

NEWS

Community newsletter: Anorexia services for autistic women, camouflaging and mental health, INSAR goes virtual again

BY CHELSEY B. COOMBS

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Hello, and welcome to this week's community newsletter! I'm your host, **Chelsey B. Coombs**, *Spectrum's* engagement editor.

First I want to remind you again about our ***Spectrum* reader survey**. We want to know what you think about our site and how we can make it even better. Participants have a chance to win one of 30 *Spectrum*-branded bags or notebooks, or one of our three *Spectrum* books. The last day to submit the survey is 5 March, so please send in your feedback ASAP.

This week, we're starting with a study from *Autism*: "**The experience of eating disorder services from the perspective of autistic women, parents and healthcare professionals.**" Study investigator **Charli Babb**, a graduate student at Cardiff University in Wales, tweeted, "We interviewed autistic women, parents and clinicians to help us to understand autistic women's experiences in **#eatingdisorder** services."

NEW paper out today in **@journalautism** - we interviewed autistic women, parents and clinicians to help us to understand autistic women's experiences in **#eatingdisorder** services **<https://t.co/ulnQrTxEN5>** **@SEDAF18**

— Charli Babb (@CharliPsych) **February 16, 2021**

Spectrum wrote about **anorexia's link to autism** in December. Estimates suggest that roughly 20

percent of people with anorexia are autistic, yet Babb and her colleagues found “diverse barriers facing autistic women when in treatment for anorexia nervosa, and these were accentuated by a lack of autism understanding within eating disorder services.”

Eloise Stark, a postdoctoral researcher and assistant psychologist at the United Kingdom’s National Health Service, called it a “brilliant paper.”

Brilliant paper, really informative and I found it helpful to read. Thank you for doing such important research! :)

— Eloise Stark ???? (@eloiseastark) **February 16, 2021**

Spectrum reporter **Laura Dattaro** noted one anecdote from the paper, in which “a woman got 'told off' for tiptoe walking and fidgeting bc docs assumed she was trying to burn calories.”

Interesting survey of autistic women w anorexia, showing again a disconnect between ED treatments and needs of autistic people. This anecdote stood out: a woman got 'told off' for tiptoe walking and fidgeting bc docs assumed she was trying to burn calories
<https://t.co/Bj22UtlQs>

— Laura Dattaro (@LauraLauraDat) **February 16, 2021**

Lily Levy, a child and adolescent mental health services clinician in the United Kingdom, tweeted, “can’t wait to see respectful, applicable and thoughtful research like this folded into practice.”

Yet more incredible work from **@CharliPsych** and **@ehealth_Janina** ... can’t wait to see respectful, applicable and thoughtful research like this folded into practice so we can finally design services that meet the needs of autistic people <https://t.co/VusmrOz5kt>

— Lily Levy #BLM (@lilyhannahlevy) **February 17, 2021**

In the paper, the researchers concluded, “Future research should focus on developing AN interventions that are specifically targeted and/or appropriate for autistic people and those with high levels of autistic traits.”

A study from **Levy** also garnered a lot of attention this week, a new *Molecular Autism* paper titled “**Is social camouflaging associated with anxiety and depression in autistic adults?**”

It's here! My first peer-reviewed paper, and beautiful transformation of my MSc thesis into something succinct, publishable and useful by the peerless **@lauralhull** “Is Social Camouflaging associated with anxiety and depression in **#autistic** adults” (YES).<https://t.co/KG7MfXr5vB>

— Lily Levy #BLM (@lilyhannahlevy) **February 16, 2021**

Another paper on camouflaging autism traits came up in our **community newsletter** a few weeks back. You can also read more on this topic in our 2018 Deep Dive, “**The costs of camouflaging autism.**”

The new study surveyed 305 autistic adults who self-reported camouflaging, as well as symptoms of general anxiety, social anxiety and depression. Camouflaging was linked to elevated anxiety, social anxiety and depression, although its effect on these traits contributed “only to a small extent beyond the contribution of autistic traits and age.” The researchers also found that camouflaging had similar mental health effects for people who identify as men and as women. Nonbinary people were surveyed, but there were too few included to understand how camouflaging affected this group.

For more on the study's findings, check out this thread by study investigator and University College London postdoctoral researcher **Laura Hull**.

New *open access* paper in *Molecular Autism*: Is social camouflaging associated with anxiety and depression in autistic adults? <https://t.co/RNa7bd1D3t> based on **@lilyhannahlevy**'s MSc thesis

— Laura Hull (@lauralhull) **February 16, 2021**

In her own thread, Levy tweeted that she hopes “our paper contributes to a body of work that makes society genuinely respectful of autistic people, your agency, your incredible contributions, and your communication.”

I hope, with every single fibre of my being, that our paper contributes to a body of work that makes society genuinely respectful of autistic people, your agency, your incredible contributions, and your communication. Here’s to interventions that HELP, not harm.

— Lily Levy #BLM (@lilyhannahlevy) **February 16, 2021**

Sarah O’Brien, research and policy officer at the U.K. autism research charity Autistica, wrote that the study was an “absolutely fab piece of research from two powerhouses of research who really understand autistic people and the impact of applied research.”

Absolutely fab piece of research from two powerhouses of research who really understand autistic people and the impact of applied research.

I hope these findings, now out in the wild, are used to make a difference to the lives of autistic people! <https://t.co/mSqlA2S6u6>

— sarah o'brien (@Sarahmarieob) **February 16, 2021**

Occupational therapist **Inês Malheiros** replied, “Hopefully, this will help a lot of professionals, myself included, think twice about the goals, interventions and suggestions they're giving to children.”

Congratulations @lilyhannahlevy ! Can't wait to dive in and learn some more. Hopefully, this will help a lot of professionals, myself included, think twice about the goals, interventions and suggestions they're giving to children ????

— Inês Malheiros (@inesOTmalheiros) **February 17, 2021**

In other news, The **International Society for Autism Research** announced this week that its annual meeting, which is celebrating its 20th anniversary, will be fully virtual again and is slated for 3 May to 7 May.

The INSAR 2021 Annual Meeting will be a fully virtual event, with new dates: May 3 – 7, 2021. Registration will open March 15. For more details, go here:

<https://t.co/aSODOGxdFO> **#INSAR2021** pic.twitter.com/WOnlpwMvSC

— INSAR (@AutismINSAR) **February 18, 2021**

We're looking forward to seeing you all there!

That's it for this week's *Spectrum* community newsletter. If you have any suggestions for interesting social posts you saw in the autism research sphere this week, feel free to send an email to me at chelsey@spectrumnews.org. See you next week!