



Current Issues for Neurodivergent Women and Girls in the UK

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Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

The particular goals related to autistic women and girls in the UK primarily focus on promoting gender equality, ensuring inclusive education and employment opportunities.





SDG 4: Quality Education

This goal focuses on ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all. It emphasizes eliminating gender disparities in education and ensuring equal access for vulnerable groups, **including persons with disabilities.**

For Neurodivergent girls and women this is hindered by a lack of identification, late identification and lack of subsequent support that affects their education and ability to thrive in school.



SDG 5: Gender Equality

This goal aims to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. It includes targets to eliminate discrimination and violence against women and girls, which is crucial for autistic women who often face additional barriers.

For Neurodivergent girls and women this is hindered by increased likelihood of school non attendance due to anxiety and bullying. They also have a higher likelihood of violence due to vulnerability, dependence on caregivers.

SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth

8 DECENT WORK AND
ECONOMIC GROWTH



This goal promotes sustained, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all. It includes targets to increase employment opportunities for people with disabilities, including autistic individuals.

For Neurodivergent girls and women this is hindered by the dual discrimination as women in employment and the fact that autistic people are the least employed of all the categories of disability.

Quiz!

www.menti.com - 2577 9272





In a recent ASD prevalence cohort study of over 7, 047, 238 English pupils, national English prevalence was 1.76% (Roman-Urrestarazu et al. 2021)

Girls and women continue to be underdiagnosed, with a male-to-female ratio (MFR) of approx. 4 males to 1 female. (Roman-Urrestarazu et al. 2021)

True, False,
Maybe

Autistic people lack
empathy.



False

(Bird et al. 2010)



Autistic people
may express
empathy
differently.



True, False,
Maybe

**Autistic children and
people don't want
friends.**

False

Autistic children/YP may socialise differently. (Gillespie and Heasman 2019)

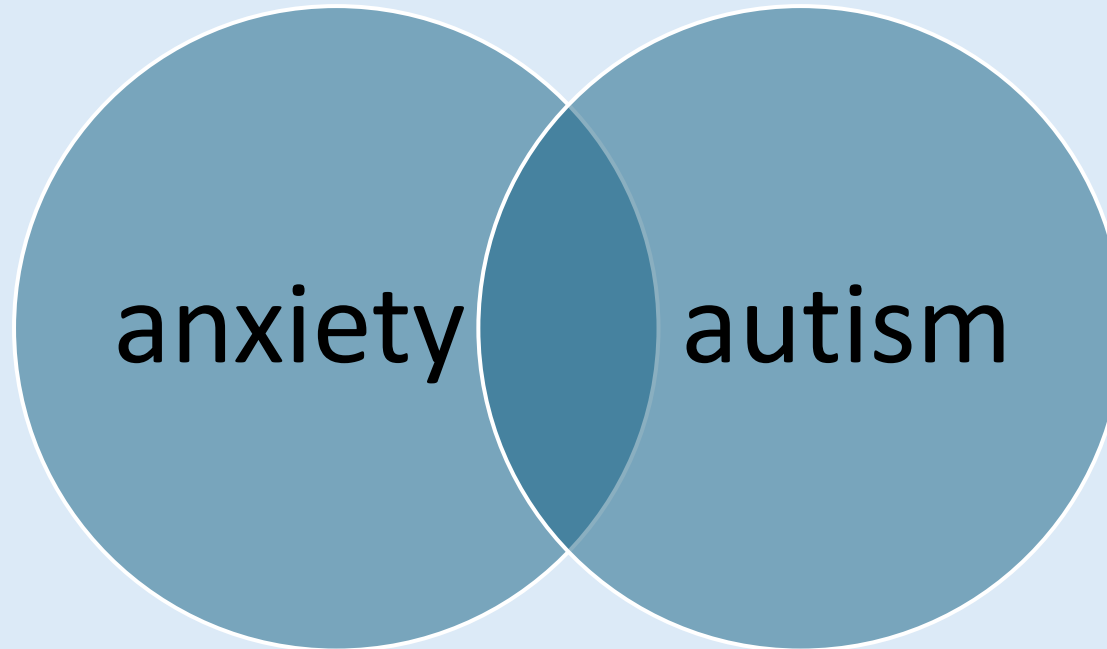
Autistic children/people may find it easier to socialise with each other. (Crompton et. al. 2020)

