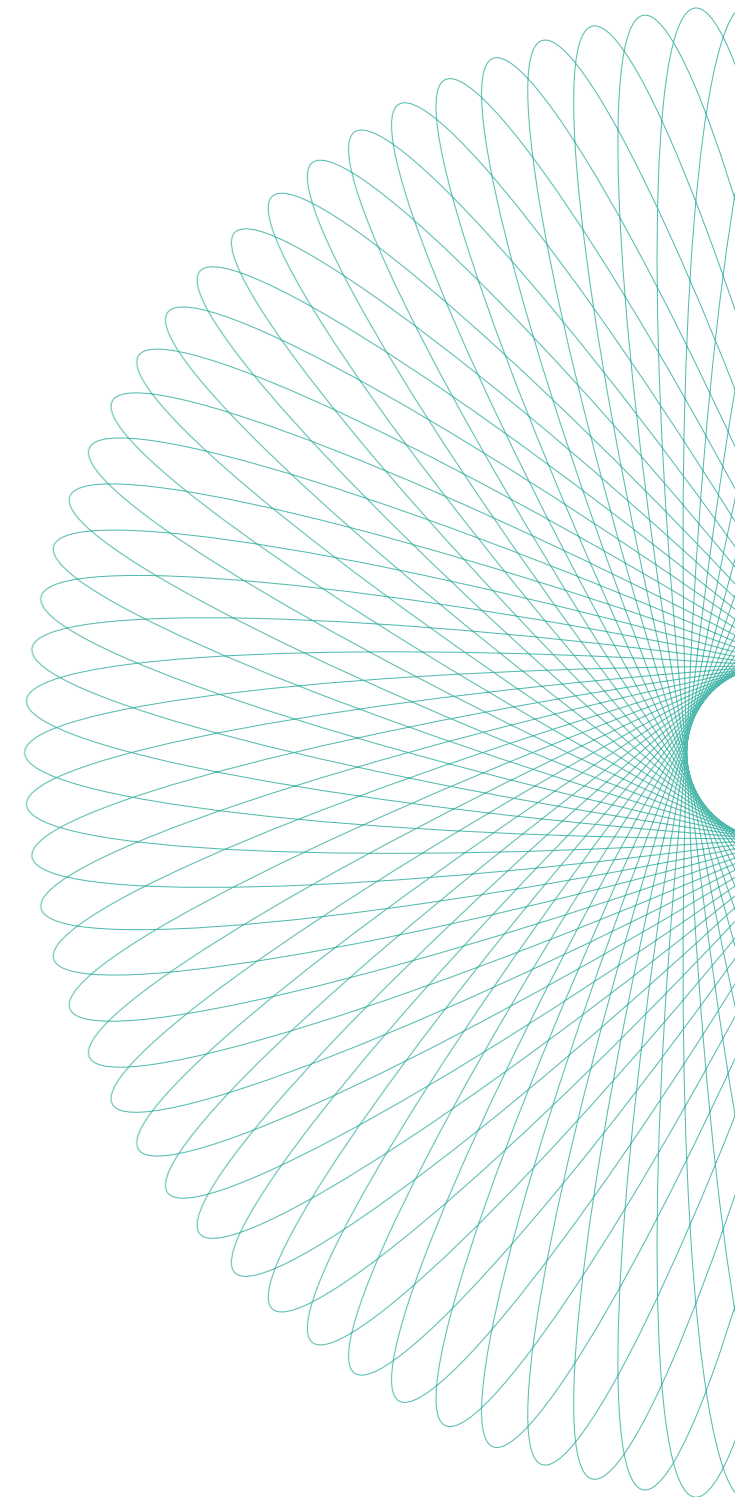
research is available regarding autism and ageing, understanding the challenges of menopausal women is vital to secure long-term health and well-being supports and strategies.

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DISTRACTION, DISTRESS AND DIVERSITY: EXPLORING THE IMPACT OF SENSORY PROCESSING DIFFERENCES ON LEARNING AND SCHOOL LIFE FOR PUPILS WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDERS

This article was reviewed by Aileen McAuliffe.

Aileen is a primary school teacher from Cork with experience teaching in both the mainstream classroom and in autism classrooms. Aileen chose to review this article to identify the impact sensory differences have on the educational experiences of autistic children. From her professional practice, Aileen observed supporting sensory regulation as one of the biggest challenges for teachers in the school environment. The aim of this review was to understand how these sensory experiences impact autistic children's experiences in school and identify supports that can promote positive sensory experiences.

BACKGROUND

From a parent and teacher perspective, this review will explore the impact of sensory processing for autistic children in the school environment. Sensory processing can be defined as the ability of the brain to acquire, classify and accurately decipher sensory input received from the environment through the eight senses.

RESEARCH AIMS

The overall aim of this study was to analyse and examine the sensory experiences of autistic children in the primary setting through teachers' and parents' perspectives. It further aimed to identify how these sensory experiences impacted the daily learning and school life of autistic children. It aimed to analyse what type of sensory experiences had the greatest impact on learning and why these sensory experiences caused the greatest challenges for autistic children. From this data, it aimed to identify what implications this would have on current and future learning for autistic children.

RESEARCH METHODS

A mixed method approach was followed, employing both qualitative and quantitative methods using online questionnaires. This incorporated two online questionnaires: one for teachers and one for parents, which were based off previously created questionnaires. This study design allowed for the impact of sensory processing in the classroom to be measured through closed-ended questions in the questionnaire, and to collate first-hand experiences and narratives of sensory experiences of children observed in the classroom through free response questions. Through purposive and convenience sampling, 57 parents were recruited representing 59 autistic children and 70 teachers, 62 of who were female. All teachers reported having experiences working with autistic children. These participants were gathered through the Special Educational Needs Co-Ordinator (SENCO) network, ties with various schools and advertisements on various media platforms. Purposive and convenience sampling allowed for knowledgeable and experienced participants to be contacted through the SENCO network, and conveniently sourced through online platforms.

