

Crossing the divide: a longitudinal study of effective treatments for people with autism and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder across the lifespan

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Plain English summary

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Plain English summary

Our aim was to determine if clinical services meet the needs of people with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and autism spectrum disorder (ASD) who are 'at transition' from childhood to adulthood and those of their carers; and to identify how improvements could be made. We asked four research questions:

1. What are the needs of affected individuals and their carers?
2. Are people with ADHD and ASD recognised and treated?
3. Can we improve the identification of ADHD and ASD?
4. Can we improve the treatment of ADHD and ASD?

We found the following answers.

People with ASD and ADHD have significant needs as they move through adolescence and young adulthood. A major contributor to these is the presence of associated mental health symptoms (e.g. depression and anxiety), which are mostly undiagnosed (and untreated). As affected individuals age, there are less likely to be seen by services. Carer burden may be approximately the same as looking after somebody with a traumatic brain injury or dementia. New changes to the ways people are diagnosed suggest that many individuals will be excluded from services.

Clinical services have a high prevalence of people with ASD and ADHD. However, only a minority of affected individuals are recognised, or treated, by the services they are in touch with. This may reflect a lack of both techniques to identify people with these conditions and staff knowledge.

Our research identified new tools to diagnose the core disorders associated with ADHD and ASD and their associated symptoms and suggests that simple psychological interventions to treat obsessional symptoms may be beneficial. We also found that treatment trials could potentially be run in prisons and that web-based training interventions are useful to clinicians.

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