



Centre for Developmental
and Complex Trauma

Part of St Andrew's Healthcare



MEETING THE TRAUMA NEEDS OF AUTISTIC ADULTS

FURTHER READING

POST CONFERENCE RESOURCES
5th December 2024





CONTENTS

PAGE

OVERVIEW OF THE PACK

3

AIA: SPECIAL EDITION PAPERS

4

FURTHER READING

5-11

A Social Model of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD): Interpersonal Trauma, Attachment, Group Identification, Disclosure, Social Acknowledgement and Negative Cognitions.

5

Being diagnosed with autism in adulthood: a personal case study.

6

Troubled beginnings: the adverse childhood experiences and placement histories of a detained adolescent population with developmental disorders.

7

Developmental trauma in a forensic intellectual disability population.

8

Differential diagnosis of autism, attachment disorders, complex post-traumatic stress disorder and emotionally unstable personality disorder: A Delphi study.

9

Prevalence of Victimization in Autistic Individuals: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis.

10

The experiences of autistic adults who were previously diagnosed with borderline or emotionally unstable personality disorder: A phenomenological study.

11

ADDITIONAL ARTICLES OF INTEREST

Articles on mentalization-based treatment for different populations with autism

12-14

POTENTIAL RESEARCH COLLABORATIONS AND SUPPORT

Social problem solving and behaviour: Call for participants

15

Validation of the ITQ for autistic people: Call for partner

16

ABOUT THIS PACK

Dear colleagues,

In partnership with Verity Chester, Editor of *Advances in Autism*, I had the privilege of guest editing a special edition to highlight current clinical and research work in meeting the trauma needs of autistic adults. The special edition includes several papers offering practical guidance, exploring the challenging diagnostic questions, empirically evaluating treatments and expanding the theoretical lens for improving our understanding of trauma in autistic people.

Thank you to Emerald Publishing who have kindly agreed to make the articles available open access for 30 days following the webinar. Please see further details on page 4.

During the webinar we benefitted from fantastic engagement from delegates who posted questions, shared personal and professional insights and cited further references to articles that arose as a result of the debate and discussions.

Many delegates asked for a link to Woodhouse, Brown and Ayers (2018) *A Social Model of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder*, which is included on page 5.

We are also pleased to include a number of peer reviewed journal papers that were shared during the day, to facilitate your wider reading around this topic.

Thank you for your valued contribution during the webinar.

Kind regards

Deborah

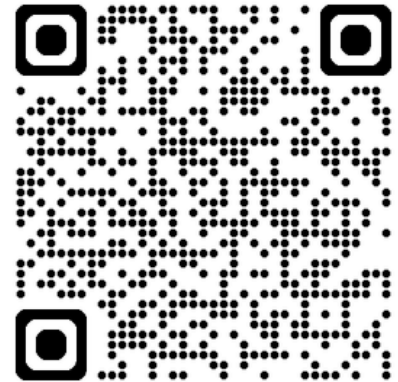
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Further Reading: AiA Special Edition

Advances in Autism: Special Edition

Improving international health outcomes in health, education and social aspects of care



Thank you to Emerald Publishing for making the Special Edition available open access for 30 days from the date of the free webinar on 5th December 2024.

Click on the QR code to access the papers.

ADVANCES IN AUTISM: SPECIAL EDITION



Further Reading: A Social Model of PTSD

A Social Model of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD): Interpersonal Trauma, Attachment, Group Identification, Disclosure, Social Acknowledgement and Negative Cognitions

Woodhouse, S., Brown, R. & Ayers, S. (2018)
Journal of Theoretical Social Psychology, 2(2), pp. 35-48.



Abstract

Objective: Proposes a social model of PTSD, examining relationships between trauma types, attachment styles, group identification, emotional disclosure, social acknowledgment, and posttraumatic cognitions.

Method: Cross-sectional survey of 298 participants with varying trauma symptoms.

Findings: Group identification mediates the relationship between attachment and social acknowledgment; emotional disclosure mediates between trauma and acknowledgment; social acknowledgment mediates between cognitions and trauma symptoms.

A personal case study: Ross Henley

Being diagnosed with autism in adulthood: a personal case study.

Henley, R. (2020). *Advances in Autism*
Volume 7 Issue 3, 19 June 2020



Abstract

Purpose: This paper aims to report the personal experiences of an adult male diagnosed with autism at the age of 48 years.