Data collection

Once questionnaires were completed, qualitative data was analysed thematically using the Braun and Clarke (2006) approach. Data was triangulated, analysed, grouped, themes attached and themes named with relevant examples provided for each theme. All authors were involved in this process to ensure creditability of results. The quantitative data in the questionnaire was analysed using descriptive statistics and Fisher's exact test.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

The findings aimed to identify how teachers and parents knew that a change in sensory experiences affected children. Teachers and parents observed a change in the sensory environment accompanied by a change in the child's behaviour through various atypical behaviours. These behaviours included closing their eyes, covering their ears, blocking their ears or an increase in hand stimming. Participants identified that an increase in distressed behaviour indicated sensory regulation difficulties within that environment. This observation is backed by research that notes that sensory difficulties are marked by a change in behaviour or atypical response.

Secondly, it identified that all participants stated that sensory experiences had the largest impact on school life and learning. This finding was further examined by identifying what sensory experience impacted children most frequently. Auditory and tactile were found to have the largest impact on learning. Lived experience accounts from autistic adults support this finding, recounting the physical pain they would experience from auditory and tactile experiences.

Finally, the research examined how sensory differences affected autistic children and ways they can be minimised and the children supported in the classroom. The study identified that sensory difficulties affected them through emotional and physical discomfort, lack of focus, anxiety and limited participation in class activities. Further research supports this finding with sensory processing differences noted as a precursor and contribution for further difficulties with emotional development, rigidity in behaviour, communication difficulties and anxiety. The study found that support can be provided through giving autistic children choice, predictability and appropriate OT supports.

Experts identify these strategies as key supports for autistic children within the classroom.

STUDENT OPINION

A key strength of this study was the identification of purposeful and meaningful findings from participants on how sensory experiences affect autistic children in the classroom and the subsequent lifelong effects. Participants also noted how they helped children with sensory regulation, such as tactile supports. These findings directly correlate with existing research on long-term sensory processing effects (Fletcher-Watson and Happé, 2019).

The use of a convenience sampling method through procuring participants on online platforms and networks limited the researchers in whom they could choose to participate in the study. This was most evident in the diversity of the participants, with all parents participating being mothers (57) and 62 out of the 70 teachers participating being female. It was also recorded in the study the lack of the autistic voice, with no autistic pupils included in the study, which limited the credibility of the study. The researchers noted this limitation, stating that future research would include first-hand sensory experiences from autistic pupils through different methods such as interviews. This would allow for rich multi-perspective data to be collected and analysed.

To maximise the quality and trustworthiness of the study and reduce bias, online questionnaires were implemented that minimised the researchers from portraying their own bias towards participants and affecting the research. Furthermore, questions were based off previously implemented interview schedules, reducing researcher bias when questions were created.

No training was required to implement this research programme. The use of online questionnaires will allow for the study to be replicated and transferred into different settings. This ensures there is reliability in the results and that the data can be reproduced and replicated.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

Through identifying the impact of auditory and tactile sensory inputs on autistic children, it will allow for specific supports to be implemented in the classroom to support sensory regulation. These supports will minimise discomfort, lack of focus and anxiety, and increase overall participation in class activities.

This study also identified specific supports for autistic children in relation to their sensory challenges in the classroom and how their sensory needs can be practically met. This will allow for evidenced-based practices to be adopted into the school environment, including greater choice and structure in their school environment, an appropriate classroom design that meets their sensory needs and greater overall staff understanding in sensory processing. Research highlights the clear need for prediction and structure in the environment, which will reduce distraction and improve focus.

A final implication is the need for greater training in sensory processing for teachers and parents to ensure they understand how to best support sensory needs, reduce sensory distress and minimise future difficulties, such as anxiety, for autistic children.

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AN EXPLORATION OF TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF HOW THE CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT CAN SUPPORT PUPILS WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER (ASD) IN THE MAINSTREAM PRIMARY SCHOOL

This article was reviewed by Sarah Priestly.

Sarah is a primary school teacher who has worked with many autistic students in mainstream classrooms. During her time undertaking B.Ed in Mary Immaculate College she specialised in early childhood education. This year she is teaching junior infants in a mainstream class and there is a little boy in her class who has recently been diagnosed as autistic. This is the fourth year in her career teaching junior infants and she has noticed that oftentimes children start school in mainstream junior infants before they receive an assessment or are diagnosed as autistic; therefore, she chose to review this paper on teachers' perceptions of how classroom environments can support autistic students in mainstream settings out of interest on how to inform her daily practice.

BACKGROUND

The Education Act (Government of Ireland, 1998) highlights the importance of education for every child, with support services and quality education essential for children with special education needs. More recently, the National Council for Special Education stressed the need for structured learning environments, including visual structures, as a vital element of education provision.

Research has suggested that overuse of the visual environment in the classroom can negatively impact engagement, with poorer learning outcomes associated with greater attention paid to visual aids. Conversely, research has also shown that visuals in the classroom can provide benefits such as stimulating discussion, encouraging peripheral learning and providing a scaffold for learning.

Visual schedules have been found to provide support for transitions and independence. Used

as visual timetables, they can provide routine and structure for learners.

RESEARCH AIMS

The aim of the study was to understand teachers' perception of how classroom environments support autistic pupils in mainstream schools.

