

Project aim Although commonly described by autistic people, there is a lack of research on autistic burnout. We sought to define autistic burnout using Grounded Delphi Method.

Background **#Autburnout**

There is fervent discussion of #AutBurnout and #AutisticBurnout on social media, yet only recently has autistic burnout been mentioned in academic discourse by Raymaker et al. (2020).

Method

Grounded Delphi Method (GDM) (Howard, 2018)

GDM combines the Delphi method, useful in areas with little established literature, and grounded theory, useful for theory building (Päivärinta et al., 2011). Twenty-two autistic adults, as experts by lived experience, completed three rounds of surveys over a sixmonth period.

Conclusions

Autistic burnout appears to be a debilitating condition with onset linked to everyday stressors faced by autistic people in an unaccommodating world. Therapeutic strategies such as behavioural activation would be contraindicated. We are currently completing a follow-up study comparing this definition with the work by Raymaker et al. (2020) and an unpublished version of the AASPIRE Autistic Burnout Measure.

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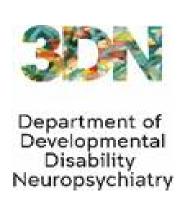
Defining Autistic Burnout using Grounded Delphi Method: Autistic Burnout through the Eyes of Experts by Lived Experience

Autistic burnout: Not being able to function due to being overwhelmed by life (particularly being autistic but having to live life as a neurotypical

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Impact Round 1 open-ended items were jointly analysed "I spent 3 weeks in the psychiatric ward, was very tired... found it difficult to talk... just wanted to be far away from by JH and SA. Peer researcher JH is a lateeveryone... trust (others) less" diagnosed autistic adult who has personally experienced autistic burnout. Visual Analogues Recovery Scales (VAS) in round 2 and 3 sought agreement "When I have time on my own... I can recover", "I need time to find me and set myself to zero, recalibrating my with the draft definition. brain", "I'm slowly coming out of burnout by understanding more about myself and autism." Open-ended VAS items with VAS items with **Temporal Qualities** further comments survey items were further comment "It depends on... the stressor... and how long I'm exposed to it... it can last all day, or only a few hours...", subjected to option aligned to option aligned to grounded theory each element of "Burnout has been 5 years so far", "this... burnout lasted... 2 years." each change to analysis. A draft the definition. the definition. definition was Definition was Consensus was **Differentiating from Depression** developed and refined and reached and the "The sensory overstimulation is off the charts", "It's more intense...a complete mind, body, soul thing it's sent to experts returned to definition finalised everything", "[Depression is] a side effect with burnout the larger cause." experts. Round Round Round **Consensus** was met in the round 3 survey and 90% of experts agreed or strongly agreed the following definition described their experiences: 3 2 **PRELIMINARY DEFINITION FOR AUTISTIC BURNOUT** Results Autistic Burnout is a severely debilitating condition with onset preceded by fatigue from camouflaging or masking autistic traits, interpersonal interactions, an overload of cognitive input*, a sensory environment unaccommodating to autistic sensitivities and / or other additional stressors or changes. Onset and episodes of autistic burnout may interact with co-occurring physical and / or Several themes were identified in Phase 1: mental health conditions. Energy The following criteria must be met; 'I have stopped wearing myself out by trying to 1 Significant mental and physical exhaustion operate in a neurotypical landscape", "Frequently 2 Interpersonal withdrawal. have to postpone tasks or events due to loss of With one or more of the following; mental energy." 1 Significant reduction in social, occupational, educational, academic, behavioural, or other important areas of functioning. 2 Confusion, difficulties with executive function**, and/or dissociative states. Onset 3 Increased intensity of autistic traits and/or reduced capacity to camouflage/mask e.g. increased sensory sensitivity, repetitive or "[Being] safety officer gained me enmity of... costimming behaviour, difficulty engaging or communication with others. workers. I got confused, everything got too much. I The condition is not better explained by a psychiatric illness such as depression, psychosis, personality disorder, trauma- and walked away from my workplace..." stressor-related disorders.





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- Extended or chronic episodes of autistic burnout may be preceded by brief or intermittent episodes.







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