



Living with Autism: Against all odds

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My plan

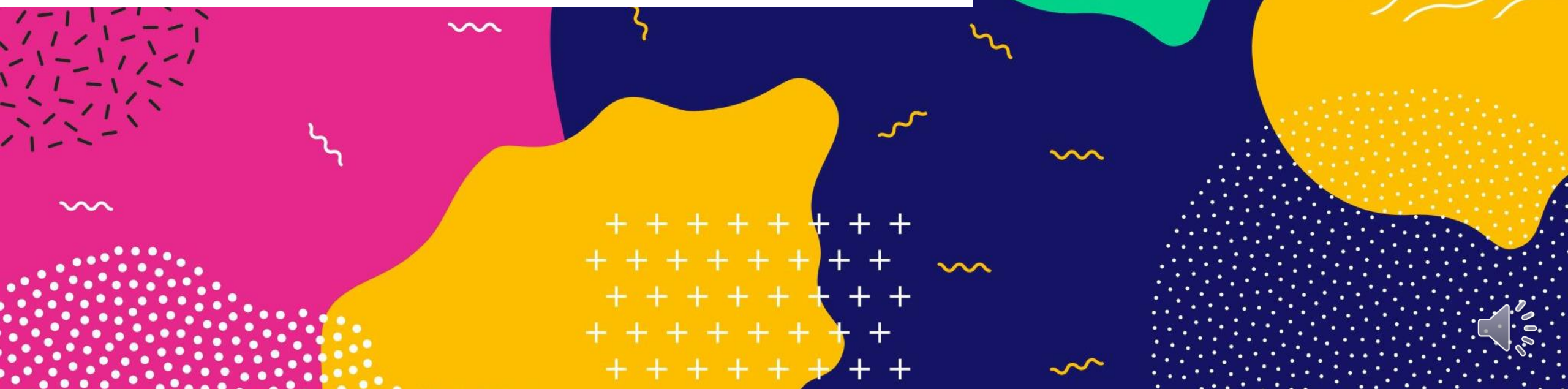
- Describe challenges for autistic people
- Describe challenges I face daily
- Winning against odds
- My current goals
- Why?
 - To show that one can be happy despite being different from others





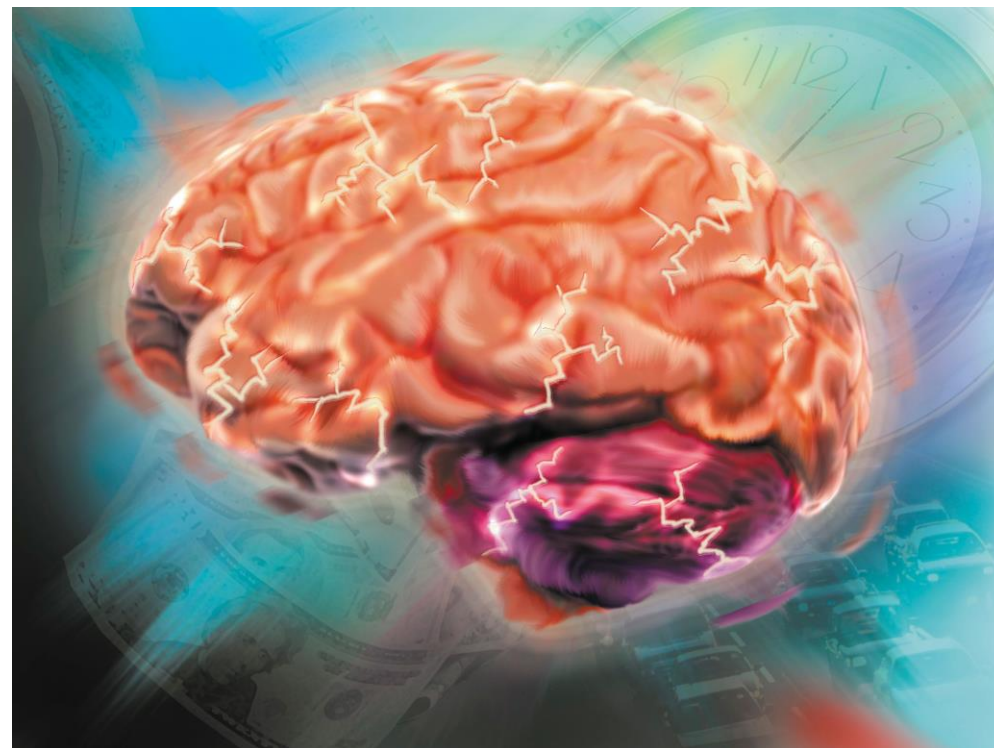
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Challenges for autistic people



What is autism spectrum disorder?