RESEARCH METHODS

Teachers' perceptions of how classroom environments support autistic children are measured through one-to-one semi-structured interviews. Data was analysed using Braun and Clarke's six-phase approach, which details how to code and analyse data until themes are evident.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

The physical and temporal environment were the themes that emerged. All participants considered visual supports important in physical learning environments. They highlighted that they were beneficial for all children in the class. They found that classroom organisation (such as organisation boxes/shelves) can support children in the classroom. Participants also emphasised the attention paid to the temporal structure of the school day, with routine, predictability, transition times and prior warning to change playing an important role.

The findings show that organisation and structure impact engagement. This reflects the view of Grandin (2006), outlining that sensory mixing can occur if environments have too many focal points. Routines promote engagement in learning as temporal environments are manageable and better understood.

STUDENT OPINION

This qualitative study's design of participatory action research is appropriate as the researcher explores lived experiences. Thematic analysis is a strength of this study. The researcher used Braun and Clarke's six-phase approach to establish themes. This enhanced the trustworthiness of the findings. Themes emerged from the collected data only, resulting in less researcher bias.

Non-probability purposive sampling was used to select teachers with experience of teaching autistic pupils. This is positive as participants have knowledge of autism and the lives of autistic students. Conversely, the sample is small, with only five teachers from one West of Ireland county, and cannot represent the full population of teachers. Research suggests that meaningful input can be gathered from autistic people during autism research, but it is unclear here if any participants are autistic.

Diversity of participants can be seen in their teaching roles. The sample comprises an ASD class teacher and four mainstream class teachers, one of whom spent several years as a special education teacher.

Another limitation is the lack of autism affirmative language used throughout. SDCAadmin (2017) claims that the perception of autism can be changed by the use of positive language.

The researcher was conscious of her values and beliefs to reduce bias. She completed a reflective diary and piloted the interview. Thereby the researcher could filter out biased, leading and offensive questions.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

The findings focus on visuals, organisation and structure as aspects of physical environments to consider when supporting autistic learners. A clear implication for practice is the need to consider other aspects of the environment, such as how environments impact sensory processing and may reduce sensory overload. Sensory processing issues can prevent full engagement in learning for autistic people.

Researchers highlight that parents within the autism community want research on ways to promote independence. Another implication for practice is that alterations to classroom environments should be used in other environments to increase independence. This approach could also be applied to the outdoor environment.

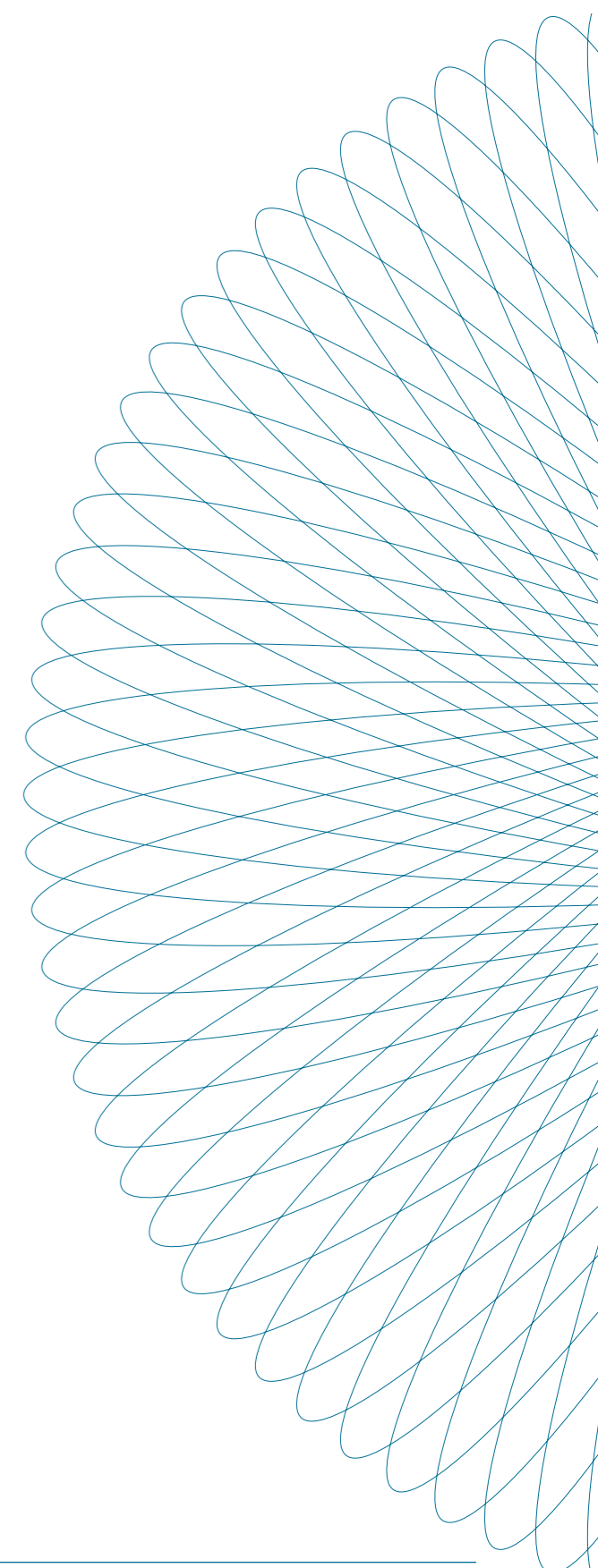
A third implication for practice is the need for continued professional development so teachers have up-to-date knowledge of best practice. People and circumstances change over time, so adaptations to environments must consider these changes.

