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

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Do you want to know more?

This snapshot is based on the following article:
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For more information about this article or the Disability and Pregnancy Study, contact Dr. Hilary Brown at hk.brown@utoronto.ca