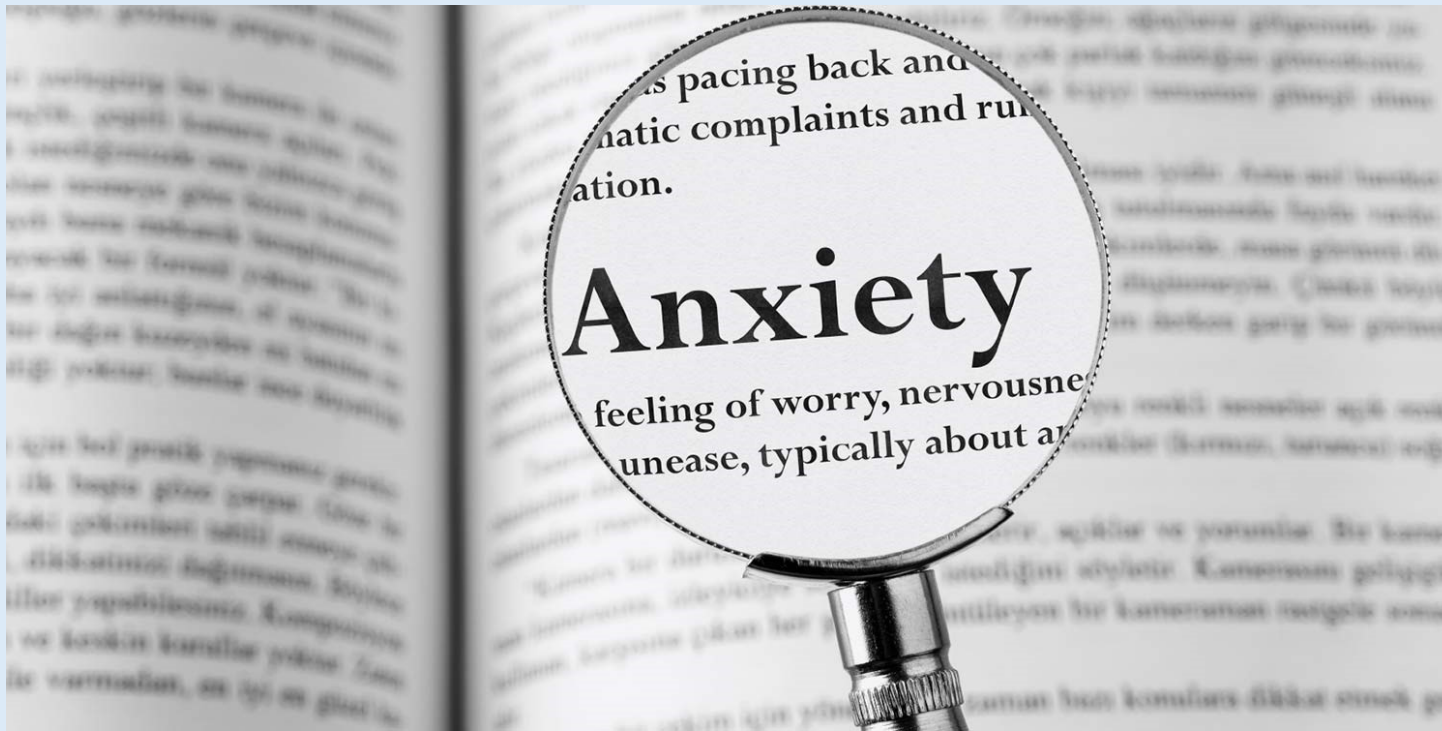
Autistic people experience 2 x the amount of bullying incidents than their neurotypical peers. (Griffiths et. al. 2019)