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Article Reviewed

Tynan, F. and Davy, K. (2021). An exploration of teachers' perceptions of how the classroom environment can support pupils with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) in the mainstream primary school. *REACH: Journal of Inclusive Education in Ireland*. 34(1), pp. 6–17, available: <https://www.reachjournal.ie/index.php/reach/article/view/314>



UNDERSTANDING THE SUPPORT EXPERIENCES OF FAMILIES OF CHILDREN WITH AUTISM AND SENSORY PROCESSING DIFFICULTIES: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

This article was reviewed by Muireann Fitzpatrick.

Muireann chose to review this article for both personal and professional reasons. As a specialist in the early years sector, she works alongside families of autistic children as they share their journey of accessing support. As a parent of two autistic children, she also has experience accessing both statutory and private support. Muireann is aware of the implications this can have on the child, finances and the pressure it can create as parents aspire to give their children the best possible start in life. She is also cognisant of the impact sensory processing differences can have on the daily life of the autistic child and their family.

Muireann searched for papers with a family connection. She believes that consideration and support must be given to the family unit in conjunction with the autistic person they care for. Muireann is intrigued to explore the perspectives of parents and caregivers in relation to support services they find most beneficial. This particular study demonstrates the need for a clearer road map of support services for autistic children and their families. It highlights the difficulties families face accessing support across the United Kingdom (UK).

BACKGROUND

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) (2021) defines sensory processing as the ability of the brain to absorb, organise and process information from the environment. Research has found that 90–95 per cent of autistic individuals experience sensory processing challenges. Such challenges have been reported to significantly impact the social relationships, employment, quality of life and learning of autistic people and be related to greater strain among caregivers. The authors of this study suggest that parents of autistic children who experience sensory

processing challenges may require additional assistance or support. Few studies have explored the accessibility and usefulness of these supports.

RESEARCH AIMS

This research study aimed to support the autistic community by establishing the views of parents or caregivers of autistic children who experience sensory processing challenges. It aimed to look at support provisions for families across the UK and examine how useful the interventions are.

RESEARCH METHODS

This was a qualitative study, funded by Cardiff University, that explored the lived experiences of participants and focused on how support services may impact their daily lives. This qualitative study was conducted as part of a randomised controlled trial exploring the effectiveness of sensory integration therapy for autistic children experiencing sensory challenges, namely the SenITA study (sensory integration therapy vs usual care for children with ASD) (Randell et al., 2019). Participants comprised parents or caregivers of 30 children aged 5–11 years, originally part of the SenITA study. Children initially included were required to attend mainstream school, have a diagnosis or be undergoing an assessment for autism and experience sensory processing challenges.

On agreement of taking part, information packs were sent to parents and carers who completed a timeline noting the various supports and interventions they had experienced to date with their child. Participants were requested to complete their timeline prior to partaking in the interview. Interviews took place either face-to-face or by phone to accommodate families. Interview questions were developed collaboratively with parents of autistic children.

A framework approach was used to analyse data and generate themes. Three main themes were encountered and chosen for closer examination: support provision, usefulness of support and gaps in support. Subthemes were identified and an analytic framework was developed by the researchers to code data using Nvivo. Themes and subthemes were supplemented with illustrative quotes, allowing for theme validity to be evaluated by all researchers.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

While this study identified a significant gap in therapeutic supports provided by health professionals, advice from parents of autistic children attending support groups was considered more acceptable and informative. Additional findings noted that parents felt dismissed by health professionals, resulting in significant delays in diagnosis and support provision. This directly impacted both the families and individual children in this study. The study authors identified the need for autism-specific training for health professionals and a more clearly defined pathway of supports for families.

In recent decades there has been a significant increase in autism diagnoses. Estimates from the World Health Organisation report that approximately one in every 100 children have an autism diagnosis. With this in mind, we must consider how the current framework of supports can meet the needs of this ever-growing community of autistic individuals and their families.

Studies have noted a link between sensory processing challenges and engagement with the local community. They reported that study participants identified an increase in sensory sensitivities due to environmental factors. They also identified that additional supports and training is required to understand behaviour and

promote multisensory environments. The current article also concluded that additional training is necessary for health professionals to further their knowledge and understanding of autistic experience with a view to supporting both the child and family.

This study failed to explore the possibility of co-occurrences and the implications this may have on the associated supports and services required by the individual child and their family. It is well documented that autistic individuals often meet the criteria for co-occurring diagnoses such as epilepsy or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). With this in mind, it must be considered whether this study can be valid in identifying the support requirements of this cohort without clarifying the presence of further underlying diagnoses.

The original SenITA study incorporated a sensory integration programme during trials. Sensory integration relates to how the nervous system receives, processes and organises information from the body and the environment, noting how sensory processing challenges have a neurological basis. This study may benefit from adopting a longitudinal study design. This would allow for benefits of sensory-based supports to be explored over time, directly impacting service provision for the autistic child and their family.

A requirement of this study was that all children attend mainstream education. The student reviewer recognises the value of including the experiences of parents and caregivers of autistic children attending more specialised schools. Including a more representative sample would support the external validity of results in future studies.

Moreover, the use of plain English to avoid jargon ensured the understanding of the interview questions for parents and caregivers. A limitation

of this study may include offering participants a voucher for partaking. This leads to questions as to whether this influenced participants' answers to the interview questions.

STUDENT OPINION

With the above considerations, it is necessary to explore the specific training requests of parents and caregivers in more detail, comparing those who have availed of support and those still awaiting. This could be explored both nationally and internationally.