Methodology: A personal case study methodology was used to illustrate the journey to autism diagnosis, the experience of diagnosis and post-diagnosis support.

Findings: This case study illustrates how stress and mental health difficulties can precede autism diagnosis in adults. The personal experiences detailed highlight how an adult autism diagnosis can bring about positive change, prompting increased self-knowledge and coping skills, improved relationships and. Furthermore, it highlights how a supportive employer can make reasonable adjustments in the workplace to improve productivity of an autistic employee.

Research limitations/implications: This case study has implications for various practice issues, including post-diagnosis counselling and access to support for autistic adults nationally.

Recent articles of interest: ACEs in adolescents

Troubled beginnings: the adverse childhood experiences and placement histories of a detained adolescent population with developmental disorders.

Morris, D.J., Webb, E.L., Parmar, E., Trundle, G., McLean.A.,
(2020) *Advances in Mental Health and Intellectual Disabilities*, August 2020.



Abstract

Purpose: People with developmental disorders are significantly more likely to experience adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), although the impact of ACEs on this population is not well understood. Furthermore, considerably less is known about the exposure to, and impact of, ACEs in detained adolescents with complex developmental disorder needs. This paper aims to explore the exposure to ACEs in an adolescent population detained in a secure specialist developmental disorder service.

Methodology: A retrospective file review was used to explore ACEs and placement histories within a specialist developmental disorder inpatient service. Data was collated for a convenience sample of 36 adolescents, 9 of whom were female, aged 13–20 years ($M = 17.28$ years).

Findings: A total of 33 participants (91.7%) had experienced at least 1 ACE, with 58% experiencing 4 or more ACEs and 36% experiencing 6 or more ACEs. The most common ACEs reported were physical abuse (61.6%), parental separation (58.3%) and emotional abuse (55.6%). The majority of participants had also experienced high levels of disruption prior to admission, with an average of four placement breakdowns (range 1–13, standard deviation = 3.1). ACEs held a significant positive association with the total number of placement breakdowns and total number of mental health diagnoses.

Practical implications: Adolescents detained in specialist developmental disorder secure care had, at the point of admission, experienced high levels of adversities and had been exposed to high levels of experienced and observed abuse. The level of exposure to adversity and ongoing disruptions in care suggests that Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services' developmental secure services should consider adopting dual treatment frameworks of developmental disorder and trauma-informed care.

Recent articles of interest: Forensic populations

Developmental trauma in a forensic intellectual disability population.



Morris, D.J., Shrengill, S., Beber, E., (2019).

Journal of Intellectual Disabilities and Offending Behaviour,
November 2019

Abstract

Purpose: People with an intellectual disability (ID) are more at risk of experiencing adverse childhood events. Moreover, prolonged exposure to ACEs results in enduring changes and impairments in neurological, physiological and psycho-social systems and functioning. In response, van der Kolk et al. (2009) have put forward the concept of developmental trauma disorder (DTD) to reflect the “constellation of enduring symptoms” and complex care needs of this population. The purpose of this paper is to ascertain the level of exposure to adverse childhood events and the prevalence of DTD in an inpatient forensic ID population.

Methodology: A retrospective file review and consensus approach to diagnosis were used in a sample of adults with an ID detained in a secure forensic service.

Findings: Results revealed that 89 admissions (N =123) had been exposed to at least one significant ACE, with 81 being exposed to prolonged ACEs. A total of 58 admissions (47 per cent) met criteria for PTSD and 80 (65 per cent) met the criteria for DTD. Significant gender differences were noted in MHA status, primary psychiatric diagnoses, exposure to ACEs and DTD.

Research limitations/implications: The discussion explores the implications for working with forensic ID populations who report high incidents of childhood trauma and the utility, strengths and weaknesses of the proposed DTD, its relationship to ID diagnoses is explored.

Recent articles of interest: Theory driven papers

Differential diagnosis of autism, attachment disorders, complex post-traumatic stress disorder and emotionally unstable personality disorder: A Delphi study.

Sarr, R., Spain, D., Quinton, A. M., Happé, F., Brewin, C. R., Radcliffe, J., ... & Rumball, F. (2024).
British Journal of Psychology, September 2024.



Abstract

Individuals diagnosed with autism, attachment disorders, emotionally unstable personality disorder (EUPD) or complex post-traumatic stress disorder (CPTSD) can present with similar features. This renders differential and accurate diagnosis of these conditions difficult, leading to diagnostic overshadowing and misdiagnosis.

