



3RD INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON  
**MENTAL HEALTH AND  
HUMAN RESILIENCE**



**2026**  
MARCH 23-24  
**BERLIN**  
**GERMANY**

**Noveltics Group LLC**  
1007 N Orange St. 4th  
Floor Suite #3199,  
Wilmington, Delaware  
19801, USA



# SCIENTIFIC PROGRAM

DAY 1 MARCH 23, 2026

08:00 - 08:40 | Registration Desk Opens

08:40 - 09:00 | Opening Ceremony & Inaugural Address

## KEYNOTE FORUM

09:00 - 09:40

**Knut Möller**, *Furtwangen University, Germany*

Title: ETAP: First results on game-based social training for ASD

09:40 - 10:20

**Stephen Mark Shore**, *Adelphi University of New York, USA*

Title: 4 A's of autism: Awareness, acceptance, appreciation and action as a pathway to fulfilling and productive lives

10:20 - 11:00

**Thomas Iland**, *Come To Life Coaching, Ireland*

Title: My glass is full: Stories of putting mental health first

## GROUP PHOTO & COFFEE BREAK | 11:00 - 11:15

11:15 - 11:55

**Magdalena Cubala-Kucharska**, *Arcana Institute, Poland*

Title: Pathogen-targeted treatment of gastrointestinal disorders and reduction of autism symptom severity assessed by ATEC: A case series

11:55 - 12:35

**Suzanne Fox**, *The Yellow Tulip Project, USA*

Title: Planting hope and smashing the stigma-one yellow tulip bulb at a time. Innovative approaches to addressing youth mental health through the arts, storytelling and gardens

**Sessions:** Sensory Processing Differences in Autism | Sibling Mental Health and Family Dynamics | Gender Diversity and Autism Spectrum Disorders | Breakthroughs in Autism Research and Neurodevelopment | Strengthening Parent-Professional Partnerships | Autistic Advocacy: Voices and Perspectives | Mental Health and Well-being | Cultural Competency in Autism Diagnosis and Care | Advances in Neurobiology and Brain Imaging | Overlapping Neurodivergences: ADHD, Dyslexia, and Autism | Neurorehabilitation | Advocacy, Activism, and Policy Development for Autism Rights

**Session Chair:** Rashmi Das, Higashi Autism School, India

**Session Chair:** Joachim Lee, PBM, Neuro-Therapy, Singapore

12:35 - 13:00

**Rashmi Das**, *Higashi Autism School, India*

Title: The daily life therapy method of higashi for educating autistic children

13:00 - 13:25

**Irina Diyankova**, *Healing Trauma, USA*

Title: Making psychotherapy space and process more neuroinclusive for autistic adults and adolescents

## GROUP PHOTO & LUNCH BREAK | 13:25 - 14:10

14:10 - 14:35

**Libby Bagno-Simon**, *Tipul-li, Israel*

Title: The invisible ones: A personal journey from motherhood to diagnosis and advocacy

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**Wynn Smith**, *Foundation L'Élan Retrouvé, France*

14:35 – 15:00

Title: Building continuity in complex autism care: A coordinated pathway at Fondation l'Élan Retrouvé in Paris, France

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**Neda Maki**, *University of Toronto, Canada*

15:00 – 15:25

Title: "I can make it friendly": Reimagining art therapy as evidence-based innovation in autistic imagination

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**Yamilka L. Schumacker-Robles**, *Institute of Sexology, Education, and Psychology of Puerto Rico, Puerto Rico*

15:25 – 15:50

Title: The need for sexuality education in school-aged children with autism spectrum disorder in Puerto Rico

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**Hamlatul Hawary Azizan**, *Hawary Sports Centre, Malaysia*

15:50 – 16:15

Title: Evaluating the autism swim program: Behavioural and attentional outcomes in children with ASD

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**REFRESHMENT BREAK | 16:15 – 16:30**

**WORKSHOP**

**Joachim Lee**, *PBM, Neuro-Therapy, Singapore*

16:30 – 17:10

Title: Brain-switch 2.0® a neuroscience-informed approach to rapid and lasting change

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**SESSIONS TO BE CONTINUES**

**Subrata Kumar Mallick**, *University of Manchester, UK*

17:10 – 17:35

Title: Positivity within negativity: Developing parental self and social identity through long-term care and group connections

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**Anupa Devi**, *Root to Resilience, UK*

17:35 – 18:00

Title: The 4Rs to resilience: Strengthening mental health through inner leadership

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**Mohammed Alzayer**, *Independent Researcher & Autism Advocate, Saudi Arabia*

18:00 – 18:25

Title: The survival–authenticity spectrum: Reframing emotional posture across neurotypes

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**NETWORKING & B2B MEETINGS**

**AWARDS & CLOSING CEREMONY**

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## DAY-2 MARCH 24, 2026

Registration Desk Opens

Opening Ceremony & Inaugural Address

### KEYNOTE FORUM

**Hanna A. Alonim**, *The Mifne Center and Bar Ilan University, Israel*

09:00 - 09:40

Title: Bridging the gap between early detection of autism prodrome in infants, assessment and intervention

**Gregory S Anderson**, *Thompson Rivers University, Canada*

09:40 - 10:20

Title: An ecological model of resilience for public safety and frontline health care organizations

**Julius Melvin Jefferies**, *Simply Healing LLC, USA*

10:20 - 11:00

Title: Spectrum of Kindness Therapy (SKT): A compassion-centered feasibility pilot for neurodiverse adults

### COFFEE BREAK 11:00 - 11:15

**Sessions:** Autism and Employment: Building Inclusive Workplaces | Family-Centered Models for Support and Intervention | Addressing Anxiety, Depression, and Mental Health in Autism Genetics and Molecular Research in Autism Spectrum Disorders | Human Resilience | Psychology and Psychiatry | Inclusive Education Strategies for Students with Autism | Enhancing Social Communication and Interaction Skills | Human Resilience | Designing Autism-Friendly and Accessible Environments

**Session Chair:** Diana Damilatis-Kull, Adelphi University of New York, USA

### WORKSHOP

**Mofijul Islam**, *Moonflower Autism Foundation, Bangladesh*

11:15 - 11:35

Title: Navigating challenges and opportunities to adulthood with Moonflower Autism Foundation in Bangladesh

**Marja Helinä Nuutinen**, *Moonflower Autism Foundation and EETE, Finland*

11:35 - 11:55

Title: Empowerment, resilience, and overcoming obstacles for adults with Autism in Finland and Bangladesh: Innovative approaches by evert

### SESSIONS TO BE CONTINUES

**Rosetta Walker-Iland**, *Rosetta Creations, Ltd, Ireland*

11:55 - 12:20

Title: Navigating autism, relationships & dating

**Diana Damilatis-Kull**, *Adelphi University of New York, USA*

12:20 - 12:45

Title: Addressing depression and anxiety in adults with autism: A neurodiversity-affirming group support model

**Wynn Smith**, *Foundation L'Élan Retrouvé, France*

12:45 - 13:10

Title: Recognizing the unspoken: Identifying and managing constipation in autistic adults

## LUNCH BREAK | 13:10 – 14:00

**Jude Merit**, *University of Sunderland, UK*

14:00 - 14:25

Title: “You don’t need anyone to validate that” interviewing transgender autistic millennials as experts on their own experiences

**Anastasia Trofilova**, *Cognitivebotics Technologies MENA, UAE*

14:25 - 14:50

Title: AI-powered gamified learning for autistic children: A development and feasibility project

## SESSIONS TO BE CONTINUES

**Jill Bradford**, *The Autistic Adult Choir, UK*

14:50 - 15:15

Title: The impact of a user-led autistic adult choir on social connection and empowerment for autistic adults

**Anna Trubitsyna**, *Novosibirsk State University, Russia*

15:15 - 15:40

Title: Differential diagnosis of ASD and related neurodevelopmental conditions

**Petra Amchová**, *Masaryk University, Czech Republic*

15:40 - 16:05

Title: Microbiota-driven modulation of brain metabolism in an animal model of autism

## COFFEE BREAK | 16:05 - 16:20

**Carla Labarthe**, *PUCRS, UFCSPA, Brazil*

16:20 - 16:45

Title: Neuronal thermodynamics in autism etiopathology

**William Albert Bill Peters**, *Global Disability Consultant & Community Inclusion Advocate, Azerbaijan*

16:45 - 17:10

Title: Strength-based work and life through community inclusion: Lessons from global practice

**Shanglin Li**, *Adelphi University, USA*

17:10 - 17:35

Title: The introduction of special education in Germany

## Exhibitor Presentation

**Faiza Abdulaziz**, *Independent Learning Center, Saudi Arabia*

17:35 - 18:05

Title: Raising the standard: Integrated autism care from the Middle East

**Santhisree Bheesetti**, *Sree Prathama Ayurvedam, India*

18:05 - 18:35

Title: Neuroregulation of social communication in autism: An integrative ayurvedic–neuroscience framework

## Awards & Closing Ceremony

## BOOKMARK DATES

4<sup>th</sup> International Conference on  
**MENTAL HEALTH AND  
HUMAN RESILIENCE**

March 15-16, 2027 | London, UK



EXHIBITOR

3<sup>rd</sup> International Conference on  
**MENTAL HEALTH AND  
HUMAN RESILIENCE**

MARCH 23-24, 2026 | BERLIN, GERMANY



of care. Parents and caregivers are considered active partners in the therapeutic process and receive structured guidance, training, and consultation. By empowering families with practical strategies and knowledge, ILC strengthens the consistency of intervention beyond therapy sessions and enhances the sustainability of progress. This family-centered model recognizes that meaningful development occurs when clinical expertise and home support systems work together in alignment.

Under the leadership of our founder and chairman, Ms. Faiza Abdulaziz, ILC combines clinical excellence with strategic innovation. The center prioritizes continuous professional development, ensuring that its team remains aligned with the latest research in autism intervention and pediatric rehabilitation. It also integrates advanced systems for data management, performance tracking, and service quality assurance to enhance accountability and measurable impact. Through forward-thinking leadership and structured planning, ILC continues to raise the standard of specialized services within the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the wider Gulf region.

ILC is internationally recognized as a Certified Autism Center™ (CAC) and proudly holds the distinction of being the world's first Down Syndrome Center of Excellence™ (DSCE), both accredited by the International Board of Credentialing and Continuing Education Standards (IBCCES). These accreditations reflect adherence to rigorous global benchmarks in autism competency, staff training, and service delivery standards. They demonstrate ILC's commitment to maintaining internationally recognized quality measures while delivering culturally responsive and community-centered care.

Through its presence at this conference, Independent Learning Center aims to foster meaningful partnerships, explore collaborative research opportunities, and contribute to the shared global mission of improving outcomes for individuals with autism. We believe that sustainable progress in autism care depends on collective expertise, innovation, and inclusive practices. By sharing our experience and learning from international leaders in the field, ILC remains dedicated to empowering children to achieve independence, participation, and an enhanced quality of life within their families and communities.



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**Facebook:** [www.facebook.com/ilctherapy](http://www.facebook.com/ilctherapy) | **LinkedIn:** <https://www.linkedin.com/company/ilctherapy/>

# BOOKMARK DATES

4<sup>th</sup> International Conference on

## **MENTAL HEALTH AND HUMAN RESILIENCE**

March 15-16, 2027 | London, UK



# Keynote Forum

DAY 1

3<sup>rd</sup> International Conference on  
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## ETAP: First results on game-based social training for ASD

**Knut Möller**

Furtwangen University, Germany

A prototype for a trainings system was developed comprising 1. An interactive, scalable game, displaying different communication scenarios 2. A sensor system, to measure heart rate variability, Electro Dermal Activity, Eye tracking and facial videos to estimate emotional changes, attention and stress, and 3. A controller to decide how the game is parameterized e.g. concerning the complexity of the scene display, amplitude of background noise, number of actors involved.

A first pilot study in a pure feedforward mode was conducted with neurotypical and ASD subjects (10 and 30 subjects) at the Clinic of Psychiatry and Psychotherapy of the University Hospital of Freiburg. Some fundamental tests were conducted first to understand the individual level of interaction capabilities and to acquire a base level of physiological signals and eye tracking. In the second part of the experiments the subjects had to navigate through a number of game scenes while body reactions and attention shifts are documented.

The presentation will cover the setup of the experiments, first results on differences of neurotypical and ASD test subjects, interindividual variations in physiological responses to different game parameterizations.

A follow up study is in preparation to address pre-/post effects and differences in trainings efficiency compared to current therapist guided group therapy as the standard of care.

### Biography

Knut Moller received the M.S. and PhD degrees in computer science and the M.S. degree in medical science from the University of Bonn, Bonn, Germany, in 1986, 1991, and 1996, respectively. From 1991 to 1997, he was an assistant professor in the Department of Computer Science at Bonn University, Bonn, Germany, where he was involved in the fields of machine learning, robotics, and image processing. In 1998, he became a professor for medical informatics at Furtwangen University, Villingen-Schwenningen, Germany, where currently he is the director of the Institute for Technical Medicine (ITeM).

Chairman of the Research Cluster “Connected Health in Medical Mountains (CoHMed)” and “Von Haast Research Fellow” of the Royal Society of New Zealand. Since 2020 Prof. Möller has been an adjunct professor at the University of Canterbury, NZ, and an associate professor at the Technical Faculty of the University of Freiburg, DE.

His research interests include AI, machine learning, decision support systems, modeling, and signal analysis with the application to diverse medical fields like, e.g., lung protective mechanical ventilation, EIT imaging, and context-aware surgical systems.



## 4 A's of autism: Awareness, acceptance, appreciation and action as a pathway to fulfilling and productive lives

**Stephen Mark Shore**

Adelphi University of New York, USA

An autobiographical structure combines presenter experiences in making fulfilling and productive lives for autistic individuals the rule rather than the exception to charge participants in reframing thinking away from deficit, disorder, and deficit towards seeking strength-based abilities.

