

THE DISABILITY AND PREGNANCY STUDY

snapshot



Health characteristics of reproductive-aged autistic women in Ontario: A population-based, cross-sectional study

What is this research about?

Autism is a neurodevelopmental condition that impacts how people communicate and interact with others, and how they experience their environment. Autism has historically been described as a mostly male condition. However, an increasing number of girls and women are being identified with autism. However, we know little about the health needs of reproductive-aged autistic women.

What did the researchers do?

The researchers used health administrative data held at [ICES](#) to look at all Ontario autistic women who were between 15 and 44 years of age in 2017.

The health characteristics of autistic women and non-autistic women were described, including those related to:

- Socioeconomic characteristics,
- Physical health,
- Mental health,
- Use of medications that could increase the risk of birth defects,
- History of experiencing assault, and
- Consistency of care by the same family physician.

What did the researchers find?

- Autistic women experienced several health disparities.
- Autistic women had higher rates of chronic conditions like diabetes, mental illness, using medications that could increase the risk of birth defects, and history of experiencing assault compared to non-autistic women.
- They were also more likely than non-autistic women to be socioeconomically marginalized.

What you need to know

Reproductive-aged autistic women had poorer health outcomes compared to non-autistic women. It is important for health interventions to be tailored to the needs of autistic women.

THE DISABILITY AND PREGNANCY STUDY

snapshot

How can we use this research?

The findings from this research highlight the need to adapt health promotion programs and interventions to better meet the needs of autistic women.

It is also important to raise the awareness of clinicians providing women's health care to the needs of their autistic patients.

About the researchers

Ami Tint, PhD, C.Psych., is a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the Azrieli Adult Neurodevelopmental Centre at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health; ami.tint@camh.ca

Hilary Brown, PhD, is an Assistant Professor at the University of Toronto Scarborough and an Adjunct Scientist at ICES and Women's College Hospital; hk.brown@utoronto.ca

Yona Lunsky, PhD C.Psych., is the Director of the Azrieli Adult Neurodevelopmental Centre at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health and an Adjunct Scientist at ICES; yonalunsky@camh.ca

Do you want to know more?

This snapshot is based on the following article:
Tint A, Brown HK, Chen S, Lai MC, Tarasoff LA, Vigod SN, Parish S, Havercamp SM, Lunsky, Y. Health characteristics of reproductive-aged autistic women in Ontario: A population-based, cross-sectional study. *Autism*. 2021; <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362361320982819>

For more information about this article or the Disability and Pregnancy Study, contact Dr. Hilary Brown at hk.brown@utoronto.ca

About the Disability and Pregnancy Study

The Disability and Pregnancy Study is a research program aiming to enhance the perinatal care of women with disabilities. This work is conducted by an international team of researchers in partnership with a dedicated Advisory Committee comprised of individuals with lived experience, service-providers, and policy-makers.

Support

This research was supported by the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health & Human Development of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) (Grant #5R01HD092326). The opinions, results, and conclusions in this report are those of the authors and do not reflect that of the NIH or the data providers. No endorsement by the NIH is intended or should be inferred.

Keywords

Autism, disability, preconception health, health disparities, reproductive health



Images in this report were obtained from the following sources:

1. Sunnybrook Hospital. (2017). Making pregnancy more accessible for women with disabilities. Retrieved June 29, 2018 from <http://health.sunnybrook.ca/pregnancy/accessible-care-pregnancy-clinic/>
2. BabyCentre. (2018). Baby signing. Retrieved June 29, 2018 from <https://www.babycentre.co.uk/a547348/baby-signing>
3. American Action Fund for Blind Children and Adults. (2010). Blind children with additional disabilities. Retrieved June 29, 2018 from <https://nfb.org/Images/nfb/Publications/fr/fr9/2/fr2902tc.htm>

This Snapshot was created following a template created by the Evidence Exchange Network (www.eenet.ca).