- Persistent deficits in social communication and social interaction across multiple contexts
- Restricted, repetitive patterns of behaviour, interests, or activities
 - Do not understand why this is a disorder unless the restricted and repetitive pattern is about harming others!!



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<https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism/hcp-dsm.html>

Based on: American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual, Fifth Edition (DSM-5)



Autism and mental health

Mental health survey results

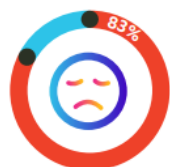
Nearly all autistic adults have experienced anxiety and around two in three have had this diagnosed by a health professional.



94% of autistic adults reported experiencing anxiety.



Almost 6 in 10 said this affected their ability to get on with life.



83% reported experiencing depression.



Half said this had a high impact on their ability to get on with life.



Almost 3 in 10 fall into the severe depression category based on the PHQ-9.



Autism and suicide



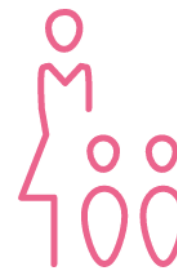
1 in 100

Around 1 in 100 people in the UK are autistic



9 x more likely

Autistic adults who do not have a learning disability are 9 times more likely to die from suicide

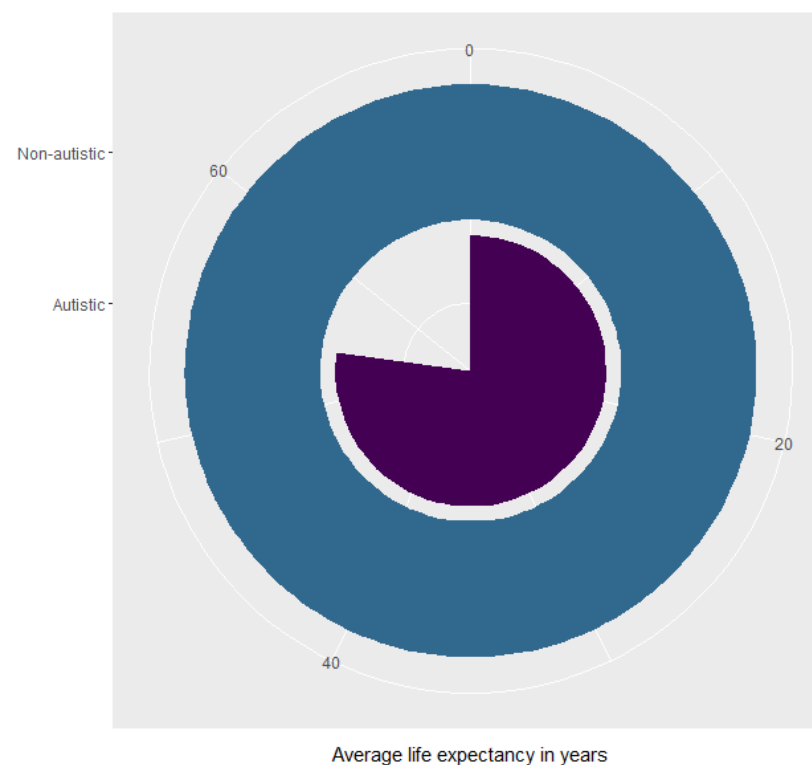


28 x more likely

Children with autism are 28 times more likely to think about or attempt suicide

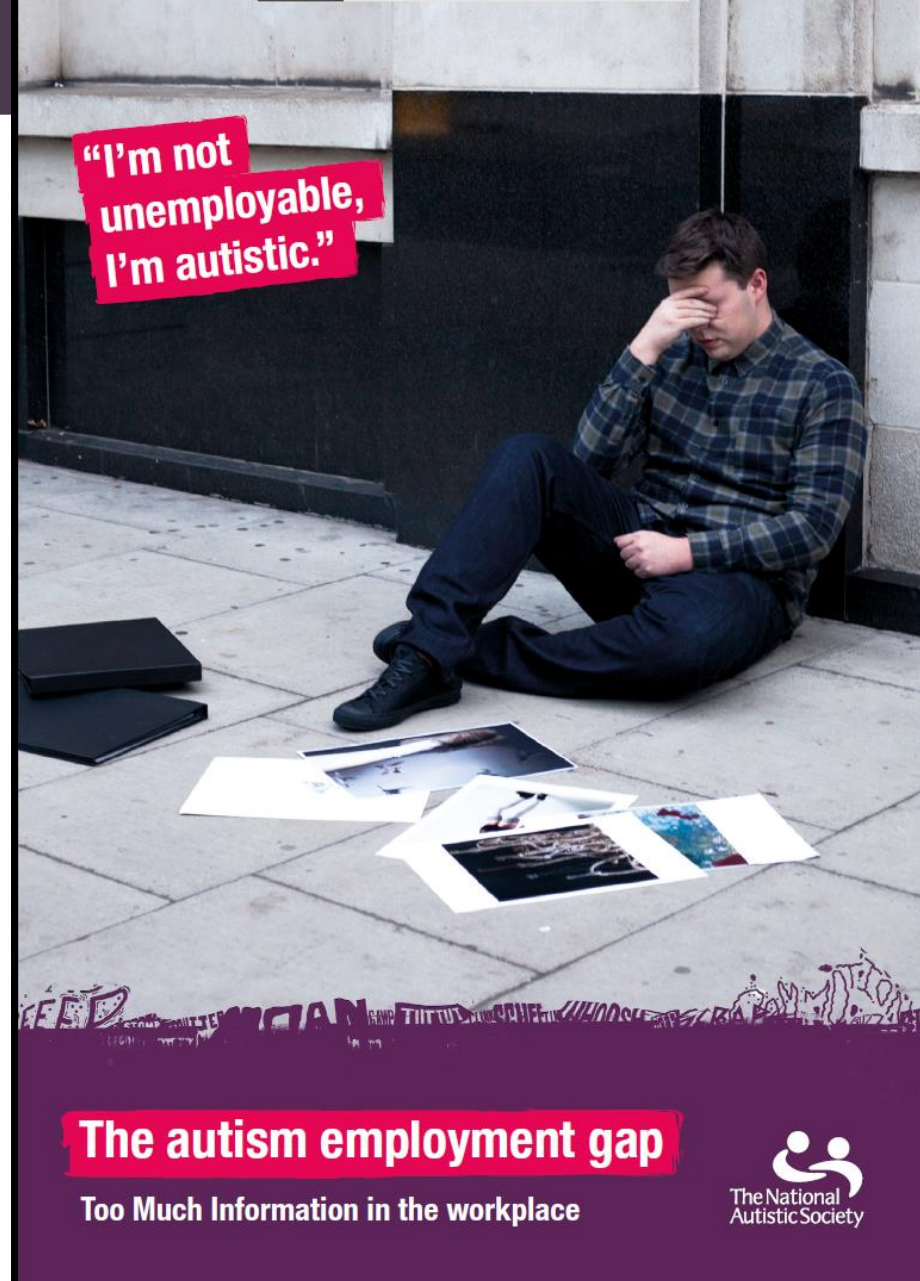


Autism life expectancy



Based on data from: Hirvikoski T, Mittendorfer-Rutz E, Boman M, Larsson H, Lichtenstein P, Bölte S. Premature mortality in autism spectrum disorder. *Br J Psychiatry*. 2016 Mar;208(3):232-8. doi: 10.1192/bjp.bp.114.160192. Epub 2015 Nov 5. PMID: 26541693.