By examining how deficits and challenges so pervasively attributed to autism can be reframed as strengths, this presentation offers practical solutions for harnessing these characteristics as potential springboards to success in education, employment, self-advocacy, and meaningful engagement in the community for leading fulfilling and productive lives.

For example, a speaking autistic person having a special interest in trains and public transportation systems may be well prepared to provide public transportation system information to lost patrons by reframing autistic characteristics as strengths.

**Communication:** Factual, detailed, truthful, data driven, and perhaps even repetitive.

How common is it to ask someone to repeat directions?

**Social Interaction:** Predictable and organized. There's a brief greeting followed by a response to a question, a thank you and the customer departs.

**Restrictive Interests:** Reframe as a passion or deep interest. Unlike his co-workers who need references for this information the autistic person has memorized these details to help lost patrons much faster than their co-workers.

These autistic characteristics enable the autistic person to outperform their non-autistic co-workers. While this example describes a person having much speaking ability, this concept can be generalized to individuals having more significant challenges in communication and other areas as well.

## Biography

Diagnosed with “atypical development and strong autistic tendencies” and “too sick” for outpatient treatment, Dr. Shore was recommended for institutionalization. Nonspeaking until 4, and with much support from his parents, teachers, wife, and others, Stephen is now a full-time professor at Adelphi University and an adjunct at several other universities, focusing on aligning best practices in supporting autistic people to lead fulfilling and productive lives.

In addition to working with children and talking about life on the autism spectrum, Stephen is an internationally renowned educator, consultant, and author on lifespan issues pertinent to education, relationships, employment, and self-advocacy. His most recent book, *College for Students with Disabilities*, combines personal stories and research for promoting success in higher education.

A current board member of Autism Speaks, the Organization for Autism Research (OAR), and the Boston Higashi School; president emeritus of the Association for Autism and Neurodiversity; and advisory board member of the Autism Society, Dr. Shore also serves on the boards of numerous other autism-related organizations.

Dr. Stephen Shore combines personal, practical, and academic experiences to promote fulfilling and productive lives for autistic and otherwise neurodivergent individuals as the rule rather than the exception.



## My glass is full: Stories of putting mental health first

### Thomas Iland

Come To Life Coaching, Ireland

Hear from THOMAS ILAND, an autistic self-advocate, as he shares his stories of accepting his diagnosis, navigating social situations and family dynamics, and making difficult decisions as he transitioned to adulthood on both personal and professional levels. From learning how to establish and enforce boundaries to bouncing back from multiple failures, Thomas brings his experience and expertise as the only Toastmasters International Accredited Speaker in the world to this presentation, leaving audiences educated and empowered.

This presentation is intended for teens and young adults on the autism spectrum as well as their families and caregivers. Service providers and researchers are also encouraged to attend.

Keywords: Self-advocacy, Family Dynamics, Relationships, Mental Health

### Biography

Thomas Iland (pronounced like “island”) was diagnosed with autism at 13 years old. Since accepting his diagnosis, Thomas has been recognized as an award-winning, bestselling author and thought leader.

He left his career as a certified public accountant in 2015 to become a keynote speaker, certified human potential coach, and diversity, equity & inclusion consultant.

He is the owner of Come To Life Coaching where he empowers his clients to live the life of their choice.

Thomas has spoken at the United Nations, gave a TEDx talk titled, “How To Come To Life,” and is one of only 95 Toastmasters International Accredited Speakers in the world and the only person on the autism spectrum to achieve this designation.

Thomas lives in Dublin, Ireland, with his wife, Rosetta, and recently broke his own Guinness World Record as the world’s oldest person with autism to finish a full Ironman triathlon!



## Pathogen-targeted treatment of gastrointestinal disorders and reduction of autism symptom severity assessed by ATEC: A case series

**Magdalena Cubala-Kucharska**

Arcana Institute, Poland

Gastrointestinal (GI) disorders are highly prevalent in children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and may significantly influence behavioral regulation, communication, and adaptive functioning. Current pediatric guidelines emphasize that untreated GI pathology in ASD may present primarily through behavioral symptoms rather than typical gastrointestinal complaints.

**Objective:** To assess changes in Autism Treatment Evaluation Checklist (ATEC) scores and GI symptom burden in children with ASD following pathogen-targeted gastrointestinal treatment.

**Methods:** We conducted a retrospective analysis of 21 children with ASD and coexisting GI symptoms (mean age: 5.0 years). ASD symptom severity was evaluated using ATEC before and after treatment. Diagnostic work-up included stool analyses and serological testing; infections with *Campylobacter spp.*, *Yersinia spp.*, and *Toxoplasma gondii* were confirmed serologically in all relevant cases. Treatment was individually tailored, pathogen-targeted, and selected based on microbiological diagnostics and antimicrobial susceptibility testing, delivered in a stepwise manner. One patient underwent fecal microbiota transplantation.

**Results:** GI pathology was predominantly polymicrobial, with a mean of 5.24 pathogens/markers per patient. The dominant infection profile consisted of Enterobacteriaceae (notably *Klebsiella spp.* and *Citrobacter spp.*) co-occurring with intestinal candidiasis (*Candida spp.*) and serologically confirmed bacterial infections (*Campylobacter spp.*, *Yersinia spp.*). Infections showed a recurrent course, most commonly 3–8 relapses per patient. Mean ATEC scores decreased markedly from 62.0 to 17.3, accompanied by clinically meaningful improvement in GI symptoms, sleep quality, emotional regulation, communication, and adaptive functioning. No serious adverse events were observed.

**Conclusions:** In this case series, GI disorders in children with ASD were frequently multifactorial and recurrent. Pathogen-targeted gastrointestinal diagnostics and treatment were associated with a substantial reduction in ATEC scores and global functional improvement, underscoring the clinical relevance of actively addressing GI pathology as part of a comprehensive, integrative approach to ASD care.

### Biography

Magdalena Cubala-Kucharska, MD, PhD, is a family physician and specialist in allergology and dietetics, with over 30 years of clinical experience. She is an international expert in gut health, the gut-brain axis, and lifestyle-related diseases. She has served as a consultant to the Ministry of Health and collaborated with the World Health Organization (WHO) on the development of regulations concerning Complementary and Alternative Medicine. She is the founder of the Arcana Institute and the author of books and scientific publications focused on gut microbiota, immunity, allergies, and metabolic disorders. In her clinical practice, she applies advanced laboratory diagnostics. For many years, she has delivered lectures and professional training for physicians, dietitians, and patients in Poland, the United States, and European countries.



## Planting hope and smashing the stigma- one yellow tulip bulb at a time. Innovative approaches to addressing youth mental health through the arts, storytelling and gardens

**Suzanne Fox**

The Yellow Tulip Project, USA

**Introduction:** In 2024 the World Health Organization reported that, globally, one in seven 10-19 year olds experiences a mental health disorder. Young people throughout the world, many of them suffering with mental illness, also feel isolated and that they do not matter. Yet they do matter, and their voices must be included in discussions of how to address this health crisis. The Yellow Tulip Project (YTP) is a youth-driven non-profit with a mission to smash the stigma associated with mental illness. YTP uses a variety of evidence-based approaches to address this stigma head-on including art exhibits, storytelling programs, nature-based interventions, and the planting of community Hope Gardens. Our data shows that these community-based interventions build social connections, reduce social isolation and start to normalize the experience of youth with mental illness by reducing the associated stigma. The aim of this presentation is twofold:

- 1) To share YTP's community-based approaches to reduce the stigma of youth mental illness; and
- 2) To collectively explore additional activities that can further smash this stigma.

**Methods:** This interactive session focuses on innovative strength-based approaches that address the youth mental health crisis and the stigmatization associated with it. Examples from YTP's on-going community programming will be presented to include photographic art exhibits in public spaces (I Am More: Facing Stigma, Young Men Moving Mountains), interactive story-telling programs, nature-based social and emotional learning programs, and the collective planting of community Hope Gardens. Both arts-informed and qualitative research methodologies have been used to assess the impact of these interventions.

**Results:** Data will be presented that demonstrates the impact of YTP's community-based programs. Additionally, as this is an interactive session, there will be an opportunity for collective brainstorming.

**Discussion:** Individuals who suffer with mental illness are often stigmatized which, in effect, compounds their suffering. Therefore, in addition to suffering from their mental illness, they also suffer from the associated social isolation. Adolescence, which is a period of great transitions, requires stable and supportive social environments. Adolescents may therefore be particularly impacted by the secondary social isolation due to the stigmatization of mental illness.

**Conclusion:** This session will demonstrate how a variety of community-based programs, ranging from public art exhibitions, storytelling programs, nature-based social emotional learning curricula and the planting of community Hope Gardens can begin to normalize the experience of youth mental illness and to thereby dismantle the stigma associated with it. Participants will

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gain an understanding of how to access YTP's programming, how to modify and adapt these programs to a variety of contexts, and ultimately how to make them scalable in a global context.

## Biography

Suzanne Fox is an American mental health advocate and co-founder of The Yellow Tulip Project, a youth-focused nonprofit dedicated to smashing the stigma surrounding mental illness and promoting hope and community support. She started the organization in 2016 with her daughter, Julia Hansen, with the goal of creating conversations about mental health and reminding people that hope truly happens when communities come together.

She currently serves as the Director of Global Initiatives on the YTP Board of Directors and advises special projects such as the I Am More: Facing Stigma and Young Men Moving Mountains exhibits, as well as other community partnerships. Previously, she was the organization's executive director from its inception until June 2023.

Before dedicating her career to mental health activism, Suzanne spent over 30 years in roles focused on intercultural understanding—as an adjunct professor, principal of an intercultural consulting company, and facilitator



# Scientific Abstracts

DAY 1

3<sup>rd</sup> International Conference on  
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## The daily life therapy method of higashi for educating autistic children

**Rashmi Das**

*Higashi Autism School, India*

The latest diagnostic data (May 2025) released by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) for the period 2022 shows that one child out of every 31 children in the US is autistic. This has gone up from 1 in every 150 children in 2000 in the US. No official government figure on autism is available in India. However, an All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) research from 2011, which is used, posits the rate at 1 in 89 children. Another study around the same time (INCLIN Trust), puts the number at 1 in 68 children. Autistic children rarely progress beyond Early Intervention programs; even rare is their entry in formal schooling board programs.

This study presents the impact of The Daily Life Therapy Method in mitigating this challenge across the spectrum of autism. The pedagogy focuses on the characteristics of children with ASD in the design of educational methods. Mediating sensory hypersensitivities, communication deficits, difficulties in learning general subjects, parental guidance, strategies for development and reversing regression are the fundamentals of autism education of Higashi. Operable through repetitious practice and perseverative teaching in multi departments of academics, clinical therapies, sports, yoga and health management, the results indicate substantial acquisition of academic milestones, communication outcomes, sensory balance and regulation.

The study conducted with student cohorts in the age groups of 4-14 shows 1:1 teacher/therapist-student ratios demonstrates measurable outcomes for executive functioning and conceptual learning. The findings suggest that group education approached through co-curricular workflows foster coordination and social interactions. The study underscores the importance of Physical Education, Music, and Arts and Crafts in establishing daily life rhythms and leisure skills. The study showcases innovative Teaching Learning Materials (TLMs), tech integration, usage of AI tools in stimulating attention and breaking out of restrictive behavior.

**Keywords:** Autism, Education Strategies, Social communication and Sensory Regulation

### Biography

I own and lead assets in the sphere of Autism Education, Therapeutic Services and Professional Development through my school, the Higashi Autism School (<https://hasdelhi.org>) based on The Daily Life Therapy method of Dr. Kiyo Kitahara. The School operates out of New Delhi and has a technical collaboration with MHS, Tokyo. My company, Mahagauri AutismCare Pvt. Ltd is engaged in creating residential infrastructure for young adults with autism across life span. My Pro bono Assets for the benefit of the autism community are <https://autypical.in/> and <https://theautisticstudent.substack.com/>. I have been a member of top university boards (JNU, IIM-Udaipur) and apex educational institutions (NCERT) in India. I was involved in the formulation of guidance on gender issues for the National Education Policy of India (NEP 2020). I have a Ph.D in International Relations from the Jawaharlal Nehru University. I am also a media leader, owning two industry leading sectoral magazines - TelecomLive & InfraLive and have more than 25 years of experience in financial news reporting.

## Making psychotherapy space and process more neuroinclusive for autistic adults and adolescents

**Irina Diyankova**

*Healing Trauma, USA*

According to Lipinski et al. (2022), there exists the systematic blind spot in mental health support for autistic adult individuals, especially those without intellectual disabilities. Many mental health professionals were taught next to nothing in their graduate training about autistic adults and their needs. Research suggests that many mental health providers are reluctant to take autistic adults into their care. In addition, identifying autism in highly intelligent, highly verbal adults and in women has historically been a challenge which left a significant group of adults with inadequate mental health care.

This workshop seeks to provide information and experiential exercises to help mental health professionals increase knowledge and confidence in working with autistic adults, as well as modify their therapy practice to make it more inclusive.

We will discuss common myths and misconceptions when it comes to autism and autistic adults, including high and low functionality, autism being a disease, mistaken connection between verbal communication and intelligence. Through experiential exercises we will help mental health professionals become more aware of their internal reactions to this population. In addition, we will provide information about neuroinclusive, non-pathologizing and collaborative ways to work with autistic adults. We will emphasize common challenges and pitfalls in psychotherapy with autistic adults and suggest ways to address them. Finally, we will discuss importance of multidisciplinary care and when it is important to refer clients to the providers from other disciplines.

We will also leave time for discussion and questions. If this is accepted as a workshop, we will create small groups for discussion and pairs for processing of the exercises.