Future research may also expand the current cohort of participants to include autistic individuals with a co-occurring diagnosis. A longitudinal study may also be beneficial in identifying the long-term impact of this research on the autistic community.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

The findings of this research paper give way to reflection on the current pathway of available supports in the UK, with much scope needed to further enhance the current accessibility of support provisions for autistic children. In agreement with the World Health Organisation, the provision of supports, both statutory and voluntary, has a direct impact on the quality of life of the autistic person and their family.

Considering the comments made by parents and caregivers in this study, areas including masking may need a more direct focus. Masking outside the home was viewed as a barrier to support by parents. However, masking can serve as a protective measure in contexts where a person feels unsafe. On a personal level, Muireann aspires to consider this aspect more acutely going forward in her professional capacity.

Exploring the impact of sensory supports, including sensory integration training, helps to inform the autistic community about approaches that may prove useful in supporting sensory modulation. As there is a high prevalence of sensory processing challenges among autistic children, this is a significant finding as a supportive therapy approach. This has a direct impact on the autistic community and could be used to influence policy to establish more appropriate sensory-based supports for this age cohort.

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Article Reviewed

Milosevic, S., Brookes-Howell, L., Randell, E., Williams-Thomas, R., Delpont, S., Busse, M., Gillespie, D., Ahuja, A.S., McKigney, A.M., Glarou, E. and McNamara, R. (2022). Understanding the support experiences of families of children with autism and sensory processing difficulties: a qualitative study. *Health Expectations*. **25**(3), pp. 1118–1130. Available: DOI:10.1111/hex.13465. [Accessed 15th September 2023.]

TEACHER CHARACTERISTICS, KNOWLEDGE AND USE OF EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICES IN AUTISM EDUCATION IN IRELAND

This article was reviewed by Anne Smith.

Anne is a primary school teacher in Dublin with an interest in the inclusion of autistic children in the mainstream classroom. From experience and from discussions with colleagues, she found that there was a lack of training and continued professional development (CPD) relating to autism for mainstream primary school teachers, and particularly in evidence-based practices and how they could be implemented in the mainstream classroom.

BACKGROUND

The majority of autistic students are now educated in inclusive settings. This means that all teachers need knowledge and flexibility to meet the needs of a variety of students. The extent to which teachers can provide appropriate individualised education has been found to be an important factor in student outcomes. Evidence-based practices (EBPs) have been found to benefit social, communicative and academic outcomes for students.

Research shows that training/CPD and knowledge is essential when implementing EBPs, with many teachers lacking confidence in both choosing and implementing EBPs. This study considers the gap between research and implementation of EBPs and seeks to identify barriers to teachers' use of EBPs with autistic children.

RESEARCH AIMS

The study has two aims:

1. To collect an overview of teacher characteristics.
2. To examine if these characteristics can be associated with knowledge or use of EBPs.

RESEARCH METHODS

Recruitment was via email and social media in Ireland. In total, 369 mainstream primary teachers, with experience of teaching at least one autistic child, from all 26 counties participated. Respondents completed an online questionnaire via an anonymous link lasting 12 minutes, centring on demographic information, teacher experience/training and support from professionals. Each respondent rated their knowledge on a 5-point Likert scale. Knowledge and use of EBPs was measured using an adapted version of the Early Intervention Practices Scale.

The 369 respondents were in a variety of roles: general educators, learning support teachers, dual principal-teachers and autism class teachers. However, there is no mention whether any of these teachers were part of the autistic community, nor does it state if the autistic community had expressed a need for this research.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Results of this research study indicate that the majority of the 369 mainstream primary teachers involved received very little initial training in autism and virtually no CPD before working with autistic children, while knowledge and use of EBPs differed significantly.

Autism class teachers had greatest knowledge/use of EBPs and mainstream teachers had the lowest. Teachers who engaged with CPD were most knowledgeable and used EBPs the most. Teachers who had access to support from professionals had highest knowledge and used EBPs the most. The most commonly used practices were social stories (50.5 per cent) and visual supports (24.1 per cent).

STUDENT OPINION

Each respondent answered using a 5-point Likert scale, providing quantitative data. However, there could be the possibility for personal interpretation of the phrases used in the scale by each respondent. The paper does not comment if informed consent was stated but the online survey was anonymous and confidential. The researchers state that they have no conflict of interest to disclose but they do not state if the results were communicated back to the respondents before publication.

The implementation can be replicated but may be more difficult to adopt in some mainstream contexts due to diversity in each school. However, while teacher training and CPD are essential before implementing EBPs with autistic children, having a high knowledge of EBPs may not translate into a high level of implementation.

Rigour was established through planning and pilot testing with a transparent and systematic methodology. Validity was achieved as similar results have been found in other studies and this study could be reproduced again.

There may be bias in this study that could skew the results as possibly only teachers interested in the area of autism/EBPs chose to participate in the online survey.

Strengths include that all 26 counties of Ireland were represented in this research study. Another strength is that the findings of this study display results similar to other research conducted in Ireland and internationally, reflecting that there is a lack of training and knowledge in this area.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

This study presents us with clear implications: both initial teacher training and ongoing CPD must include training on working with autistic

children and the implementation of EBPs. There are implications for providers when designing and delivering training/CPD so that there is an effective method of dissemination. One possible solution is training the trainer so that there is an autism/EBP expert in each school for support and mentoring. CPD should also include collaborative practice and knowledge of relevant research. Teachers should also have access to professionals on a regular basis.

The autistic community should be included in future research and in designing training for teachers in order to give an insight into what is relevant. We should also bear in mind the lack of research in relation to knowledge and training of special needs assistants (SNAs) in mainstream classrooms as it could also be inadequate.

The goal of training/CPD is to impact practice, so school leaders should constantly monitor training to ensure that there is correlation between high levels of knowledge and high levels of implementation.