The purpose of this study was to explore professionals' perspectives on the differential diagnosis of autism, attachment disorders and CPTSD in young people; and of autism, CPTSD and EUPD in adults.

A co-produced three-round Delphi study gathered information through a series of questionnaires from 106 international professionals with expertise in assessing and/or diagnosing at least one of these conditions. To provide specialist guidance and data triangulation, working groups of experts by experience, clinicians and researchers were consulted. Delphi statements were considered to have reached consensus if at least 80% of participants were in agreement. Two hundred and seventy-five Delphi statements reached consensus. Overlapping and differentiating features, methods of assessment, difficulties encountered during differential diagnosis and suggestions for improvements were identified.

The findings highlight current practices for differential diagnosis of autism, attachment disorders, CPTSD and EUPD in young people and adults. Areas for future research, clinical and service provision implications, were also identified.

Recent articles of interest: Theory driven papers

Prevalence of Victimisation in Autistic Individuals: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis

Trundle, G., Jones, K.A., Egan, V., Ropar, D., (2023).
Violence & Abuse. Volume 24, Issue 4, October 2023.



Abstract

Autistic individuals are at an increased risk of experiencing victimisation. Previous reviews have focussed specific types of victimisation. Thus, a clearer picture considering the range of victimisation experiences autistic people face is required. This systematic review aims to identify the prevalence of victimisation in autistic individuals considering a variety of victimisation types (e.g., bullying, sexual victimisation, and crime) in both adults and children from clinical and community settings.

Through systematic searches of relevant databases, 291 studies met the criteria for review. Of those, 34 studies met the inclusion criteria: a) quantitative studies, b) involving autistic individuals, c) reporting prevalence rates of victimisation. Meta-analysis found a pooled prevalence rate of victimisation of 44% in autistic individuals. Subgroup analysis examined moderating factors as high heterogeneity was present. This found the pooled prevalence rates for bullying to be 47%, 16% for child abuse, 40% for sexual victimisation, 13% for cyberbullying, and 84% for multiple forms of victimisation in autistic individuals, though heterogeneity remained. Correction for participants' age, reporter used, and the population which the sample was recruited from did not reduce heterogeneity. Although heterogeneity impedes the definitive interpretation of the findings, this review illustrates the need for strategies and interventions to reduce the incidence of victimisation.

Recent articles of interest: Theory driven papers

The experiences of autistic adults who were previously diagnosed with borderline or emotionally unstable personality disorder: A phenomenological study

Tamilson, B., Eccles, J.A., Shaw, S.C.K., (2024).
Autism, September 2024.



This qualitative study is really insightful into the experiences of receiving previous diagnoses (BPD) and feeling that this experience in itself could be viewed as 'traumatic'.

Abstract

An increasing number of studies are investigating the links between autism and borderline personality disorder. Studies report overlapping differences and the challenges in differentiating between these two diagnostic labels. In practice, there are many people, especially autistic women, who feel that they were misdiagnosed with borderline personality disorder. This study aimed to explore the experiences of autistic adults who were previously diagnosed with borderline personality disorder.

This is an interpretive phenomenological study. Data were collected using one-to-one, semi-structured interviews. Interview audio-recordings were transcribed and analysed using an interpretive phenomenological analysis. Ten people participated. All recalled autistic differences since childhood that went unnoticed. In most cases, borderline personality disorder was felt to have been a misdiagnosis. This misdiagnosis carried stigma, introduced diagnostic overshadowing and led to harmful experiences for our participants.

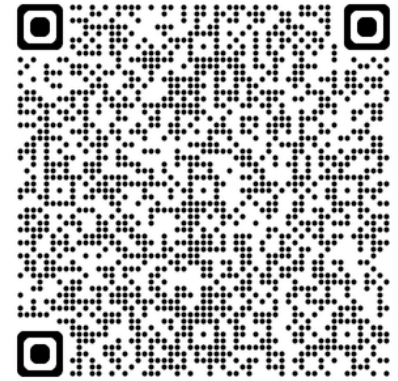
While they did not identify with the diagnosis, they felt powerless to challenge it. In contrast, receiving an autism diagnosis was 'life changing'. While this did not solve everything for them, it was deeply validating. It also allowed them to be their true authentic selves, shifting the focus away from 'treatment' and changing who they are to suit others, towards acceptance of their differences and neurotype. This significantly improved their mental health.