### Biography

Irina Diyankova is a licensed psychologist and health services provider, as well as a certified IFS therapist and approved clinical consultant. She/they specialize(s) in the treatment of psychological trauma, late-identified neurodivergent adults, and an intersection of both. She is also a certified IFS therapist, an approved clinical consultant, and a lead trainer at the IFS Institute. Irina offers trainings and consultation/supervision groups to mental health professionals who are in the process of learning IFS with a specific focus on the neurodivergent population. Irina is a multiply neurodivergent individual herself. In their leisure time, Irina loves painting, swimming, practicing yoga, reading, and traveling.

## The invisible ones: A personal journey from motherhood to diagnosis and advocacy

**Libby Bagno-Simon**

*Tipul-li, Israel*

For years, I was the devoted mother of two autistic children—navigating therapies, school systems, and a world not built for neurodivergent minds. I learned to speak the language of autism for them, long before I realized it was also my own. It wasn't until my 40s that I was diagnosed as autistic myself—an experience that redefined my identity and reshaped my understanding of what autism can look like.

This presentation tells the story of my late discovery and how it propelled me into advocacy—not just for my children, but for the countless autistic individuals who go unnoticed because they don't “look autistic” according to outdated stereotypes or rigid diagnostic criteria. I will explore how masking, high camouflaging skills, and internalized shame can render autistic children—especially girls and highly verbal or socially competent children—effectively invisible to professionals, educators, and even their own families.

Through the lens of lived experience, I will highlight the emotional and psychological toll of undiagnosed autism: the chronic self-doubt, anxiety, burnout, and sense of never quite belonging. I will argue for the critical importance of recognizing these “hidden” autistics early—not only to provide them with appropriate support, but to affirm their identity and help them grow into their full potential.

When we fail to notice them, we don't just miss a diagnosis—we miss a life that could have been lived with greater self-understanding, compassion, and joy. This talk is a call to action: to look beyond the checklists, to listen deeply, and to widen our lens so no child has to live unseen.

### Biography

Libby Bagno-Simon holds a PhD in English Literature and is a trained Applied Behavioral Analyst working with autistic children. Her professional path took a deeply personal turn when both of her children were diagnosed as autistic—and later, when she received her own autism diagnosis in her 40s. This transformative journey led her to become a passionate advocate for neurodiversity and the importance of recognizing autism in its many forms. Combining academic insight, clinical experience, and lived understanding, she works to amplify the voices of those who are often overlooked: autistic individuals who don't fit conventional diagnostic profiles but nonetheless face significant challenges. Her work centers on empathy, self-acceptance, and making the invisible visible.

## Building continuity in complex autism care: A coordinated pathway at Fondation l'Élan Retrouvé in Paris, France

**Wynn Smith**

*Fondation l'Élan Retrouvé, France*

Artistic individuals with complex profiles often marked by severe behavioral challenges and multiple psychiatric or somatic comorbidities require highly individualized, flexible, and coordinated care. At the Fondation l'Élan Retrouvé in Paris, an integrated pathway has been developed through collaboration between four key services: USIDATU, UMI, URAT, and UR.

- USIDATU, located at the Pitié-Salpêtrière Hospital, is a specialized non-sector psychiatric unit. It provides intensive assessment and crisis stabilization for children and adults with autism and complex comorbidities.
- UMI (Interdepartmental Mobile Unit) is part of the regional system for managing complex autism cases. It provides community-based outreach to assess situations in their full medical, social, familial, and environmental dimensions. Working closely with local partners, its mission is to support care planning and reduce exclusion by helping re-integrate individuals into ordinary healthcare and community pathways.
- URAT (Reinforced Transitory Care Unit) offers short- to medium-term stays focused on restoring daily routines, de-escalating crises, and preparing for long-term placement.
- UR is a small, long-term residential unit offering structured, adaptive care for autistic adults with high support needs.

This presentation will illustrate how these units work both independently and as part of a coordinated, person-centered continuum. Key strategies include:

- Proactive planning to avoid institutional ruptures
- Cross-unit consistency through shared tools and clinical handovers
- Partnership with families and external services to support transitions

Findings from the field show that this integrated approach helps prevent psychiatric re-hospitalization, enables sustainable care solutions, and enhances the quality of life for individuals and their networks. It offers a practical model aligned with the summit's goal of embracing the full diversity of neurodivergence.

### Biography

Wynn Smith, RN, MSc, APN (Psychiatry & Mental Health) is an Advanced Practice Nurse specializing in psychiatry and mental health at the Fondation l'Élan Retrouvé in Paris, France. With a Master of Science degree and advanced clinical training, Wynn provides comprehensive, patient-centered mental health care, integrating evidence-based practice with a holistic approach. In addition to clinical work, Wynn serves as an occasional collaborator with the Faculty of Health at Université Paris Cité, contributing to academic initiatives and the advancement of psychiatric nursing practice.

# “I can make it friendly”: Reimagining art therapy as evidence-based innovation in autistic imagination

**Neda Maki**

*University of Toronto, Canada*

What happens when a monster becomes friendly? During an art therapy session, a six-year-old child reimagined his favourite Minecraft creature “Sirenhead” as a companion, declaring, “I can make it friendly.” This moment captures the essence of my work how autistic children transform fear, sound, and sensory intensity into imaginative, relational, and healing forms of expression.

As both a Registered Psychotherapist (Qualifying) and Professional Art Therapist, I approach this project through an integrated lens of clinical practice and ethnographic research. The study introduces autistic imagination as a framework for understanding creativity and communication beyond behavioural or linguistic norms, emphasizing sensory intelligence and imaginative agency as central to neurodiversity-affirming care. Conducted in a community art therapy clinic in northwestern Ontario, this research merges evidence-based clinical practice with visual and multimodal ethnography, combining art-based interventions drawing, painting, sculpting, movement, and film—with reflective analysis of therapeutic outcomes and participant narratives.

Grounded in medical, visual, and disability anthropology (Grinker 2007; Manning 2013; Mattingly et al. 2022), the project positions art therapy as both evidence-informed intervention and qualitative innovation. It challenges the biomedical “deficit model” of autism by demonstrating how art-making enables emotional regulation, narrative coherence, and sensory integration while celebrating autistic creativity and resilience.

By attending to monsters, animals, and dreams as visual languages of imagination, this study reframes art therapy as a site of collaborative discovery rather than correction—an approach that operationalizes neurodiversity in practice. “I Can Make It Friendly” thus proposes a model of imaginative, relational, and evidence-based art therapy that transforms care from normalization to empowerment, and from intervention to co-creation.

## Biography

Neda Maki is a sixth-year PhD candidate in Medical Anthropology at the University of Toronto, Canada, where her doctoral research explores imagination, communication, and care in art therapy with autistic children. She is also a registered psychotherapist (qualifying) with the College of Registered Psychotherapists of Ontario (CRPO), a professional art therapist (Canadian Art Therapy Association), and a visual artist with more than fourteen years of practice. Since 2019, Maki has worked extensively with individuals on the autism spectrum and with co-occurring conditions such as ADHD, OCD, selective mutism, Down syndrome, and global developmental delay across therapeutic and residential settings. Her dual background in clinical art therapy and anthropology informs her integrative, evidence-informed, and neurodiversity-affirming approach to care. She has taught at the postgraduate level at Algoma University and has presented her research at national and international conferences in Canada, the United States, and Europe.

# The need for sexuality education in school-aged children with autism spectrum disorder in Puerto Rico

**Yamilka L. Schumacker-Robles**

*Institute of Sexology, Education, and Psychology of Puerto Rico, Puerto Rico*

Sexuality education remains a sensitive yet essential component of comprehensive human development. Despite international recommendations from organizations such as UNESCO and the WHO, students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) often lack access to adequate sexuality education, resulting in gaps in knowledge, autonomy, and social adaptation. This quantitative, cross-sectional study aimed to explore the perceived need for sexuality education among school-aged children with ASD in Puerto Rico.

Data were collected through structured questionnaires administered to parents, educators, and therapists, focusing on developmental, educational, and socio-cultural dimensions. Preliminary findings indicate a significant consensus regarding the necessity of structured, adapted sexuality education curricula for this population. Participants highlighted the need to address topics such as body autonomy, consent, personal boundaries, and safe social interactions, while considering the cognitive and communicative profiles of children with ASD. The results underscore the urgency of designing inclusive educational programs that integrate evidence-based strategies and culturally relevant practices.

This investigation contributes to the global discourse on disability and inclusive education by emphasizing both the challenges and opportunities of implementing sexuality education for students with ASD in Puerto Rico, with implications for broader international contexts.

## Biography

Yamilka L. Schumacker Robles, M.Ed., is Dean of Academia Joeleanny in Puerto Rico and Director of the Graduate Program at the Institute of Sexology, Education, and Psychology of Puerto Rico (Instituto Sexológico, Educativo y Psicológico de Puerto Rico, ISEPPR). She is also a faculty member in the Professional Certification of Educational Evaluation and Therapy, and a graduate student in Human Sexuality with a specialization in Sexopedagogy. Her academic and professional work focuses on inclusive education, educational therapy, and the promotion of comprehensive sexuality education for populations with diverse functional needs, particularly students with Autism Spectrum Disorder. Prof. Schumacker has extensive experience in curriculum development, teacher training, and institutional leadership, combining educational, therapeutic, and community approaches. She is passionate about integrating research, pedagogy, and advocacy to promote inclusion, respect, and dignity in educational contexts. Her work seeks to bridge the gap between theory and practice, ensuring that educational systems respond to the needs of all learners.

# Evaluating the autism swim program: Behavioural and attentional outcomes in children with ASD

**Hamlatul Hawary Azizan<sup>1\*</sup>** and **Shuhaili Talib<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>*Hawary Sports Centre, Malaysia*

<sup>2</sup>*International Islamic University Malaysia, Malaysia*

This paper focusses on a performance-impact review of the “Autism Swim Program (ASP)” at Hawary Sports Centre (HSC). The primary objective is to evaluate how well the swimming program improves behavioural control and attentional outcomes in children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). A combination of quantitative descriptive statistics and qualitative analysis was utilised to implement the mixed-methods design. The information regarding children’s behaviour was obtained directly via parental respondents. Male children with mild-to-moderate ASD patterns were considered as most of the sample group. They participated in once-weekly swimming programs from where behavioural attributes and attentional outcomes were determined. The measured results revealed positive trends in improving focus, self-regulation and emotional stability. These were validated by a high level of parental satisfaction indicators. The qualitative data provided insight into other benefits such as increased social confidence, enhanced motor coordination, and social well-being within the family and surrounding society. Despite the program achieving good value, several operational constraints were observed from the responses. The major constraints were the barriers of sensory adaptation of the children, environmental distractions and availability of the services. Such perspectives were perceived by the children, especially in the outskirts of urban centres. In the future, it is recommended to expand the program’s access to rural areas. Altogether, the ASP displays therapeutic services that are highly effective and accepted by families in the context of the ASD intervention system that has been developed. The program can be noted to be highly aligned to holistic developmental outcomes and long-term advocacy for affected individuals.

## Biography

Hamlatul Hawary Azizan is the founder and director of Hawary Sports Centre (HSC) and a dedicated member of the Malaysia Swimming Teachers Association (MSTA). Renowned for his expertise in teaching individuals with autism, he has pioneered the Autism Swimming Program (ASP) in Malaysia since 2016. His professional journey includes certifications from Autism Swim (Australia), Aqua Pros Swim School (USA), and the Swimming Teachers’ Association (UK). As the author of *Swim for Autism* (2017), Hamlatul has organized key events such as the Malaysia Autism Swim Festival (MASF) and Open Water Autism Swimming (OWAS) series. Internationally recognized, he became the first Malaysian to swim across Lake Brienz, Switzerland, and represented Malaysia at the 8th Ice Swim in Morocco (2025). His career embodies innovation, inclusivity, and an enduring commitment to advancing aquatic education for individuals with special needs.

## Brain-switch 2.0® A neuroscience-informed approach to rapid and lasting change

**Joachim Lee, PBM**

*Neuro-Therapy, Singapore*

**B**rain-Switch 2.0® is a next-generation, neuroscience-informed intervention designed to address trauma, anxiety, depression, and other distress states through the precise application of memory reconsolidation principles. By targeting the brain's default mode network (DMN) and integrating evidence-based mechanisms from neuroplasticity research, this process offers a pathway to transform entrenched emotional patterns at their root.

Unlike traditional talk therapy or symptom management approaches, Brain-Switch 2.0® works by updating the brain's predictive models, enabling clients to experience rapid and durable relief. It is a structured-yet-flexible method that can be integrated into diverse therapeutic settings, counselling, psychotherapy, coaching, or trauma recovery work without unnecessary jargon or rigid protocols.

In this interactive workshop, participants will:

- Understand the neuroscience underpinning Brain-Switch 2.0®, including DMN modulation and emotional memory updating.
- Experience a live demonstration of the process, illustrating how real-time state shifts can occur within a single session.
- Learn how to apply Brain-Switch 2.0® in practice, either as a stand-alone intervention or within existing therapeutic frameworks.
- Explore case studies showing significant improvements in anxiety and depression symptoms, supported by qualitative and emerging quantitative evidence.

By the end of the workshop, attendees will not only understand the neuroscience that makes Brain-Switch 2.0® effective but will also gain the practical skills to apply it, empowering them to help clients move beyond coping and into lasting, life-changing transformation.

### Biography

Joachim Lee, PBM, is a senior principal psychotherapist with twenty-five years of clinical and leadership experience in mental health care. He is a clinical hypnotherapist, neurofeedback therapist, and the developer of Brain-Switch 2.0®, a neuro-integrative process designed to support trauma recovery, nervous system regulation, and sustainable mental well-being. He is the principal trainer of Multichannel Eye Movement Integration and serves as co-chair of the Clinical Supervision Board of the Singapore Association for Counselling, contributing to professional standards and clinical governance. He is the president of the Asia Pacific Neurofeedback Association (APNA) and is a founding member of the International Strategic Psychotherapists Association (ISPA).