Initial and ongoing CPD are imperative as research shows EBPs have positive outcomes for autistic students socially, academically and can support regulation and communication, but also that teachers' expertise and professional development play a huge part in these positive outcomes. If training is addressed, then teachers' confidence in teaching autistic children and using EBPs will also increase.

Article Reviewed

Barry, L., Holloway, J., Gallagher, S. and McMahon, J. (2021). Teacher characteristics, knowledge and use of evidence-based practices in autism education in Ireland. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*. 52(8), pp. 3536–3546. DOI:10.1007/s10803-021-05223-1

SAME WORD, SAME PICTURE, DIFFERENT RESPONSES: EXPLORING TEACHERS' AND AUTISTIC ADOLESCENTS' CONCEPTIONS OF AUTISM

This article was reviewed by Mark Dunne.

Mark Dunne is a primary school teacher in Ireland. Having graduated Mary Immaculate College with a Bachelor of Education in 2018, Mark found himself working in the area of special education for the first five years of his career. Having gained experience across all settings of special education, Mark is currently working in a mainstream rural school.

Mark decided to review this article due to an understanding that within an Irish context, research in the area of teacher attitudes to autism is limited. In order for inclusion to be successful and beneficial for all parties, the conception and perspectives of both the teacher and autistic individual's understanding of autism must be considered. As an educator in primary education, the need for appropriate and research-based understanding of autism is fundamental.

BACKGROUND

The inclusion of autistic individuals in mainstream education has long been a source of academic and education discourse. Research shows that teachers' attitudes are an important indicator to successful inclusion in education settings.

This area of research is of current interest to the autistic community. Holmes (2022) in his research observed that autistic individuals have remained a muted group in terms of research pertaining to inclusion.

Vincent and Ralston (2019) suggested that teacher knowledge of autism is a precursor for successful inclusive practices, opportunities and research in well-being at second level, and that autistic students found it was critical for teachers to be understanding of individual needs. These studies

highlight the importance and need for identifying misconceptions of autism within education.

The study was carried out to identify how teachers and autistic adolescents conceptualise autism. A priority of the research was to provide the autistic community with a sense of agency within the research. The study itself involved the use of 12 images, decided upon by the autistic community, to establish how the participants conceptualised autism. Researchers used an agreed-upon opening question to elicit participants' understanding of autism before seeking their photo-elicitation responses from the set of 12 images. Interestingly, one image was selected by all participants in the study, but their rationale varied greatly, highlighting the varying degrees of understanding that exists of autism.

RESEARCH AIMS

The real or lived experiences of educators and autistic students have been fundamental in exploring an understanding of autism. This research is looking at how similar/dissimilar the participants' conceptions of autism are, and how this affects autistic students in school. This research study also aims to explore how other factors might influence autistic students' feelings of acceptance and support in the school setting.

RESEARCH METHODS

A qualitative approach was used when exploring the conceptions of autism among teachers and autistic individuals. A phenomenological approach allowed researchers to explore the experience of participants. Teacher recruitment was conducted through invitations via their university where they were studying postgraduate courses in autism, to which six replied. Semi-

structured interviews and photo-elicitation activities were employed. Four autistic students responded to an advertisement in an autism-specific support centre to participate in the study. Participants began with an open-ended question asking them to elicit a thought when they heard the word 'autism'. This provided researchers with a baseline of initial thoughts prior to any conceptions that may be linked to the photographs provided.

An important note in the research method was the implementation of an autistic adults reference group that provided feedback during the data collection process.

Semi-structured interviews for educators took place at a time and place of convenience for them, while the young autistic individuals interviewed all preferred to have their parents present. Including parents in the interviews can lead to both positive and negative reactions. Participants may feel comfortable exploring the questions with a supportive person present; however, the opposite must be noted – participants might be reluctant to share full feelings around caregivers. Safeguarding issues were addressed in ethical application with appropriate steps put in place for the autistic individuals' interviews, such as sensory considerations for the autistic individual to engage in the research. The researcher who attended the research programme asked the questions, providing a consistency of up-to-date research methods within the autism community. Four autistic adults from the reference group were also interviewed, to which their responses were not included in the ultimate findings.

The researchers employed semi-structured interviews as well as photo-elicitation activities to obtain the data required. The data collection method saw rigour applied through a structured approach. An initial open-ended question led to

a photo-elicitation activity and built on what was discussed. Transferability in terms of research is acknowledged here as the same 12 pictures can be used in further studies, but the caveat of the opening questions could determine the trajectory of further research if more exploratory questions are used.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

The hypothesis of the study was supported. Thematic analysis identified three themes across the research: the role of lived experience on conceptions of autism, the influence of autism popular culture on conceptions of autism, and the influence of conceptions of autism on expectation and outcomes for autistic students all identified.

The most notable area of discussion was the use of language by the teachers interviewed. The medical model of autism appeared to be central in their viewpoints with statements such as 'kids with autism', needing to 'help' and to 'cope' with their diagnosis frequently used. This dramatically contrasted the autistic individuals where they looked for greater understanding. This viewpoint is also noted in Holmes (2022) where the autistic individuals interviewed 'advocated that understanding of autism support and skill building is what autistic students need' (p.11).

Further development on the picture elicitation is a must, and although acknowledged by the researchers, it would have provided a more in-depth view of the conceptions held by the interviewees and could further explore more emergent themes.

STUDENT OPINION

The researchers prioritised the autistic voice throughout their research. This included one

of the named researchers participating in a research programme that looked to strengthen the connection between research and the autistic voice. This was further developed through the photo-elicitation activity with the autistic community having the final say of the photographs used. Researcher bias was not evident, but a lack of diversity among the participants is a limitation that will be further explored.