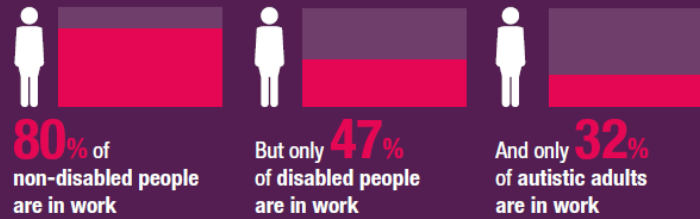


<https://s3.chorus-mk.thirdlight.com/file/1573224908/63516243370/width=-1/height=-1/format=-1/fit=scale/t=444848/e=never/k=59f99727/TMI%20Employment%20Report%202024pp%20WEB.pdf>

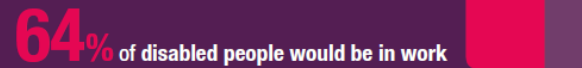


Responses to our survey indicated that:

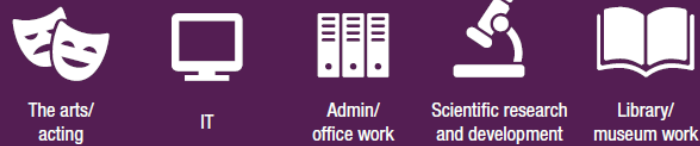
THE FACTS



The Government wants to halve the disability employment gap. This would mean that



Autistic people told us their ideal job would be in:



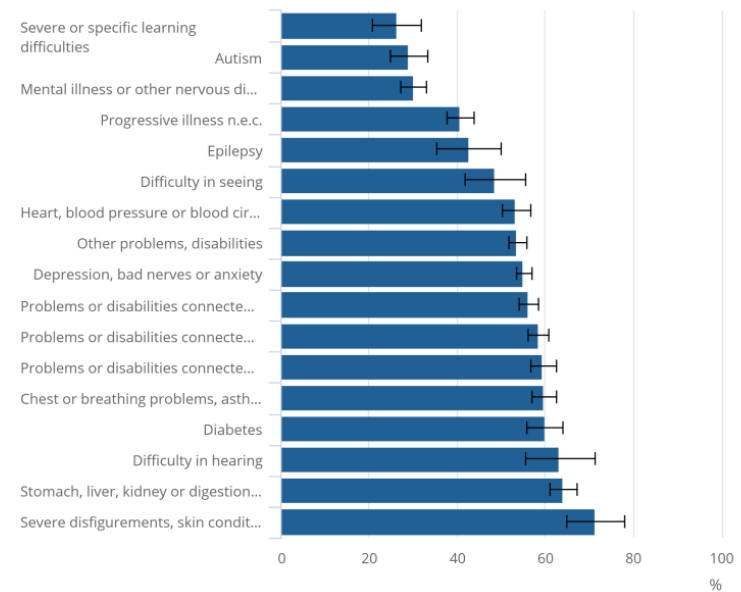
What employers say:



Unemployment rates in UK in 2021

Figure 5: Disabled people with severe or specific learning difficulties, autism and mental illness had the lowest employment rates

Employment rates of disabled people, by main impairment, aged 16 to 64 years, UK, year ending June 2021





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Challenges I face



Challenges I face (1)

- Social communication and social interaction
- Probably resulting from difficulty in language perception

Please take a seat

What you mean



What I understand



Challenges I face (2)

- Difficulty in language perception
 - Compounded by being from minority community
 - Misconception that I do not have good knowledge of English



Challenges I face (3)

- Lack of subtlety
 - Might miss important things said in a subtle way
- I cannot be subtle either
 - This may not be acceptable to all
 - Wrongly perceived as lacking emotional maturity or arrogance



Did you notice it?