Additional articles of interest: MBT

Towards a comprehensive approach to mentalization-based treatment for children with autism: integrating attachment, neurosciences, and mentalizing.

Costa-Cordella, S., Soto-Icaza, P., Borgeaud, K., Grasso-Cladera, A., Malberg, N.T. , (2023).

Frontiers in Psychology, Volume 14 – 30 November 2023.



Abstract

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is diagnosed based on socio-communicative difficulties, which are believed to result from deficits in mentalizing, mainly evidenced by alterations in recognizing and responding to the mental states of others. In recent years, efforts have been made to develop mentalization-based treatment (MBT) models for this population. These models focus on enhancing individuals' ability to understand and reflect on their own mental states, as well as those of others. However, MBT approaches for people with ASD are limited by their existing theoretical background, which lacks a strong foundation grounded in neuroscience-based evidence properly integrated with attachment, and mentalizing. These are crucial aspects for understanding psychological processes in autism, and as such, they play a pivotal role in shaping the development of tailored and effective therapeutic strategies for this specific population.

In this paper we review evidence related to the neurobiological, interpersonal, and psychological dimensions of autism and their implications for mentalizing processes. We also review previous mentalization-based frameworks on the psychosis continuum to provide a comprehensive understanding of attachment, neurobiology, and mentalization domains in therapeutic approaches for autism. After presenting a synthesis of the literature, we offer a set of clinical strategies for the work with children with autism. Finally, we provide recommendations to advance the field towards more robust models that can serve as a basis for evidence-based therapeutic strategies.

Additional articles of interest: MBT in HSPC

Extreme violence in a man with an autistic spectrum disorder: assessment and treatment within high-security psychiatric care.

Murphy, D. (2010).
The Journal of Forensic Psychiatry & Psychology,
Volume 21, 2010 – Issue 3



Abstract

Autistic spectrum disorders (ASD) are lifelong neurodevelopmental disorders characterised by significant impairments in social communication, social interaction and in different dimensions of imagination such as with perspective taking. Individuals with an ASD who commit violent offences typically present as a challenge to clinicians and struggle within conventional forensic psychiatric services.

A case study is described of a young man with an ASD convicted of manslaughter and admitted to high-security psychiatric care (HSPC). His detailed psychological assessment is described, along with an offence formulation and subsequent psychological interventions within HSPC. Additional issues relating to mental capacity, risk assessment and future management are highlighted. A final discussion is given towards some general issues relating to the role of HSPC in the assessment and management of individuals with an ASD who commit serious offences.

INTERESTED IN TAKING PART IN RESEARCH ON AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER?

Researcher: Verity Chester, University of East Anglia

Research Supervisor: Dr Karen Bunning, University of East Anglia

We are looking for people to take part in a study "Social Problem Solving in Autism Spectrum Disorder and Behaviour" (IRAS Project ID: 174027)



- To be eligible to participate, you need to be:
 - Over 18
 - Have a diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder or Asperger Syndrome.
- If you have a criminal record, including (a history of arrests, cautions or convictions), unfortunately you cannot participate.
- The research involves completing a number of questionnaires and computer tasks. A relative, carer or staff member who knows you will also be asked to complete a questionnaire about your emotional health and behaviour.

If you would like to participate, have any questions or would like to discuss the project further, Verity can be contacted by email at y.chester@uea.ac.uk.

CALL FOR EXPRESSION OF INTEREST IN TRAUMA ASSESSMENT VALIDATION PROJECT



- Currently, there exists no validated measures for the assessment of trauma symptoms in autistic people.
- Consequently, clinicians are required to rely on tools developed for use in general population samples, which may not be appropriate for autistic people.

What are we doing about this?

The Centre for Developmental and Complex Trauma (CDCT) are at the early stages of developing a validation study of the International Trauma Questionnaire (ITQ; Cloitre et al., 2018) for autistic people.

The project will look to identify whether the ITQ is an appropriate tool for identifying trauma symptoms in this population.

To support the development and delivery of this project, we are looking to hear from healthcare professionals and experts by experience who would be interested in getting involved.

Interested?

Simply scan the QR (or head to: <https://forms.office.com/e/YJrWSMWkn2>) to complete the expression of interest form.





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