He has worked extensively across healthcare, education, community, and humanitarian settings, where he integrates neuroscience and psychotherapy. He was awarded the Public Service Medal (PBM) in 2016 by Mr. Tony Tan, then President of Singapore, in recognition of his contribution to Singapore. He regularly trains and supervises mental health professionals internationally and publishes in the areas of trauma, anxiety, depression, and psychophysiological regulation.

## Positivity within negativity: Developing parental self and social identity through long-term care and group connections

**Subrata Kumar Mallick\***, **Dharmi Kapadia** and **Alexandra Sturrock**

*University of Manchester, UK*

After a child's diagnosis of autism, families, especially parents, face various challenging situations. Furthermore, in countries of the global south like Bangladesh, these responsibilities and challenges are compounded by social barriers such as negative feedback and societal stigma experienced at different levels of the community. Based on this background, the researcher chose the title of the study: 'Stigma, Family Life and Autism: Perspectives from Parents in Bangladesh.' However, during the literature review on stigma, discrimination, and family life, the researcher was struck by the thought: within this negative environment, is there any presence of positivity for the parents? To highlight the theme of positivity, the study included a research question addressing positivity within negativity: developing parental self and social identity through long-term care and group affiliations.

This qualitative study examines the experiences of stigma and discrimination faced by parents in Bangladesh after their child's autism diagnosis. Using semi-structured interviews with 20 families (27 parents) from two different regions—Dhaka and Khulna—the participants were recruited through specialised autism schools, non-governmental organisations, social media, and personal networks. To address the specific research question of parental identity development, the study employs the Identity Model of Disability to analyse and interpret the data.

The study found that long-term care for a child with autism fosters a sense of pride and positivity among parents, encouraging them to develop self-identity and resilience to move forward. Conversely, parents connect with others who have children with autism through various platforms such as school premises, formal groups, informal groups, and online communities. This connection helps them build a sense of community and share their thoughts, beliefs, emotions, joys, and sorrows. In turn, this supports the development of a positive social identity and helps them navigate life's challenges.

### Biography

Presenting author Subrata Kumar Mallick is a third-year PhD candidate in the Department of Sociology at the University of Manchester, UK, where he also works as a teaching assistant. His study focuses on autism and stigma from a sociological perspective. He is originally from Bangladesh and serves as an assistant professor of sociology at Kushtia Government College. In addition to his academic roles, he works as a trainer, focusing on imparting autism-related knowledge to students and teachers across various educational institutions. He has six years of experience in the field of autism. Working as a trainer motivates him to pursue a PhD in autism with a special focus on social context. After completing his PhD, he is passionate to work in the autism sector in Bangladesh and build an autism-related organization to contribute to both the academic and practical fields.

## The 4Rs to resilience: Strengthening mental health through inner leadership

**Anupa Devi**

*Root to Resilience, UK*

In today's high-pressure world, resilience is more than a buzzword it's an essential foundation for sustainable mental wellbeing and human flourishing. This presentation introduces the 4Rs to Resilience framework: a practical, holistic model built on four pillars Regulate, Reframe, Restore, and Reconnect designed to strengthen mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual wellbeing.

Developed through my work as a speaker, coach, and founder of Root to Resilience, the 4Rs framework equips professionals and leaders with actionable tools to navigate challenges, prevent burnout, and support others in doing the same. This approach bridges the gap between performance and wellness, helping individuals lead themselves and others from a place of clarity, calm, and connection.

Through real-world examples, reflective prompts, and evidence-informed strategies, attendees will learn how to:

- Recognize stress patterns and self-regulate under pressure
- Shift unhelpful thinking through mindset reframing
- Replenish energy through restorative habits
- Reconnect with purpose to build long-term resilience

Key outcomes include enhanced emotional regulation, improved mental clarity, and increased capacity to foster resilience within teams and communities. This work aligns closely with the conference's mission of human-centred innovation in mental health and offers a grounded, accessible path for both personal growth and systemic change.

The session reflects my broader mission: to create ripple effects of resilience that empower individuals and transform workplaces. It will be of particular value to health professionals, wellbeing leaders, HR teams, and educators.

**Keywords:** Mental Health, Resilience, Emotional Wellbeing, Inner Leadership, Workplace Wellness, Human Flourishing

### Biography

Anupa Devi is the founder of Root to Resilience, a speaker, coach, and podcast host dedicated to helping individuals and organisations cultivate sustainable resilience through mind, body, and soul practices. With a background in wellbeing, communications, and leadership, Anupa works with busy professionals, leaders, and wellbeing ambassadors to strengthen mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual wellbeing. Her signature framework The 4Rs to Resilience provides a practical, holistic approach to navigating pressure, preventing burnout, and promoting long-term mental health. Anupa delivers talks, workshops, and 1:1 coaching for public and private sector clients, creating ripple effects of resilience that transform both individuals and workplace cultures. She also hosts the Root to Resilience Podcast, where she interviews thought leaders on the art and science of flourishing. Passionate about empowering others to lead from within, Anupa blends real-life insight with grounded tools for growth, making resilience both relatable and achievable.

# The survival–authenticity spectrum: Reframing emotional posture across neurotypes

**Mohammed Alzayer**

*Independent Researcher & Autism Advocate, Saudi Arabia*

This presentation introduces the Survival–Authenticity Spectrum, a psychological framework developed by an autistic adult to map internal emotional posture. Rather than categorizing behaviors as “masked” or “unmasked,” the model focuses on whether a person is operating from survival mode, marked by fear, performance, and external validation, or from authenticity, characterized by emotional clarity, aligned action, and self-trust. This posture exists on a continuum, not as a binary, and changes with context, self-awareness, and perceived safety.

The spectrum highlights how authenticity, when sustained over time, leads to alignment (living in congruence with one’s truth) and fulfillment (the felt experience of meaning and coherence). Survival, by contrast, may appear functional but often results in burnout, disconnection, or identity confusion. A transversal force, self-awareness, moves fluidly across the spectrum and can evolve in quality, shaping how individuals perceive and shift their state.

Two anonymized case studies illustrate the model in action: “Mohammed,” who discovers his autism and gradually builds a life around authenticity, and “Abdulaziz,” who remains entrenched in survival mode despite external success. These narratives show how lived experience, trauma, and environment influence one’s ability to reclaim emotional truth.

While rooted in autistic experience, the model also resonates with neurotypical individuals navigating high-pressure roles, trauma legacies, or identity suppression. It offers a language to articulate emotional states and a pathway to move from reactive survival to intentional living.

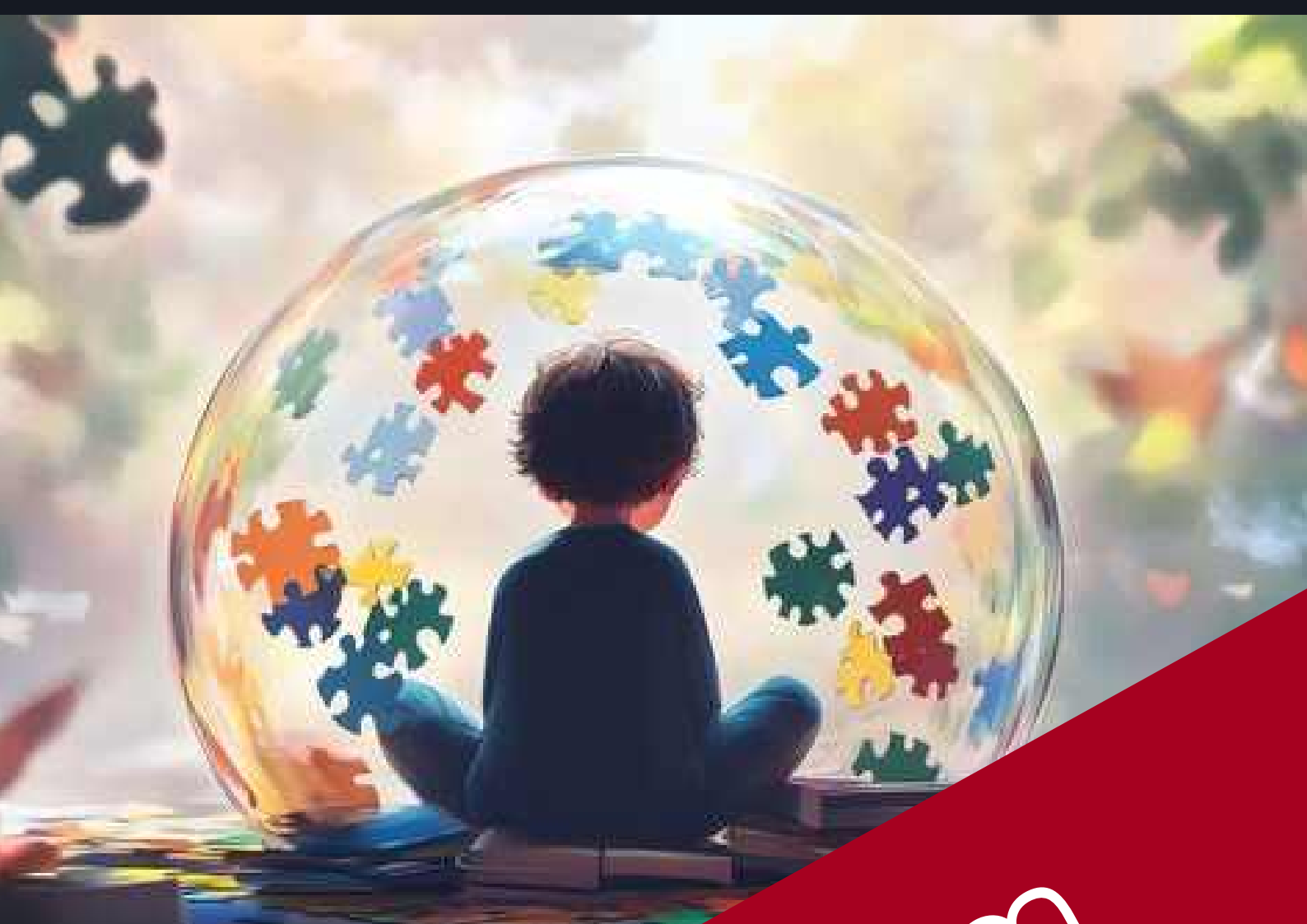
By naming and mapping this spectrum, the presentation aims to support deeper self-understanding, reduce internalized shame, and empower both neurodivergent and neurotypical people to make emotionally sustainable choices.

## Biography

Mohammed Alzayer is an independent researcher and autism advocate with a professional background in marketing and corporate communications. He currently works as a marketing and communication specialist at HADEED in Saudi Arabia, where he combines strategic communication expertise with a deep interest in human behavior and identity.

His independent research focuses on autism, neurodivergence, and psychological frameworks that explore concepts such as emotional posture, survival mode, authenticity, and self-awareness. Mohammed is particularly interested in how individuals on the spectrum navigate identity formation and social environments while striving to remain authentic.

Through his work, he aims to contribute thoughtful perspectives that bridge lived experience, research, and practical understanding of neurodivergence in both personal and professional contexts.



# Keynote Forum

DAY 2

3<sup>rd</sup> International Conference on  
**MENTAL HEALTH AND  
HUMAN RESILIENCE**

MARCH 23-24, 2026 | BERLIN, GERMANY



## Bridging the gap between early detection of autism prodrome in infants, assessment and intervention

**Hanna A. Alonim**

The Mifne Center and Bar Ilan University, Israel

The worldwide prevalence of autism points out of 2% of the population. Very early intervention may minimize the severity of the phenotypic presentation of autism during infancy when neural connections are being rapidly developed. However, intervention is contingent upon a diagnosis of autism – which in most developed countries occurs above the age of 24 months – resulting in missing a critical therapeutic opportunity for early intervention. Our study aimed to detect the prodromal variables at a very early stages during the first year of life, that may characterize significant risk for the later development of autism. The study examined 110 infants from various countries diagnosed with autism at age 2-3 years. Analysis was conducted of home videos recorded during the infants' first year of life. Data was collated and analysed in terms of individual variables and combinations of variables. Eight prodromal variables were exhibited among 89% of the infants participating in this study. The results of this study indicate that detecting the prodrome of autism depends primarily on the ability to identify various combinations of indicative symptoms. The variables elicited by this study provide the basis for an early assessment scale for prodromal variables associated with autism, which is applied clinically for infants between 5-15 months. This presentation is aimed to raise awareness of early detection, and will be accompanied by videos. Effective application of the screening scale is of utility in bridging the divide between early assessment and intervention for infants at high risk for autism during the very early neurodevelopmental stages. Clinical therapeutic sample will be presented in this lecture.

### Biography

Hanna A. Alonim is an expert and researcher in the autism spectrum in infancy. Founder and Head of the Mifne Center Israel for Treatment, Training, and Research since 1987. Head of the Therapists' Training School for Autism in Infancy at Bar Ilan University. Alonim developed the ESPASSI © screening scale for the detection of autism prodrome in the first year of life and established the pioneer infant's detection unit at the Ichilov Hospital in TLV. Dr. Alonim is a member of the Norland Journal Editorial Board, a consistent reviewer of JADD, and a committee member of the ICF Core Set for ASD, WHO, Stockholm 2016.



## An ecological model of resilience for public safety and frontline health care organizations

**Gregory S Anderson**

Thompson Rivers University, Canada

Workplace mental health interventions are increasingly employed by public safety and health care organizations to address their employees' well-being yet evidence on their remains limited. The present health care model and research funding is on diagnosis and treatment of illness and injury once symptoms are present, downstream from the actual onset. Much less attention is paid to mitigation strategies reaching upstream building skills prior to traumatic exposure. While "preventing" posttraumatic stress injury (PTSI) is near impossible, learning a suite of mitigation strategies may build one's resilience to illness and injury.