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Challenges I face (4)

- Difficulty with body language perception
 - Compounds difficulty in language perception and difficulty in understanding subtle things
- Ability to communicate with body language
 - People misunderstand
 - Cannot communicate in a subtle way



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Challenges I face (5)

- Difficulty in remembering faces and names
 - Particularly if look slightly different from how they looked previously
 - Has led to many awkward situations

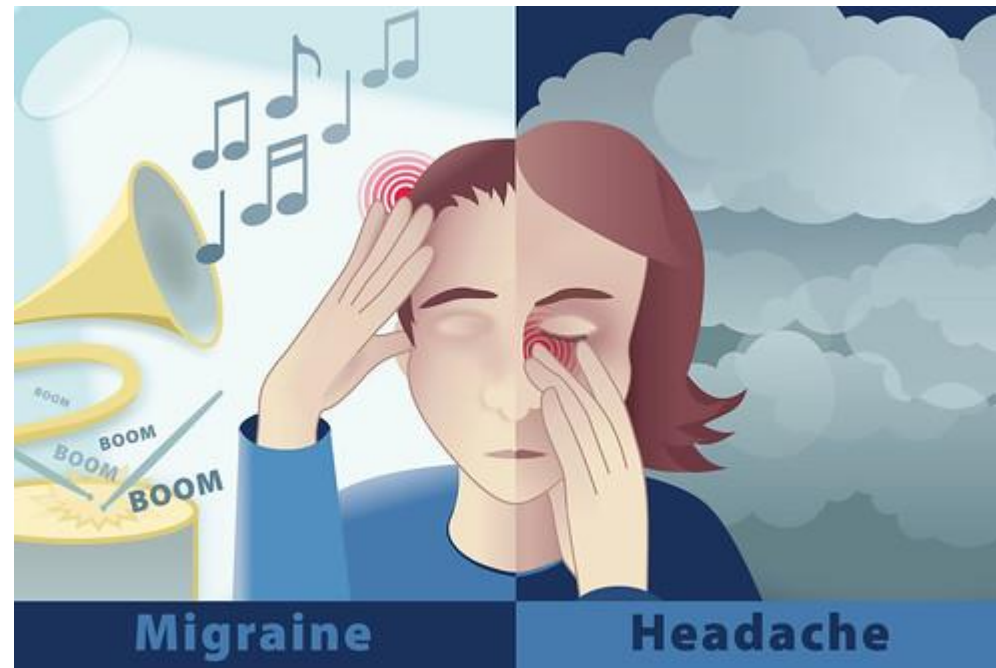


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Challenges I face (6)

- I have hypersensitivity to light and sounds
- Makes it difficult to work in an office



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Winning against odds



Why do I feel that I am reasonably successful?

Professor of Evidence-based Medicine and Surgery

Head of Research in Division of Surgery and Interventional Science

I am one of the top 2% of the scientists who have published their research in Medicine since 1960 based on impact (<https://doi.org/10.17632/btchxktzyw.4>)

More than 50 of my research publications have been used in one or more national or international clinical practice guidelines



How did I get to this position?

My daughter

Patience of
parents, friends,
relatives, and
work colleagues

Unconditional
help from
teachers/
strangers

Luck

Effort

What are the qualities that allowed me to get to this position?

I did not/do not allow others define what my success should look like: I followed my heart

I was/am prepared to accept failure: this allowed me/allows me to take more chances

I was/am ready to alter my plans when new opportunities arise

I was/am highly resilient: if I failed/fail a few times with one task, I looked/look for a different opportunity having learnt something from the failure

I am not very modest: I am not shy to acknowledge my achievements



What is the advice that I would give my younger self?

Success and failure are simply a matter of perception

Don't let others define your success or failure

Be prepared to learn new things to increase the chances of success

Put in your best effort to succeed but accept that you will succeed sometimes and fail other times

Be prepared to learn from any failures

Be prepared to change paths if the situation warrants: that is not accepting defeat

You can only lose if you accept defeat

You can never lose by helping others unconditionally

What is my current goal?

- I am working towards a day when
*People will not be judged by their **physical appearance**, **gender**, **sexuality**, or **neurodiversity**, but by **their character***
 - Modified from *Reverend Doctor Martin Luther King Jr's dream*
- Probably not see that day during my lifetime
- To increase chance of success
 - Learn social communication and communication through body language
 - Connect with people working towards or willing to work towards realising this fundamental necessity

Take-home message

- I am autistic
- I am also one of the top 2% of the scientists who have published their research in Medicine since 1960
- Don't let your disabilities define you and feel sorry for yourself
- Focus on your abilities: this can lead to success (in whichever way you define it!)
- I am a living example of that!