True, False, Maybe

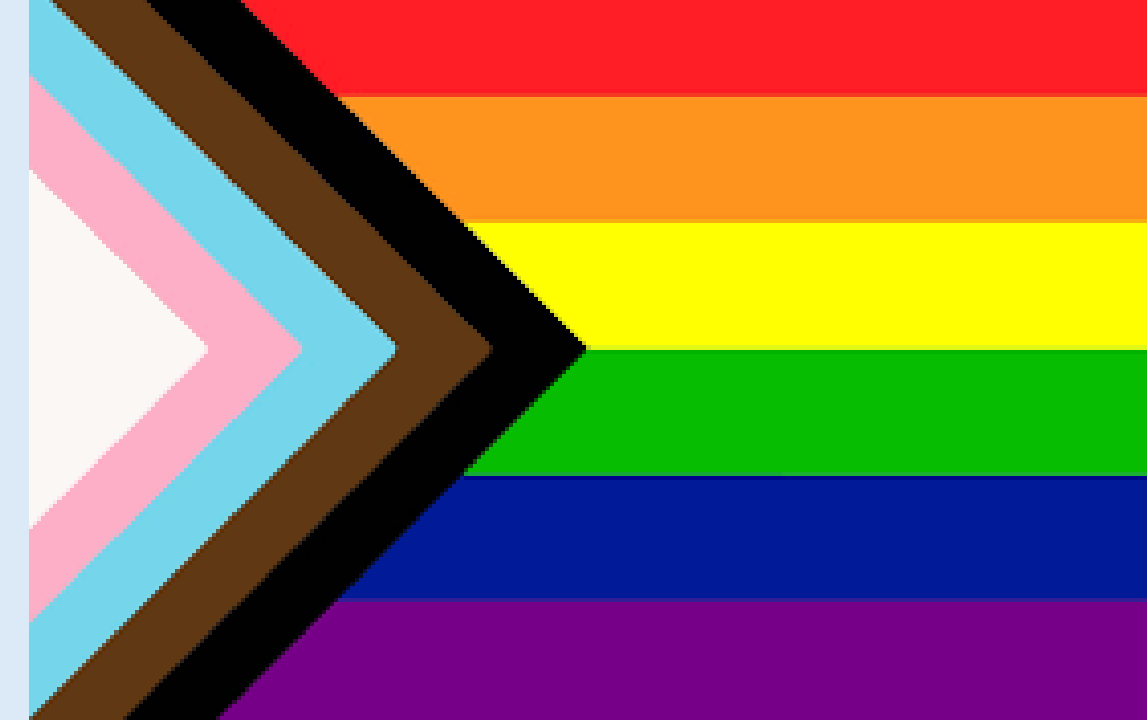
Autistic people often experience anxiety.





Hwang et al. (2019) reports between 50% and 65% of autistic people of all ages report periods of high anxiety during their lifetime.

True



True, False,
Maybe

**Autistic people identify as
LGBTQ+ more than
neurotypical people.**

Autistic People More Likely to Identify as LGBTQ+ (Sarris 2020)

2-3 times higher than in the general population. (Sarris 2020)

Autism and gender identity

Autistic people are more likely to be transgender, meaning they have a gender identity that differs from their sex assigned at birth. One study found that transgender adults are 3–6 times more likely to be autistic than cisgender people.

True



Tylan Grant from
Hollyoaks

What privileges does Ash have that many girls in the UK do not?



Flexible Thinking, Information Processing and Understanding

Special Interests may look different than boys or more “appropriate” – drawing
Internalise when there is lack of structure and routine.

**Autism
Education
Trust
3 areas of
difference**

Sensory Processing
May mask, hide or internalise their sensory needs leading to burnout or school avoidance

Social Understanding and Communication

Physical Masking (clothes and Makeup)
People pleasing/Fawning
Saying what people expect you to say
Compelled to take on more than you can cope with/Saying ‘yes’
Conforming
Leaning into expected gender roles/stereotypes

Some Key Issues

Underdiagnosis

Mental Health

School non-attendance



Lost Girls

by JM

Lost girls don't live
in Neverland
but between the pages
of diagnostic
forms designed for boys
by men.

We were unseen
but not undone
and though
we were told to stop
being who we were
to fit the mold
of a lady — we were still
here underneath
it all — waiting
for our chance to know
and be known
for our glorious
neurodivergence.



Underdiagnosis



autistic women and girls have characteristics that don't fit with the traditional profile of autism

autism assessments are less sensitive to autistic traits more commonly found in women and girls

women and girls are more likely to 'mask' or camouflage their differences

autistic traits in girls are under-reported by teachers

<https://www.autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/what-is-autism/autistic-women-and-girls>

Mental Health

Misdiagnosis often leads to untreated mental health issues and/or the wrong treatment. (eating disorders, BPD)

Increased likelihood of depression, anxiety, and eating disorders.

Cycle of masking, burnout, and suicidality. (Men and non-binary people mask also.)

Vulnerability: Autistic women are at higher risk of abuse and trauma. Three times the risk of coercive sexual victimization compared to neurotypical peers.

<https://autism.org/women-in-autism/>



School non-attendance – Ruth Moyse

Gender stereotypes?

