

NEWS

Community Newsletter: New prevalence estimates, journal chief steps down

BY SPECTRUM

5 DECEMBER 2021

Hello, and welcome to *Spectrum's* Community Newsletter.

Autism researchers on Twitter pondered questions around autism prevalence this week after two new estimates came out.

Jack Underwood, a clinical research fellow at the University of Cardiff in Wales, posted a thread about new work that found an **eightfold increase in autism diagnoses** among Welsh women from 2001 to 2016.

<https://twitter.com/JFGUnderwood/status/1465655285167575047>

In a longer thread, written when the paper was accepted, Underwood broke the findings down: The team reviewed more than 3.6 million people's medical records across Wales and anonymously identified 0.51 percent with an autism diagnosis. Yearly incidence, they found, had risen steadily throughout the 15 years of data they reviewed.

The jump reflects better public awareness of the condition, he writes, but because the estimates are lower than previous ones based on population sampling or clinical cohorts, diagnoses are clearly still being missed in medical records.

On Thursday, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention also released **new prevalence figures** from its Autism and Developmental Disabilities Monitoring Network. Among 8-year-olds across 11 sites, it found an autism prevalence of 1 in 44 children in 2018, up from 1 in 54 in 2016.

David Mandell, professor of psychiatry at the University of Pennsylvania, tweeted about the new numbers — and why they should be treated with “a healthy dose of skepticism.” For one thing, he writes, the numbers are based solely on education and health records, not on clinical assessments.

<https://twitter.com/DSMandell/status/1466495930891259904>

Jonathan Sebat, professor of psychiatry at the University of California, San Diego, seconded that view in a retweet, commenting how “CDC estimates of autism ‘prevalence’ reflect services and diagnostic practices but are not great estimates for the actual prevalence of the disorder.”

<https://twitter.com/sebatlab/status/1466499127412355076>

In other Mandell news, he has stepped down from his role as editor-in-chief of *Autism*, an announcement that drew an outpouring of mournful tweets.

<https://twitter.com/DSMandell/status/1464994606777573387>

Replying to **Brittany Rudd**, instructor of psychology at the University of Illinois at Chicago, he served up an enviable list of activities to fill the newfound gaps in his calendar: “Bake. Woodworking. Gardening. Respond to the bewildering reviews of my most recent grant proposal. Get through my inbox.”

That’s it for this week’s Community Newsletter! If you have any suggestions for interesting social posts you saw in the autism research sphere, send an email to chelsey@spectrumnews.org.

Cite this article: <https://doi.org/10.53053/JGJP7249>