This work reports on a series of investigations and research investigating the longitudinal effects of a holistic ecological approach to resilience conceptualized at the individual, familial, and community (workplace) levels. A series of structured reviews examined mental health disorders, mitigation strategies, coping and resilience in public safety personnel and frontline health care workers. An ecological framework was developed to focus on the variables that impact resilience to occupational stress injuries.

New conceptualizations of resilience focus on risk and protective factors emerging through ongoing transactions within networks of individual, family, and workplace (community) systems. Preliminary evidence at the organization level supports such a model with improvements in average scores across 7/9 of mental health and occupational stress measures. Rank-based correlation analyses indicate potential associations between organizational stress levels and psychological health-related costs, with an inverse relationship observed between changes in work engagement and these costs.

The shift from models emphasizing individual capacities to multi-systemic, contextualized conceptualizations raise awareness that some individuals may not be resilient not because they lack agency, but because they may be disconnected from the supports that ameliorate risk. Results underscore the potential value of sustained mental health strategies and highlight the need for further research with larger samples to better evaluate long-term effectiveness and causal relationships.

### Biography

Gregory S Anderson is the Dean of the Faculty of Science and a professor at Thompson Rivers University (TRU). He is an award-winning researcher specializing in exercise and occupational physiology, particularly focusing on mental health screening and resilience for public safety personnel.



## Spectrum of Kindness Therapy (SKT): A compassion-centered feasibility pilot for neurodiverse adults

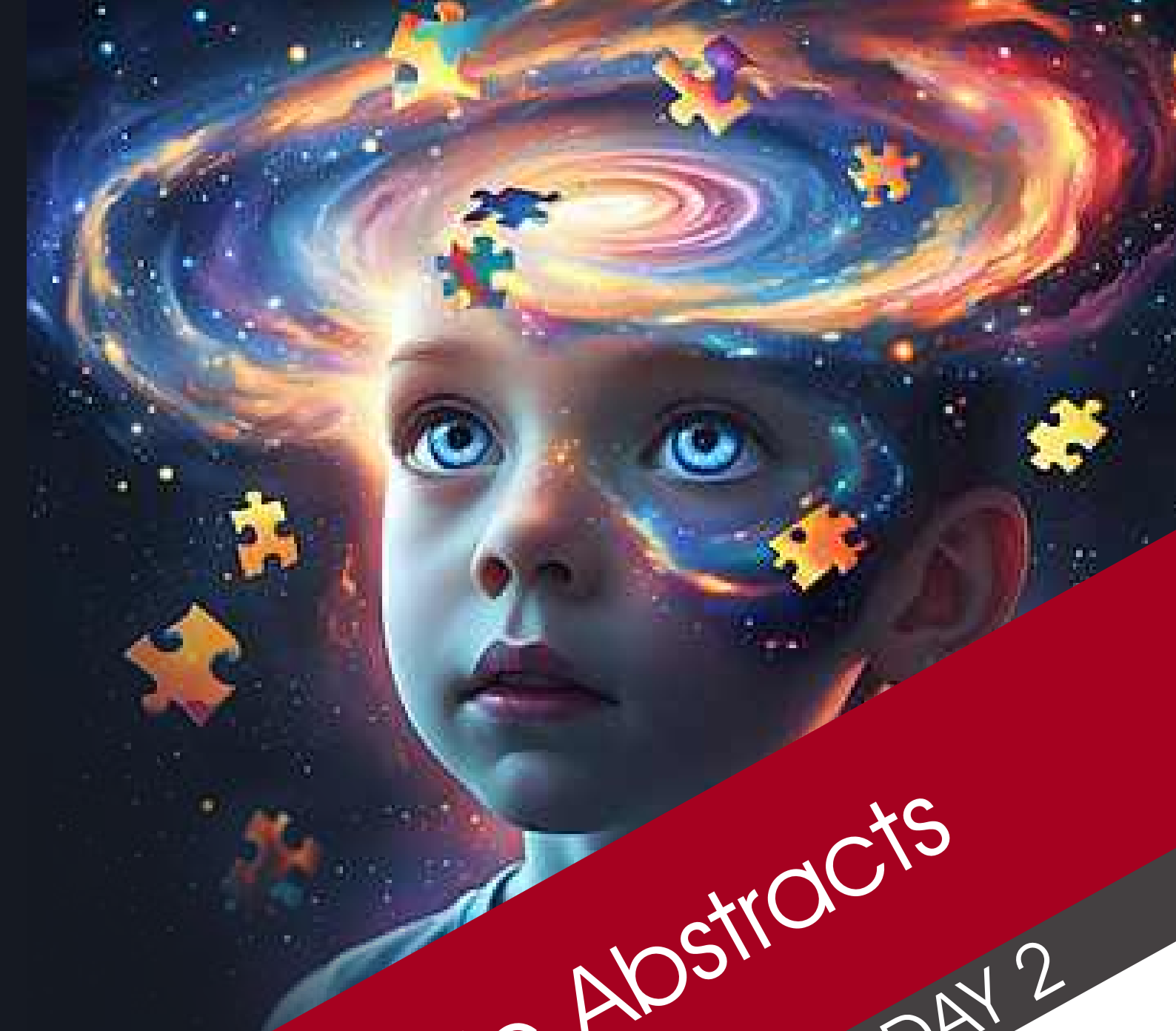
**Julius Melvin Jefferies**

Simply Healing LLC, USA

Spectrum of Kindness Therapy (SKT) is an integrative, compassion-centered therapeutic model that operationalizes intentional kindness as a structured intervention across three interrelated domains: Internal (self-kindness), Relational (kindness to others), and World (kindness in action). Grounded in polyvagal theory, parts work (IFS-informed), and compassion-focused approaches, SKT targets autonomic regulation, shame mitigation, and purposeful community reintegration. This feasibility pilot will evaluate acceptability, safety, and preliminary signals of clinical benefit among neurodiverse adults, including autistic and ADHD-identified participants, experiencing elevated self-criticism and relational distress. We will recruit N = 30 adults (ages 18–65) to participate in a 12-session SKT program delivered by clinicians trained in SKT Level 1 competencies. Primary feasibility outcomes will include rates of recruitment, retention, adherence to daily somatic resourcing practice, and adverse events. Secondary clinical outcomes, measured at baseline, mid-treatment, post-treatment, and at 3-month follow-up, include the Self-Compassion Scale (SCS), Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale (DERS), WHOQOL-BREF, brief relational functioning measures, and session-by-session SUDS. Where feasible, heart rate variability snapshots during resourcing will explore physiological mechanisms. Semi-structured exit interviews will assess accessibility, perceived benefit, and needed adaptations. Findings will inform manual refinement, fidelity metrics, and power estimates for a subsequent randomized controlled trial. The study emphasizes neurodiversity-affirming practices and accessible adaptations; we hypothesize that SKT will be feasible and acceptable and will show positive signals on self-compassion and emotion regulation outcomes.

### Biography

Julius Melvin Jefferies is a dedicated wellness practitioner and the Founder of Simply Healing LLC, USA. With a strong commitment to holistic health and personal transformation, he specializes in integrative healing approaches that promote physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being. Julius has guided individuals toward balanced lifestyles through personalized wellness strategies, stress management techniques, and natural healing practices. His work emphasizes empowering clients to take an active role in their health journey. Through education, mentorship, and compassionate care, Julius continues to inspire lasting positive change within the communities he serves.



# Scientific Abstracts

DAY 2

3<sup>rd</sup> International Conference on  
**MENTAL HEALTH AND  
HUMAN RESILIENCE**

MARCH 23-24, 2026 | BERLIN, GERMANY

# Navigating challenges and opportunities to adulthood with Moonflower Autism Association in Bangladesh

**Mofijul Islam<sup>1\*</sup>** and **Marja Helinä Nuutinen<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Moonflower Autism Foundation, Bangladesh

<sup>2</sup>Moonflower Autism Foundation & EETE, Finland

Moonflower Autism Foundation stands as a beacon of hope in Bangladesh, dedicated to advocating for individuals with autism and their families. Since its beginning, Moonflower has been at the forefront of promoting understanding, inclusion, and empowerment bridging the gap between awareness and action. Rooted in the rich cultural context of Bangladesh, the Foundation has worked tirelessly to break long-held stigmas and misconceptions surrounding autism, transforming social attitudes and fostering a sense of dignity, acceptance, and belonging for neurodivergent individuals.

This presentation traces Moonflower's inspiring journey from its humble beginnings to its current national and international initiatives and demonstrates how community-driven programs, early intervention, education, and family empowerment have changed lives. Through powerful personal stories and real-life case studies, we will highlight the resilience of families navigating the challenges of autism in a society often constrained by social taboos, limited resources, and lack of awareness.

At the same time, the presentation will place these local experiences within a global perspective, exploring shared challenges such as late diagnosis, social stigma, inadequate policy implementation, and the need for inclusive education and employment opportunities. We will examine how Moonflower's model of compassion, collaboration, and community participation offers practical lessons for other developing nations seeking to build inclusive support systems.

By emphasising the interplay between cultural values, education, and advocacy, this session aims to shed light on how empathy, social responsibility, and grassroots innovation can reshape public perception and policy. Attendees will gain insights into practical strategies, advocacy frameworks, and the transformative power of collective action all centred around fostering hope, acceptance, and resilience among families affected by autism in Bangladesh and beyond.

## Biography

Mofijul Islam is the Executive Director of Moonflower Autism Foundation and Head Teacher of Moonflower School for Autism, with over 20 years' experience in autism education and advocacy. His educational background is Master of Social Sciences. Since 2002, he has promoted inclusive education, disability rights, and community-based support for individuals with autism. His work continues to advance inclusive education, community-based approaches, and sustainable development for individuals with autism, showing leadership and commitment to transformative change in the field of disability.

## Empowerment, resilience and overcoming obstacles for adults with autism in Finland and in Bangladesh: Innovative approaches by evert

**Marja Helinä Nuutinen<sup>1\*</sup>** and **Mofijul Islam<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>*Moonflower Autism Foundation & EETE, Finland*

<sup>2</sup>*Moonflower Autism Foundation, Bangladesh*

The presentation explores the global challenges and personal journeys associated with autism spectrum disorders (ASDs), focusing on the lived experiences in Finland and Bangladesh. While autism as a neurobiological disorder is universal, the cultures and communities formed by individuals with ASDs and their families differ widely across societies. Drawing on personal experience as a mother of an autistic adult, the narrative highlights Evert's development, and achievements in Finland, where supportive laws and rehabilitation have enabled him to flourish. However, similar challenges persist for adults with autism in both Finland and Bangladesh, including social exclusion and barriers to reaching meaningful employment.

Comparative research and firsthand engagement in development co-operation underscore that families in both countries share the same hopes for their children: access to education, employment, and a fulfilling life. Despite Finland's advancements in special needs education and human rights, issues such as unpaid labour and restricted opportunities still undermine the rights of disabled individuals. The presentation advocates for concerted efforts to influence policymakers, aiming to end discrimination and create more inclusive, autism-friendly environments worldwide. The basis of a good life rests on equal opportunities, dignity, and the recognition that everyone has the right to thrive without judgement, assumptions, or criticism.

### Biography

Marja Helinä Nuutinen holds qualifications in social sciences and education, with a master's degree in community pedagogy. She has spearheaded development co-operation and integration initiatives, carried out research into autism, and authored both articles and books. She is the founder of the EETE- Association (Empowerment, Energy, Teamwork and Empathy) in Finland, inspired by her son Evert who has autism. Marja Helinä's work is strongly driven by her commitment to empowering minority groups, a motivation deeply rooted in her experiences as a mother. Marja Helinä is recognised as an expert in neurological conditions and passionately believes in the potential of every individual, advocating that, "Everything is possible, and we all can." Renowned for her visionary approach, she promotes lifelong learning, personal development, and positive transformation. Her family represents a broad spectrum of neurodiversity, and she herself lives with ADHD and Tourette's syndrome, both of which are integral aspects of her identity.

## Navigating autism, relationships & dating

### **Rosetta Walker-Iland**

*Rosetta Creations, Ltd., Ireland*

Do you know if your child or loved one is in a relationship or thinking about having one? A person with autism has needs and desires just like anyone else. Yet, the topic of dating and relationships is often not openly discussed.

Less than 10% of people on the autism spectrum are married, and fewer stay married.

Rosetta will discuss autism and relationships and give some helpful tips on transitioning to adulthood, what to look out for, and how attendees can help during this process.

This presentation is intended for teens and young adults on the autism spectrum as well as their families and caregivers. Researchers are also encouraged to attend.

### **Biography**

Rosetta Walker-Iland, The Queen of Inspiration®, is a versatile artist, Distinguished Toastmaster, child activist, autism advocate, and ordained minister. As a certified life coach and spiritual counselor, she empowers individuals to overcome adversity. Rosetta is a bestselling author and co-authored the MISSION UNSTOPPABLE book with renowned leaders, including motivator Les Brown. With over 25 years of experience, Rosetta has successfully hosted her own radio show and demonstrated her acting abilities, earning consideration for an Oscar for Best Supporting Actress for her role in Canaan Land. Additionally, she is a gospel singer-songwriter, entrepreneur, and CEO of Walker Records Productions in California, RD Walker Publishing BMI, and Rosetta Walker-Iland Outreach Ministries and is the president of Rosetta Creations, Ltd., her corporation in New York. She and her husband, THOMAS ILAND, are the authors of "THEY SAID WE COULDN'T SO WE DID: Making Relationships Work When The Odds Are Against You."