Impact of language

FIRST TYPE OF DESCRIPTION

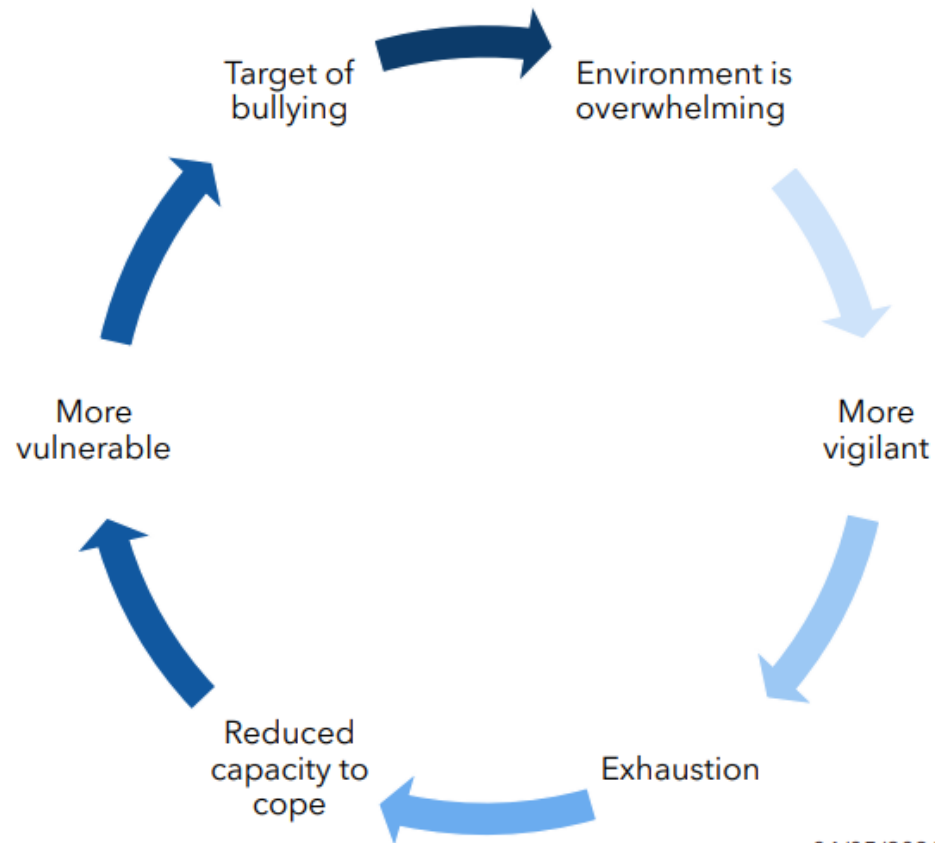
- 'Hides in cupboards' and 'tries to avoid/opt-out'. (Cayla)
- 'Works hard', 'anxious about failing with her work and in not being able to please'. (Emma)
- 'Very shy'; 'very submissive'; 'tries to fade into the background'. (Katie)
- 'Very compliant.' (Gina)

SECOND TYPE OF DESCRIPTION

- 'Partners think she's bossy.' (Molly)
- 'Resistant'; 'lacks empathy'; puts 'a great deal of burden on the class teacher and the class as a whole'. (Beth)
- 'Attention-seeker'; 'lashes out' and 'doesn't care about others if she has hurt them'; 'finds it hard to accept upsets and injustices'. (Lauren)

Factors influencing attendance

- External factors cause deterioration in mental health and exhaustion
- Reduced belief in own power to change things



Rewriting the Narrative

Conclusions

1. The autistic girls' voices were absent from reports and decisions about them
2. They were not rejecting learning, but an environment and ethos that were damaging their mental health
3. Attainment and absence statistics do not necessarily identify autistic girls who need support - alternative flags of concern are required
4. If you don't meet their needs, don't be surprised when they stop attending school!

Let's change the

Narrative



Hannah
Gadsby
Ten
Steps to Nanette

Autistic and ADHDer
Comedian

Communication difficulty? Or difference?



Five recommendations

1. ***"Just listen. It's not rocket science, just listen"*** (Daisy)
2. ***"Be curious"*** (Robyn)
3. ***"Prioritise pupil wellbeing"*** (Erin)
4. ***"Take action"*** (Jane)
5. ***"Be more informed about being autistic"*** (Alex)





Questions



Helpful Links

<https://www.autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/what-is-autism/autistic-women-and-girls>

<https://spaceherts.org.uk/services/> <https://findtheadhdgirls.org/>

<https://www.ndti.org.uk/news/rewriting-the-narrative>

<https://autisticgirlsnetwork.org/>

<https://www.ndti.org.uk/news/rewriting-the-narrative>

<https://autism.org/women-in-autism/>

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