The study has made great strides in prioritising the autistic voice throughout each stage of the research. It has long been advocated for the sentiments of the autistic voice to be heard both in research and education.

There are some limitations attached to the research. The researchers sought teachers who were completing postgraduate studies in autism. This led to the sample already having understanding of autism prior to the study. With only six teachers recruited, and all teaching autistic students, other facets of the education system have been missed, namely mainstream teachers, to which if conducted, would have added to the findings and led to more inclusive findings, which is the focus of current research trends. A larger sample would have provided the researchers with more data across more areas.

Four autistic adolescent students were also recruited. While the option to have their parents present was asked and agreed upon, this potentially could have led to apprehension in their true understanding of autism.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

This study has highlighted the challenges that are faced on an ongoing basis for the autism community. While it can be determined that there is no intentional misconception of autism,

these misconceptions are prevalent and are often determined by the world around us and carry lasting impressions of the autism community. The paper identified three themes through its research.

The research clearly identified, through the autistic voice, the notion of 'them vs us'. It highlighted the impact of language on the understanding of autism. References such as the 'child with autism' or a 'disorder vs difference' all hold negative connotations that are harmful in practice. The paper did not highlight the negative connotations that such language has on the community. This leads to the need for a coordinated approach to appropriate CPD on the language used relating to autism.

The understanding of a strengths-based approach to autism is not a new phenomenon but as identified in the paper, autistic students are often identified through their deficits and not their strengths. Identifying strengths, preferences and interests of autistic individuals is a fundamental way of allowing students to have a voice (Chandroo et al., 2018).

Cultural influences can lead to misunderstanding across the medias. These implications leave a lasting impression on the autistic community. The research concluded that media campaigns create a narrative of tragedy across autistic individuals and families. Many strides have been made in changes to the concepts of autism from the past to now; however, this author would suggest a more conscious effort at positive media campaigns and their portrayal of the autistic individual.

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Article Reviewed

Alexander, V. and Bissaker, K. (2023). Same word, same picture, different responses: exploring teachers' and autistic adolescents' conceptions of autism. *Education Sciences*. **13**(7), p. 734. doi:10.3390/educsci13070734

'SOMETHING NEEDS TO CHANGE': MENTAL HEALTH EXPERIENCES OF YOUNG AUTISTIC ADULTS IN ENGLAND

This article was reviewed by Maria Dunne.

As a parent and psychiatrist, Maria is acutely aware of the struggle to both access and deliver meaningful mental health support to autistic children and adolescents. As our understanding of autism evolves, there is a growing appreciation of the essential role the autistic community plays in improving healthcare for autistic people. She chose this study as it provides insights into the lived experience of young autistic adults and the day-to-day challenges that mental health problems can bring.

BACKGROUND

Young people face significant mental health challenges, often hindered by barriers to seeking help. While autism isn't a mental health condition, it has been reported that approximately 70–80 per cent of autistic individuals experience mental health problems, primarily depression and anxiety.

Despite high rates of mental health issues, research on the experiences of young autistic adults (ages 16–25) remains limited. Difficulties in identifying symptoms, stigma and a preference for self-reliance deter many from seeking professional support. In addition, transitioning from Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) to Adult Mental Health Services (AMHS) in the UK poses additional challenges, leading to many being overlooked.

RESEARCH AIMS

This study aimed to understand the lived experience of autistic adolescents and young adults in terms of how the young people perceive themselves, the presentation of their mental health issues and the barriers in accessing appropriate supports.

RESEARCH METHODS

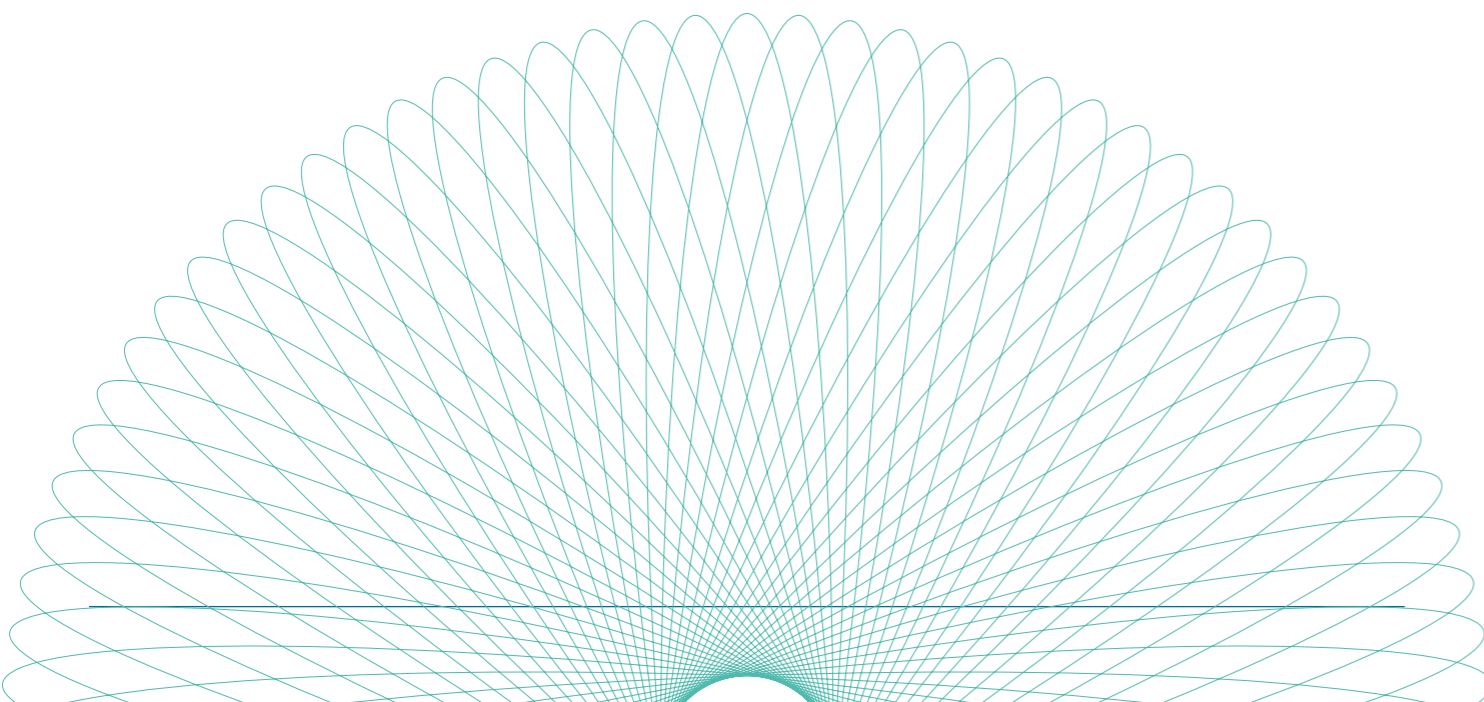
This is a qualitative study using a community-based participatory research approach. A joint working group was established between three young autistic adults and two academic researchers from University College London's Centre for Research in Autism (CRAB).