# Addressing depression and anxiety in adults with autism: A neurodiversity-affirming group support model

**Diana Damilatis-Kull\*, Stephanie Grindell and Yan Mei Nie**

*Adelphi University, USA*

Depression and anxiety are highly prevalent and frequently comorbid among adults with autism, yet symptoms often present in ways that differ from neurotypical populations, complicating identification, interpretation, and intervention. Internal distress may not be readily observable and is often expressed through behavioral, relational, or processing differences rather than explicit verbal report. This presentation describes a structured, neurodiversity-affirming group support model designed to address depression and anxiety through assessment-informed, processing-focused interventions that emphasize consistency, clarity, and individualized support.

Participants complete standardized self-report measures, including the Beck Depression Inventory (BDI) and Beck Anxiety Inventory (BAI), to identify symptom severity and comorbid presentations. Anxiety is conceptualized within a neurodevelopmental framework that accounts for differences in theory of mind, communication styles, sensory processing sensitivities, response and processing latency, and non-typical manifestations of emotional distress. These factors are further understood through a trauma-informed fight-flight-freeze-fawn model, recognizing that anxiety may present as emotional escalation and perseveration on triggers (fight), avoidance or withdrawal from support (flight), shutdown or immobilization with reduced responsiveness (freeze), or excessive social engagement and people-pleasing behaviors intended to mitigate perceived threat (fawn).

Interventions emphasize predictability, relational safety, and explicit processing support. Students participate in consistent weekly support meetings designed to establish routine and reduce uncertainty. Sessions address executive functioning differences that are often amplified during periods of stress, including difficulties with initiation, planning, prioritization, and emotional regulation. Facilitators guide students in examining multiple perspectives, evaluating evidence related to anxiety-driven beliefs, and directly articulating internal thought processes to clarify processing differences. Anxiety triggers are collaboratively broken into concrete, actionable steps to increase agency and reduce overwhelm. Written summaries are provided following sessions to reinforce understanding, support memory, and promote follow-through.

This model demonstrates the feasibility and clinical relevance of integrating standardized assessment with individualized, processing-informed group supports to address depression and anxiety in adults with autism.

## Biography

Diana Damilatis-Kull, MA, LMHC has over 19 years of experience supporting those with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

She has co-founded the award winning Bridges to Adelphi Program at Adelphi University. This neurodivergent support program provides academic, social, transitional, and vocational support services

to Adelphi University students. The Bridges to Adelphi program currently has over 125 students enrolled and 75% of these individuals identify with an autism diagnosis.

She serves as a neurodivergent consultant in which she has provided a plethora of workshops to various organizations in which some topics include: universal design for learners, fostering neuroinclusive spaces across higher education, embracing neurodiversity in higher education, best practices for neurodivergent students in the classroom, embracing neurodiversity in the workplace, and facilitating social relationships amongst neurodivergent adults.

She is an adjunct professor at the Derner Institute School of Psychology at Adelphi University in which she teaches a course "Counseling students on the Autism Spectrum". She also teaches a "First Year Seminar Course: Supporting Neurodiversity" which is offered to first year Adelphi students.

Diana Damilatis-Kull also has her own private practice in which she provides mental health counseling services to those with Autism and other diagnoses also associated with neurodiversity. She is an eclectic integrative psychotherapist in which she utilizes Rogerian theory to build upon an authentic self-representation coupled with cognitive behavioral and mindfulness coping strategies to further guide adults with autism into living more fulfilled lives.

In Diana's workshops and presentations, she utilizes a combination of personal, practical, academic, and counseling experiences to highlight the individualized presentation of those with Autism Spectrum Disorder. She works to facilitate a comfortable and welcoming space to allow others to feel embraced and encouraged to unmask and be their authentic selves.

## Recognizing the unspoken: Identifying and managing constipation in autistic adults

**Wynn Smith**

*Foundation L'Élan Retrouvé, France*

Constipation is a frequent and often underdiagnosed comorbidity in autistic adults, yet it remains largely overlooked in both research and practice. This presentation combines findings from two original studies aimed at improving identification and care strategies for this population.

The first is a systematic literature review (Smith & Desprez, 2024), which analyzed nine studies published between 2012 and 2022. It highlighted significant variability in diagnostic approaches and found that most research focused on children and adolescents. Notably, symptoms frequently reported by autistic adults such as sleep disturbances, behavioral changes, and discomfort were often absent from standard diagnostic criteria like the ROME guidelines.

The second study is a qualitative investigation (Smith & Desprez, 2025) involving 22 healthcare professionals across French medical-social facilities. Through interviews and questionnaires, the study explored real-world practices and revealed that professionals rely on behavioral observation and deep familiarity with each individual to detect constipation. Despite its prevalence, most participants reported a lack of training, inconsistent protocols, and a reliance on informal strategies.

**Key Findings** emphasize the mismatch between conventional clinical tools and the lived experiences of autistic adults. Both studies support the urgent need for autism-specific diagnostic frameworks, staff training, and collaborative, preventive care models.

This presentation contributes to the summit theme *"Different Minds, One World: Embracing the Spectrum"* by advocating for inclusive somatic healthcare that truly reflects the diversity of autistic experiences.

### Biography

Wynn Smith, RN, MSc, APN (Psychiatry & Mental Health), is an Advanced Practice Nurse specializing in psychiatry and mental health at the Fondation l'Élan Retrouvé in Paris, France. With a Master of Science degree and advanced clinical training, Wynn provides comprehensive, patient-centered mental health care, integrating evidence-based practice with a holistic approach. In addition to clinical work, Wynn serves as an occasional collaborator with the Faculty of Health at Université Paris Cité, contributing to academic initiatives and the advancement of psychiatric nursing practice.

## “You don’t need anyone to validate that” interviewing transgender autistic millennials as experts on their own experiences

**Jude Merit**

*University of Sunderland, UK*

Transgender and autistic individuals are disproportionately excluded from research about these populations, particularly when their lives fall at the intersection of multiple marginalized identities. Existing literature often fragments experience into discrete domains—work, diagnosis, gender, or mental health—obscuring how identity, embodiment, and social context are lived as a whole, and is historically exclusive of the perspectives of the autistic trans people themselves. This study aims to address that gap through a participatory, narrative phenomenological approach centered on the lived experiences of transgender autistic millennials in the United States, United Kingdom, and Canada.

Drawing on in-depth open-ended interviews conducted across multiple accessible formats (video call, in-person, live text, and asynchronous written Qualtrics form narratives), this research foregrounds participant agency, narrative control, and community co-design, as well as prioritizing participant comfort and safety physically, emotionally, and mentally. The interview method itself was developed iteratively through consultation with autistic and trans community members, ensuring inclusive language, flexible pacing, and multiple modes of communication and expression. Participants are invited to preview, edit, or add to the interview schedule, and then review and validate their narrative summaries, supporting co-creation and epistemic justice.

Analysis focused on preserving narrative wholeness while identifying shared experiential patterns across life histories. While participants reported a wide diversity of interests, backgrounds, and personal trajectories, common themes emerged around identity formation, masking and authenticity, relational safety, systemic exclusion, and the political dimensions of diagnosis and self-recognition. Participants’ stories illustrate how being autistic and transgender are not separate experiences but are continually shaped by social structures, cultural expectations, and access to resources.

This study contributes to intersectional autism research by demonstrating how narrative phenomenological methods can honor complexity without erasure. It offers a model for ethical, community-guided research that centers autistic and trans voices not only as subjects, but as knowledge-holders—advancing more inclusive, culturally responsive, and justice-oriented autism scholarship.

### Biography

Jude Merit is a PhD researcher at the University of Sunderland whose work centers on the lived experiences of transgender autistic adults. As a trans, autistic, and disabled researcher, Jude’s scholarship is grounded in participatory, community-guided methods that prioritize accessibility, co-creation, and ethical storytelling. His research uses narrative phenomenological approaches to explore identity, embodiment, and meaning-making across intersecting social contexts, with a particular focus on millennial life histories

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in the UK, USA, and Canada. Jude is also a certified crisis counselor, a background that informs their trauma-aware, consent-driven research practice. Committed to the principle of “nothing about us without us,” Jude works closely with autistic and trans communities to challenge deficit-based research models and to amplify marginalized voices within autism research, clinical practice, and policy development.

# AI-powered gamified learning for autistic children: A development and feasibility project

**Anastasia Trofilova**

*Cognitivebotics Technologies MENA, UAE*

Autistic children often face limited access to early intervention due to shortages of trained professionals, linguistic diversity, and inconsistent service availability. Digital learning tools offer scalable opportunities to address these challenges; however, many lack evidence-based instructional design and fail to sustain engagement for young learners. This study investigated whether these limitations could be addressed through an AI-powered, gamified learning platform informed by the principles of applied behavior analysis (ABA).

The platform was designed to translate core behavior analytic instructional processes into structured digital activities, including clear task sequences, prompting hierarchies, positive and differential reinforcement, and planned opportunities for generalization across learning contexts. Artificial intelligence features, including speech, pose, and eye-gaze detection with automated accuracy tracking, were integrated to support adaptive feedback and learner autonomy. A mixed-methods feasibility evaluation was conducted using clinician review, caregiver interviews, and a preliminary individual-use trial with young autistic learners.

Results indicated high alignment between learning objectives and foundational developmental and communication skill areas as rated by clinicians. Caregivers reported strong usability and clarity of task structure, while children demonstrated high engagement with the gamified and AI-supported activities during repeated use. Challenges were primarily related to variability in internet quality and the need for guided onboarding during initial use in home settings.

These findings suggest that AI-powered, ABA-informed gamified learning tools represent a promising and scalable approach to supporting early learning and engagement in autistic children. Integrating behavior analytic science with adaptive digital technologies may help expand access to high-quality intervention across diverse geographic and service contexts in early childhood education.

## Biography

Anastasia Trofilova is a Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA) and clinical lead working at the intersection of Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA), autism intervention, and AI-enabled learning technologies. She currently serves as Clinical Subject Matter Expert at Cognitivebotics Technologies, where she leads the clinical design of gamified digital learning tools for autistic children grounded in evidence-based instructional principles. As a clinician, her work has focused on early intervention and the development of foundational learning, communication, and adaptive skills. She is currently pursuing a PhD in Behavior Analysis at Capella University and contributes to interdisciplinary projects integrating clinical science with digital innovation, with the goal of making high-quality autism intervention accessible at scale across diverse communities.

# The impact of a user-led autistic adult choir on social connection and empowerment for autistic adults

**Jill Bradford**

*The Autistic Adult Choir, UK*

**Background:** Autistic adults, particularly those without co-occurring learning disabilities, frequently experience a “service gap,” failing to meet statutory criteria for support while facing significant social isolation. Recognizing the profound connection between music and the autistic experience, The Autistic Adult Choir (TAAC) was established in 2015 to provide a neuro-affirming space for social connection and musical expression.

**Methods:** TAAC was developed through a user-led framework. Initial research identified a lack of specialized choral groups for autistic adults. Development involved extensive consultation with the autistic community to address barriers to participation, including geographical accessibility, sensory-safe environments, and the implementation of “reasonable adjustments.” A longitudinal approach was taken to build community trust over a five-year period.

**Results:** Participation grew from five initial members to over 50 nationwide. Despite systemic stigma—including initial resistance from professional musical conductors—the choir has achieved significant milestones, including performances at major stadiums and collaborations with high-profile artists. Success was predicated on clear “what to expect” planning, member-led music selection, and a commitment to authenticity. Findings suggest that providing a safe, predictable environment allows autistic adults to excel in high-pressure performance settings that would otherwise be unbearable.

**Conclusion:** TAAC demonstrates that strength-based, innovative practices can successfully mitigate social isolation. By prioritizing belonging and “autistic joy,” TAAC serves as a model for inclusive practice, proving that when reasonable adjustments are integrated into the core design, autistic adults can achieve high-level artistic success and community integration.

## Biography

Jill Bradford, MBA, B.Mus.Ed, is the Co-Founder and Choir Director of The Autistic Adult Choir (TAAC). With a diverse career spanning music education and corporate leadership—including previous experience as a Chief Operating Officer in Investment Banking—she brings a unique strategic lens to neuro-inclusive community programming.

In 2014, she founded the charity Music for Autism International, adapted from the UK model to provide professional musical platforms for autistic youth across the Gulf, Asia, Canada, and the US. Her work is characterized by “outside the box” thinking, moving beyond traditional therapy to emphasize professional-grade artistic discovery.

Currently, she focuses on the adult autistic population, managing corporate partnerships, user-led training, and the development of sensory-relaxed spaces. She oversees an Autism Hub in Camden and Islington, which utilizes the same user-led, empowerment-based model as TAAC. Her work continues to champion the transition from statutory service-level support to strength-based, authentic community belonging for autistic adults.

## Differential diagnosis of ASD and related neurodevelopmental conditions

**Anna Trubitsyna**

*Novosibirsk State University, Russia*

The study employed the ADOS-2, a structured behavioral observation protocol created by a USA collaboration under C. Lord's leadership. The study involved children aged 2.5 to 3.5 years. Following the initial ADOS assessment, all participants had autism. Subsequently, over a three-year period, all children received intensive behavioral intervention. After the intervention, a small subset of participants, named Group A, was able to join into mainstream educational settings. The second diagnostic assessment conducted three years after the initial one confirmed an ASD diagnosis for all participants except Group A. In the initial ADOS assessment, children in Group A shared identical codes on items that we consider key for the differential diagnosis between ASD and non-ASD. Specifically, these were three items from the "Social Interaction" domain of ADOS-2 Module 1, namely items B1, B4, and B7. In the initial assessment, children in Group A received a code of 0 on item B1, consistently received a code of 2 or 3 on item B7, and a code of 2 or 3 on item B4. Children who were not included in Group A, that is, those whose ASD diagnosis was confirmed at the follow-up assessment, consistently received a code of 2 on item B1 and predominantly a code of 1 on item B7. In cases where a code of 2 or 3 was assigned on item B7, the observed behavioral manifestations were qualitatively different from those observed in children from Group A. There is reason to suppose the results of the initial diagnostic assessment for children in Group A represented false-positive findings. Thus, we identified key ADOS-2 items that allow differentiation between true positive and false-positive diagnostic outcomes. At this stage, the study should be considered exploratory, and the obtained results require confirmation in a statistically representative sample.

