

## NEWS

# Community Newsletter: Post-traumatic stress in older autistic people, Michael Rutter's legacy

BY CHELSEY B. COOMBS

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Hello, and welcome to the Community Newsletter! I'm your host, **Chelsey B. Coombs**, *Spectrum*'s engagement editor.

The first study to spark online exchanges this week looked at the link between **autism traits and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)** in adults aged 50 and older who scored high on a measure of autism traits.

Study investigator **Gavin Stewart**, a postdoctoral researcher at University College London in the United Kingdom, tweeted about the work, which used data from the **PROTECT study**, a survey of 20,000 adults in the U.K.

Our new **#autism** and **#ageing** paper now out, w/ open access. We looked at traumatic life experiences (in childhood and adulthood) and current mental health problems, including PTSD symptoms, in adults age 50+. With **@Happelab @GoldAgeLabUK** and **@ProtectStudy** <https://t.co/2v0iDpCiYV>

— Dr Gavin R. Stewart (@gavrobstew) **December 23, 2021**

Based on five questions, 251 participants from that cohort met the criteria for autism traits. Compared with matched controls without autism traits, those in the autism traits group were more likely to have experienced trauma and its negative effects, echoing **previous findings** in younger

autistic people.

The authors concluded that people with more autism traits should have greater access to mental health support to prevent trauma-related conditions such as PTSD, depression and anxiety.

**Brittany N. Hand**, assistant professor of health and rehabilitation sciences at Ohio State University in Columbus, asked Stewart whether the people with autism traits had disclosed their diagnostic status.

I'm curious whether you asked participants if they were autistic (either self- or formally-diagnosed)?

— Brittany N. Hand (@BN\_Hand) **December 23, 2021**

Few people said they had been formally diagnosed, Stewart replied, but the PROTECT study has tried to recruit more people with an autism diagnosis.

Sorry, that's meant to be