A convenience sample of participants was recruited from advertisements disseminated via social media and databases held by Ambitious About Autism charity and CRAB. The inclusion criteria were that individuals were aged 16–25 years, diagnosed as autistic and lived in England.

Qualitative data was collected in two ways: a larger number of autistic people completed an online survey (n=109); a smaller group (n=21) partook in a semi-structured interview. Both the survey and semi-structured interview were designed by the research team and granted ethical approval from the University of London. Thematic analysis was used to identify themes.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

A total of 130 young autistic adults participated in the research, with 109 completing an online survey and 21 taking part in detailed interviews. The majority of survey participants (85.3 per cent) had mainstream education. Forty two per cent were not in employment. Anxiety (39.4 per cent) and depression (32.1 per cent) were the most common mental health issues reported, with over 80 per cent experiencing current and/or past mental health problems. Despite seeking assistance from professionals (90.1 per cent), few found it very useful (23.2 per cent and 13.7 per cent respectively), preferring support from friends, family and charitable organisations.



Interview findings from the 21 participants, aged 16–26 years, showed high rates of mainstream education (94.74 per cent). Common experiences with mental health included anxiety (57.1 per cent) and depression (38.1 per cent). Employment was low, with 33 per cent not working or looking for work, and most lived with parents and siblings (57 per cent). Thematic analysis revealed four main themes: ‘Not understanding my normal’, ‘Stigma’, ‘Barriers to support’ and ‘Relationships’. Participants emphasised the need for tailored support, particularly during transitions between child and adult services, and highlighted the importance of family, friends and peer support in bridging gaps in professional services.

Overall, the results highlight how young autistic people find it difficult to evaluate their mental health, experience high levels of stigma and often face severe obstacles when trying to access mental health support.

STUDENT OPINION

The educational bias in the sample, with participants having a high level of educational attainment, is notable. This may lead to an underestimation of healthcare needs (Menezes et al., 2021). However, the advantages of this study include the partnership approach between the autistic community and academic researchers, the selection of the research topic by the autistic community and the relatively large sample size.

After reviewing this article, the current researcher reflected on two major issues:

- As outlined in this study, the practicalities of how to establish contact with services can be compounded by the individual’s struggle to identify and understand feelings and experiences: a key component of the psychiatric or psychological consultation.

- Even when contact with services is established, the lack of expertise on the part of the therapist often results in failure to receive tailored specific support. This is echoed elsewhere by service users and carers alike.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

The findings strongly indicate that young autistic people may face significant disadvantages due to the mental health challenges they encounter. This includes struggles in evaluating their own mental health and encountering numerous obstacles when attempting to access mental health support, notably the lack of autism-specific and person-centred assistance from key professionals.

It is crucial for researchers and professionals to prioritise listening to and learning from young autistic individuals who have first-hand experience with mental health issues, particularly regarding the design and delivery of services.

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Article Reviewed

Crane, L., Adams, F., Harper, G., Welch, J. and Pellicano, E. (2019). ‘Something needs to change’: mental health experiences of young autistic adults in England. *Autism*. 23(2), pp. 477–493.

CONCLUSION

This issue of the Research Bulletin has taken a different form, with no single topic linking the articles presented. The students picked the research publications that they wanted to review based on topics that were relevant and interesting to them. In doing so, they addressed important areas like mental health, health across the lifespan, sensory challenges and meaningful inclusion. Across their work, students highlighted the importance of hearing and understanding the autistic voice, addressing non-autistic assumptions and developing strengths-based supports.

The Centre wishes to thank the GDAS class of 2024 for their contribution to this special edition and their thoughtful contributions to the course across the year. We wish them all the best for their post-graduation futures.

Special thanks to Fiona and Caroline for giving their time to provide interviews for the Bulletin.

YOUR OPINION

The Centre trusts that you have found this Research Bulletin informative. It would be appreciated if you would take a few minutes to provide the Centre with feedback in relation to this Bulletin by clicking on the survey link below.

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The Centre's Research and Information Service welcomes any correspondence including suggestions for future bulletins to: research@middletownautism.com.

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