### Biography

Presenting author Anna Trubitsyna is biologist and autism researcher at the Institute of Medicine and Medicine Technology, Novosibirsk State University, Russia. Her main activities revolve around clinical work with children with autism, teaching and supervising ABA-instructors, creating and providing educational courses for parents of children with autism and educational personal. She is the supervisor of inclusive practice in few regions of Russian Federation. Her research interests relate to ASD diagnostic and behavior intervention.

## Microbiota-driven modulation of brain metabolism in an animal model of autism

Petra Amchová<sup>1\*</sup>, Iveta Harastova<sup>2</sup>, David Novak<sup>3</sup>, Tereza Deissova<sup>4</sup> and Jana Ruda- Kucerova<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1,3,4</sup>Masaryk University, Czech Republic

<sup>2</sup>Institute of Scientific Instruments of the Czech Academy of Sciences, Czech Republic

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a neurodevelopmental condition associated with disturbances in the gut– brain axis. The present study used the valproic acid (VPA) model of autism to evaluate the effects of fecal microbiota transplantation (FMT) on brain metabolism and intestinal microbiota composition.

Pregnant Wistar rats received a single intraperitoneal dose of VPA (500 mg/kg) on gestational day 12.5. Offspring were treated post-weaning with FMT from healthy donor rats, administered orally every other day for three weeks. Proton magnetic resonance spectroscopy (<sup>1</sup>H MRS) was used to quantify brain metabolites, and 16S rRNA sequencing was performed on cecal content to assess microbiota composition.

In the VPA model, <sup>1</sup>H MRS revealed decreased levels of myo-inositol and Glx (glutamate + glutamine), indicating disrupted glial function and impaired glutamatergic neurotransmission. Microbiome profiling showed reduced abundance of beneficial bacterial genera (*Clostridium sensu stricto*, *Romboutsia*, *Turicibacter*, [*Eubacterium*] *xylanophilum* group), which may compromise gut integrity, lower short-chain fatty acid (SCFA) production, and enhance systemic inflammation. In contrast, elevated levels of *Lachnospiraceae*, *Oscillibacter*, *Intestinimonas*, and *Bacteroides* could contribute to metabolic dysregulation, neuroinflammatory signaling, and gut barrier impairment.

FMT administration improved or normalized microbiota composition and restored mIns and Glx concentrations toward control values, suggesting that microbial modulation can influence brain metabolic homeostasis. These findings support the role of gut–brain communication in ASD pathophysiology and highlight FMT as a potential strategy to ameliorate neurochemical alterations associated with this disorder.

### Biography

Petra Amchová is a pharmacologist and assistant professor at the Faculty of Medicine, Masaryk University in Brno, and at the Rehabilitation Clinic, the University Hospital Brno. Her research focuses on neuropsychopharmacology, neurodevelopmental, and psychiatric disorders. She serves as the principal investigator of several national research projects, including the AZV Grant (2025–2028), examining *reward pathway dysregulation and the role of microbiota in autism spectrum disorders*, and the Czech-BioImaging project (2024), exploring *the effects of gut microbiota modulation on cerebral perfusion using ASL MRI*. She is also a member of collaborative projects investigating the impact of antipsychotics on liver microvasculature and metabolism.

She has developed an extensive network of international research collaborations, working with leading academic centers such as the University of Bergen (Norway), the University of Catania (Italy), the National Research Council in Cagliari (Italy), and Howard University (USA), resulting in several joint publications and ongoing cooperative projects.

## Neuronal thermodynamics in autism etiopathology

**Carla Labarthe**

*PUCRS, UFCSPA, Brazil*

Increased numbers or activation of glial cells in the brains of individuals is a biomarker of autism spectrum disorder (ASD). This study aims to investigate the etiopathology of ASD related to glial biomarkers from the perspective of the neuronal thermodynamics, through a theoretical, integrative, and translational study utilizing multidisciplinary analysis.

Neuronal action potentials are associated to thermal and pressure waves, along with membrane lateral displacement and axonal shortening. They can be triggered by heat, mechanical, or electrical stimuli. Neuronal communication is primarily a mechanical phenomenon, that can be measured electrically due to the electroacoustic effect in electrolyte-rich media (Heimburg et al., 2005). Transient mechanical changes in the brain related to function can be observed using functional magnetic resonance elastography (Hiscox et al., 2021).

Heat is a form of energy that affects temperature. A unit of heat is calorie, defined as the amount of heat needed to raise the temperature of one gram of water by one degree Celsius. Metabolism of foods is an essential mechanism for thermogenesis in the body. Glycolysis releases heat within the cells. Ingested monosaccharides don't need to be digested; they are absorbed through facilitated diffusion and active transport, ready to be metabolized.

Our findings suggest that neuronal thermodynamic behavior connects ASD to diets with fast absorption rates in children. Such diets lead to rapid metabolic heat release, which can randomly trigger neuronal action potentials, and affect insulin-like hormone growth factor-I, influencing brain growth and central nervous system myelination. An increased number of glial cells is responsible for permanent changes in the brain's mechanical properties, affecting the propagation of mechanical waves, which are crucial for neuronal action potential transmission.

### Biography

Carla Labarthe has been a volunteer researcher in autism prevention since 2014, when she returned to undergraduate studies during her free time from her dental practice. The Pontifical Catholic University of Rio Grande do Sul (PUCRS) gave her the opportunity to select any undergraduate courses needed to support her research goals, ultimately earning a master's degree in electrical engineering with an emphasis on biomedical devices. Her research interests include brain motion and its monitoring. She is currently seeking a PhD opportunity to experimentally test the hypothesis regarding impaired function in glial-enlarged brains.

## Strength-Based Work and Life Through Community Inclusion: Lessons From Global Practice

**William Albert Bill Peters**

*Global Disability Consultant & Community Inclusion Advocate, Azerbaijan*

This presentation explores strength-based approaches to work, daily living, and community inclusion through an international, lived-experience lens. Drawing on years of working and living within communities across multiple countries, the presenter examines how employment, independence, and belonging are best supported not through isolated services, but through community-embedded practices such as outreach, shared daily life, and homestay-based engagement.

Rather than focusing on deficits or standardized placement models, this talk reframes inclusion around strengths, relationships, and context. It highlights how community outreach and living-in-community approaches reduce barriers, lower executive functioning demands, and create more sustainable pathways for autistic and disabled people to work, live, and participate fully.

Participants are invited to rethink job placement, independent living, and inclusion as interconnected processes that work best when grounded in real human relationships, cultural understanding, and mutual respect.

### Biography

William Albert Bill Peters is a Global Disability Consultant and community inclusion advocate with lived experience of autism, cerebral palsy, and diabetes. Diagnosed in early childhood and initially non-speaking, Bill has spent his life navigating — and helping redesign — systems not built with disabled people in mind.

His work spans multiple countries and focuses on strength-based inclusion through community outreach, shared daily life, homestays, and long-term partnership with families, organizations, and communities. Rather than importing models, Bill works by living within communities and building inclusion through presence, trust, and mutual respect.

## The introduction of special education in Germany

**Shanglin Li**

*Adelphi University, USA*

For the Autism conference in Berlin this year. I would like to present these four things which are from my powerpoint slides: 1. The brief introduction of Germany. 2. The overall introduction of special education in Germany. 3. The good therapeutic schools in Germany. 4. Regular schools who are doing well with inclusive education in Germany.

### Biography

My name is Shanglin Li, but please, feel free to call me Ben.”

My journey is a bit of a bridge between two worlds. I was diagnosed with autism in China, but I moved to the U.S. for high school (the high schools that I went to are therapeutic high schools) and stayed all the way through my master’s graduation. I’m a proud graduate of Adelphi University (I received both a bachelor’s and a master’s degree from Adelphi University; I went to Adelphi because it has one of the best support programs in the United States, and that program helped me throughout my bachelor years), where I specialized in special education.

In terms of hands-on experience, I’ve seen it all—from the inclusive classrooms in the East Meadow School District to the therapeutic environment at Gersh Academy in Long Island, New York. Most recently, I returned to China and worked as a counselor at the ‘Snail Stroll’ center-based clinic, supporting children with moderate to severe autism. I’m excited to share what I’ve learned from both sides of the globe with you today!”

# Neuroregulation of social communication in autism: An integrative ayurvedic neuroscience framework

**Santhisree Bheesetti**

*Sree Prathama Ayurvedam, India*

Autism is increasingly recognized as a neurodevelopmental condition in children affecting social communication, attention, emotional regulation, and sensory processing. Modern neuroscience highlights differences in brain connectivity, autonomic regulation, and network synchrony that underlie social and communicative challenges.

**Objective:** To propose an integrative framework that bridges contemporary neuroscience insights with Ayurvedic principles, highlighting how system-level regulation can support social communication in children with autism.

**Approach:** This framework is based on:

- Neuroscience research on brain network connectivity, autonomic regulation, and social engagement circuits
- Longitudinal clinical observations of paediatric autism interventions using individualized Ayurvedic therapies
- Integration of Ayurvedic concepts of brain-body regulation and clinically validated formulations, including the clinical use of Vaakkdevi Rasayana, a traditional formulation supporting cognition, speech, and neural regulation

**Observations:** Clinical insights suggest that interventions targeting sensory integration, autonomic stability, and neurological regulation can lead to:

- Improved attention and responsiveness
- Enhanced emotional attunement
- Gradual emergence of spontaneous social communication

Vaakkdevi Rasayana is clinically observed to support these effects by promoting cognitive clarity and speech readiness, aligning with neuroscience concepts of neuroregulation.

**Implications:** This integrative framework emphasizes that social communication is an emergent property of a regulated nervous system, not merely a learned skill. Ayurveda and neuroscience complement each other, offering a holistic, system-based approach to autism intervention, which may inspire future interdisciplinary research and integrative care models.

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## Biography

Santhisree Bheesetti is an Ayurvedic physician and the founder of Sree Prathama Ayurvedam, an Ayurvedic hospital specializing in pediatric neurological disorders. With over 15 years of clinical experience, her work focuses on autism, ADHD, speech delay, and global developmental delay. She leads a protocol-based clinical practice integrating classical Ayurveda with structured child-specific assessment and therapeutic approaches. Her primary activities include clinical consultations, parental guidance, practitioner training, and documentation-based research. Her interests center on neurodevelopmental disorders, the gut-brain axis, and integrative approaches to cognitive and behavioral enhancement in children.



# E-Posters

DAY 2

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# Psychological determinants of wellbeing-oriented life strategies among Ukrainian forced migrants

**Oksana Pokutnia**

*Institute of Social and Political Psychology, Ukraine*

Forced migration caused by the war in Ukraine has profoundly affected the psychological well-being, identity stability, and future orientation of displaced citizens. Exposure to trauma, loss of social roles, and prolonged uncertainty create conditions that challenge personal agency and life planning, making the reconstruction of life strategies a key psychological mechanism of recovery.

This conceptual paper presents a well-being-oriented model of life strategy formation among Ukrainian forced migrants, grounded in positive psychology, resilience theory, meaning-in-life research, and life-design approaches. Life strategies are conceptualized as dynamic systems of psychological regulation that integrate coping, resilience, agency restoration, and future-oriented planning to support well-being and post-traumatic growth.

The model identifies three interconnected clusters of determinants: personal psychological resources (resilience, meaning in life, self-efficacy, motivation, and values); social and community resources (social support, inclusion in host communities, access to services, and institutional protection); and psychological mechanisms (positive reappraisal, narrative reconstruction, restoration of agency, and future construction). Their interaction determines whether individuals remain within survival-focused strategies or develop well-being-oriented life strategies associated with post-traumatic growth, higher life satisfaction, and psychological stability.

The proposed framework emphasizes psychological factors facilitating the transition from trauma-focused coping to constructive life reconstruction and provides a theoretical basis for psychosocial interventions aimed at strengthening well-being, resilience, and long-term integration of Ukrainian refugees.

## Biography

Oksana Pokutnia is working at the Institute of Social and Political Psychology, NAPS, Ukraine.

## When the mind affects the body: Psychosomatic aspects of eating disorders and self-harm

**Ondřej Buchta**

*University in Olomouc, Czech Republic*

**Background:** This study explores the link between eating disorders (ED) and self-harm as manifestations of self-aggression and emotional dysregulation.

**Methods:** A qualitative phenomenological analysis was used, based on 50 semi-structured interviews (DIPEX methodology) with patients, parents, and experts conducted in 2021/2022.

**Findings:** The research identifies self-harm and ED as methods for tension release and coping with negative emotions (guilt, shame, despair). Findings highlight a strong connection between lower self-esteem and the higher need for discipline. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the increase of these disorders is also discussed.

**Conclusion:** The study emphasizes the importance of interdisciplinary therapeutic approaches, including CBT and Dance/movement therapy, in treating the psychosomatic aspects of ED.

### Biography

Ondřej Buchta is working at a university in Olomouc, Czech Republic.

# Strengthening psychological resilience and adaptive capacity in humanitarian settings through hypno-neuroimaginative training: A field-based implementation model

**Annick Maria Ildiko Python, Marta Hegyaljai and Sylvie Lurot**

*Association Hypnose Humanitaire, Switzerland*

Psychological resilience and adaptive functioning under sustained stress are central priorities in global mental health and humanitarian response systems. Professionals and communities exposed to chronic adversity face cumulative psychological burden, yet scalable interventions that strengthen regulatory capacity remain limited.

