

NEWS

Quarantine may hit autistic women and children hardest

BY JACLYN JEFFREY-WILENSKY

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The coronavirus lockdown has radically disrupted autistic people's schedules and access to services, according to a new survey. And the disruptions may be especially difficult for women and children with the condition.

The email went to participants in SPARK, a project that connects people with autism and their families to researchers who are recruiting for studies. (SPARK is funded by the Simons Foundation, *Spectrum's* parent organization.)

The questions aimed to gauge how people on the spectrum are faring during the COVID-19 pandemic, which has shuttered many of the schools and clinics they rely on. **One version of the survey** went to families of autistic children, **another to autistic adults** living on their own.

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The answers show widespread disruptions. More than 60 percent of the families who responded report major interruptions in their children's usual autism services, such as speech or behavioral therapy. Of the 36 percent who are temporarily doing teletherapy or other remote services instead, less than half say their children benefit from it.

Parents of children younger than 6 report the most interruptions, with nearly three-quarters describing severe disruptions in autism-related services. They also report feeling overwhelmed or stressed by schedule changes resulting from the pandemic more often than parents of older

children do.

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Among the autistic adults surveyed, more **autistic women** than men say they have experienced coronavirus-related disruptions. Autistic women also appear to be more severely affected than men, with more women reporting major negative impacts on their employment, home life and **mental health**. Nearly three-quarters of the autistic women surveyed say the pandemic has at least moderately affected their mental health, compared with just over half of the autistic men.

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