This poster presents field-based implementation outcomes of Hypno-Neuroimaginative Techniques (HNTs) delivered in humanitarian and migration contexts in East Africa and Switzerland. HNTs integrate structured guided imagery, auto-hypnotic self-regulation, embodied stress-modulation practices, and solution-oriented cognitive rehearsal. The intervention is implemented through a train-the-trainer framework designed to enhance individual stress-response regulation while embedding transferable resilience skills within community structures.

A pre-post field-based implementation evaluation (N = 112) employed structured internal surveys, Likert-scale self-report measures, numeric stress ratings (0–10 scale), and qualitative feedback, alongside four-week follow-up usage data.

Results demonstrated substantial reductions in self-rated stress (average decrease from 8.4 to 3.1). At follow-up, 76% of participants reported sustained self-application of techniques, and 83% reported increased confidence in facilitating peer-based resilience practices. Qualitative findings indicated improvements in emotional regulation, perceived coping capacity, sleep quality, and team cohesion.

These findings suggest that structured neuro-imaginative training may strengthen adaptive stress-regulation mechanisms central to psychological resilience. By operationalizing resilience as a transferable self-regulatory skillset embedded within local systems, this model aligns with global mental health strategies emphasizing prevention, sustainability, and human adaptation in contexts of prolonged adversity.

**Keywords:** Global mental health; Psychological resilience; Humanitarian mental health; Community-based intervention; Capacity building; Stress regulation

## Biography

Annick Maria Ildiko Python holds a Master's degree from the University of Bern and is currently pursuing a PhD in International Law at the University of Zurich, with a research focus on legal reform, gender, and governance in fragile contexts. She is also undertaking advanced studies in Global Mental Health at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. Her academic background in transitional justice and peacebuilding includes field research in Kosovo. A trained hypnotherapist, Annick serves as Project Manager at Hypnose Humanitaire, where she designs and implements resilience-oriented psychosocial interventions for humanitarian professionals and crisis-affected communities.



# VIRTUAL ABSTRACTS

DAY 2

3<sup>rd</sup> International Conference on  
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## Building inclusive workplaces – a lifelong approach to neurodiversity

**Uzma Akser**

*Uzma Akser Coaching and Consulting (UACC), UK*

Parents and carers of neurodivergent children often experience chronic emotional and physical exhaustion as they navigate complex systems of support that tend to diminish as children transition into adolescence and adulthood. Early intervention is widely recognized as essential, yet support networks and services often taper off precisely when consistent and sustained guidance are most needed. This presentation examines the lifelong journey of neurodivergent individuals and their families, focusing on the importance of maintaining a holistic support system across developmental stages and environments—from home and education to the workplace.

Drawing upon both personal experience as a parent of a neurodivergent teenager and professional expertise as a Neurodiversity Consultant and Leadership Coach, I will explore the continuum of support and the evolving challenges faced by families. Central to this discussion will be the role of executive functioning skills and the impact they have on learning, independence, and workplace readiness. I will present insights from programs I deliver for young learners aged 14 and above, as well as for academic coaches supporting neurodivergent students. These initiatives, currently yielding promising outcomes, are contributing to a growing evidence base demonstrating the value of structured, holistic intervention in improving educational and life outcomes.

The session will also address the critical transition from education to employment and the need for inclusive workplace practices such as adaptive recruitment processes, flexibility in communication, and individualized accommodations. Drawing on current case studies and corporate models from organizations such as Microsoft, SAP, and EY, participants will gain a research-informed understanding of how inclusive hiring and leadership approaches can unlock the potential of neurodivergent talent.

This presentation situates neurodiversity within a lifelong, system-wide framework—bridging the gap between early support, adolescence, and adulthood—and highlights how coordinated efforts across education and employment can lead to measurable, long-term success for neurodivergent individuals.

## Biography

Uzma Akser is an ACC (ICF) Executive & Leadership Coach and Consultant, Neurodiversity Consultant, Certified Autism Specialist (IBCCES), Mentor and the founder of Uzma Akser Coaching and Consulting (UACC), founder of the “Bridging the Gap” cohesive parent support group (International) and founder of Motherhood on the Spectrum (MoS). She hosts her own podcast ‘Neurodiversity from the Inside Out - The Future of our Children’ and has interviewed world renowned speakers like Dr Temple Grandin, Dr Stephen Shore and many others. At UACC, our focus extends beyond traditional approaches to embrace the principles of neuroinclusion in family life, education and the corporate workplace. With a strong interest in what ‘real’ education for neurodivergent individuals should look like, we have meticulously crafted our CPD training courses for parents, educators and corporates. She has spent time supporting an advocacy agency The Butterfly for People of Determination on a voluntary basis during 2020-2022 in Abu Dhabi. Volunteered for the Special Olympics UAE in 2019 during the World Games; participated as a coach and mentor for the students of the “Unified Physics” program in 2022. Also, volunteered and supported the Early Childhood Authority (Abu Dhabi) as a panelist in the “Voice of Child” initiative. She facilitated a parents support group for The Developing Child Centre (Dubai) from November 2022-November 2024, facilitating a homeschooling parents support group, online Live talks for parents and educators. She has also been a speaker at numerous community events in Abu Dhabi and Dubai. Recently an international speaker at the ICAN conference in the US and prior to that in Dubai. Through her business she has conducted workshops and trainings for Cascade Education (learning center, Dubai), The Butterfly (Abu Dhabi), R.A.C.E. Raise Awareness of Coaching and Education (Canada and UAE). Uzma is currently coaching and training individuals on the spectrum, their families and companies seeking neuroinclusive practices on an international level. She works with mothers of neurodivergent children both 1-1 and group coaching to help and support them. Since growing and expanding the business in the UK, Uzma has delivered training to the NHS, international corporates based in the UK through Purple Tuesday, the prison service and many others. UACC is also working with a community group BYTE – Build Your Tribe Inclusive Affair, offering workshops and coaching programs. Uzma is proud to have initiated her home education journey with her three children in the UAE, dedicating herself to supporting the home education community in both Abu Dhabi, Dubai and now currently in the UK. Her family actively participated in the Special Olympics and regularly joined community walks to raise awareness about health and autism. Her children have taken part in numerous local and international LEGO League competitions, and her eldest son had the honor of delivering a speech at Expo Dubai during an event for children of determination. Uzma’s journey as an author also began in the UAE, where she devoted countless hours to writing and bringing to life a book that raises awareness about the important topic of autism. Embodying our motto – ‘every small step makes a huge impact in developing a child in a holistic way’ – we are committed to nurturing neuroinclusive environments that foster growth and potential.

## Clear, confident, and unmasked: Rethinking autistic communication

**Daneil Jones**

*TAW Media, UK*

Autistic communication is often misunderstood as a surface-level verbal skill. This presentation reframes communication as a whole-life system that shapes decision-making, boundaries, self-advocacy, relationships, and professional outcomes. Drawing on lived experience, applied practice, and outcome-based frameworks, this session explores how autistic individuals can strengthen communication by focusing on internal clarity, confidence, and self-understanding rather than masking or forced neurotypical norms.

The talk introduces practical methods for defining communication outcomes, reducing anxiety, and increasing clarity without over-explaining or self-erasure. A central theme is the distinction between fear-based communication, which leads to avoidance and shutdown, and action-based communication, which builds momentum, confidence, and self-trust. Confidence is presented not as a personality trait but as a skill developed through structure, intentional action, and repeated practice.

Participants will gain a clearer framework for understanding their own communication style and learn how to apply these strategies across personal, social, and professional contexts. The session challenges deficit-based narratives of autism and presents autistic communication as valid, effective, and powerful when supported by the right internal systems.

### Biography

Daniel Jones is an internationally bestselling author, autistic advocate, and founder of The Aspie World, one of the largest autism education platforms in the world. He was diagnosed with autism in adulthood after years of burnout, miscommunication, and chronic overwhelm, experiences that now shape his practical, direct teaching style.

Daniel is the author of *Autism for Adults* and has built a global audience of over 700,000 people across YouTube and social media by explaining autism in clear, real-world terms. His work focuses on communication, confidence, self-advocacy, and building systems that work with the autistic brain rather than against it.

Through talks, courses, and daily content, Daniel helps autistic adults reduce anxiety, stop masking, and communicate with clarity across work, relationships, and everyday life.

## Depression symptoms in patients with diabetic peripheral painful neuropathy-case control study

**Ibrahim El Bayoumy**

*Tanta University, Egypt*

**Aim:** The study aimed to investigate the possible relationship between diabetic peripheral neuropathy (DPN) and the development of depressive symptoms in patients with type 2 diabetes mellitus (T2D).

**Methods:** A comparative non experimental study was conducted. 200 with type 2 diabetes. The sample was divided into two groups: 105 participants with T2D and without DPN and 95 participants with T2D and diabetic painful neuropathy. The Patient Health Questionnaire 9 (PHQ-9) was used to collect information about low mood and depression symptoms in the subjects recruited.

**Results:** Participants with DPN recorded higher scores on PHQ-9 than those with T2D only. The mean PHQ-9 score for the DPN group (7.8) was significantly higher than that for the T2D only group (2.30) ( $p < 0.001$ ). Participants with DPN were more likely to have mild to moderate or moderately severe low mood and depression symptoms than T2D only participants who exhibited minimal to no low mood and depressive symptoms.

**Conclusions:** The association between DPN and depression is confirmed by this study, with significant depressive symptoms found in patients with neuropathy when compared to diabetes patients with no neurological complications. It is therefore important that discomfort and emotional problems caused by DPN should be taken seriously and addressed closely in the management of DPN in order to prevent depression. Also, a change in screening practices to identify patients with diabetes and depressive symptoms is required.

### Biography

Ibrahim El-Bayoumy holds a Bachelor of Medicine and Surgery (Tanta University, Egypt, 1989), a Master's in Public Health (Tanta University, 1996), and an MD/PhD in Public Health (Tanta University and McGill University, Canada, 2003). He has been a professor of public health at Tanta University since 2016. Currently, he works as a consultant of public health at the Ministry of Health in Kuwait and lectures on public health at the University of South Wales, UK (since 2021), and Texila American University, Guyana. He has supervised 24 PhD projects since 2018. He had published extensively on infectious diseases (HIV, tuberculosis, hepatitis), chronic diseases (diabetes, obesity, cancer), and pharmacoepidemiology. He earned a master's in diabetes care and education from the University of Dundee, Scotland, in 2015 and serves as a reviewer for several international journals.

# NeuroSynergetics™: An EEG-guided integrative neural systems model for clinical regulation and peak performance optimization

**Julian Leicester**

*Asian Institute of Mental Health Management (AIMHM), Malaysia*

NeuroSynergetics™ is an integrative neural optimization framework designed to enhance cognitive, emotional, and behavioral functioning through the synchronized regulation of cortical, limbic, and autonomic networks. Grounded in systems neuroscience, psychophysiology, and applied neuroplasticity, this model shifts intervention from symptom-based treatment toward whole-network coherence.

This longitudinal pre-post study investigated the neurophysiological and psychometric outcomes of an EEG-guided NeuroSynergetics intervention across mixed clinical and performance populations ( $n = 312$ ; age range 18–62). Participants presented with anxiety, emotional dysregulation, executive stress, attentional instability, and performance burnout. The intervention was conducted over 8–12 weeks and integrated four synergistic domains:

- (1) EEG-informed attentional entrainment,
- (2) HRV biofeedback for autonomic regulation,
- (3) breath-based vagal modulation, and
- (4) structured focused-awareness and guided cognitive-suggestion protocols.

Quantitative EEG analysis revealed statistically significant increases in frontal midline theta stability and alpha-band coherence across fronto-parietal networks ( $p < 0.01$ ), alongside a reduction in maladaptive high-beta activity associated with hyperarousal. HRV indices demonstrated significant improvements in autonomic flexibility, including increased RMSSD and high-frequency spectral power. Psychometric outcomes showed meaningful reductions in anxiety severity, emotional reactivity, and cognitive fatigue, with concurrent improvements in attentional control, self-efficacy, and executive clarity. Performance cohorts demonstrated faster stress recovery, enhanced decision stability, and improved mental stamina.

These findings support NeuroSynergetics as a scalable, non-invasive neuromodulation platform applicable to both mental health regulation and elite performance training. The model contributes to contemporary network neuroscience by emphasizing coherence-based neural optimization as a primary mechanism for sustainable psychological resilience and performance enhancement.

## Biography

Julian Leicester is a Malaysian neurosciences practitioner, hypnotherapy researcher, and founder of Hypno Station™, with over three decades of experience in clinical intervention, peak performance training, and applied neuro-regulation. He is the founder, a lifetime fellow member, and the chairman of the Malaysian Professional Hypnotherapy Association (MPHA) and serves as the principal innovator of NeuroSynergetics™, an integrative brain–body optimization framework. He is also the CEO and Director of the Asian Institute of Mental Health Management (AIMHM). His work spans clinical anxiety regulation, trauma-informed neuro-interventions, executive performance enhancement, and psychophysiological resilience training. He has won national and international awards in his field with the subconscious. He has been an international keynote speaker at conferences and symposiums and delivered training and interventions across healthcare, corporate, and high-performance sectors throughout Asia.

## Resilience and strengths-based support in autism – from theory to practice

**Céline Mollink**

*AutismeKRACHT, The Netherlands*

In this presentation, I combine my experiences as a clinical psychologist, experiential expert, and author of *AutismeKRACHT* to demonstrate how a strengths-based approach can make a real difference in supporting autistic individuals.

I will explain how focusing on personal strengths, talents, and collaboration with a person's network leads to greater resilience, reduced stress, and a more positive self-image. Through practical examples, exercises from my book, and recent research insights, I provide concrete tools for professionals, parents, and autistic individuals themselves.

Special attention will be given to:

- Collaboration between professionals and families (parent-professional partnerships)
- Stress regulation and building resilience in autism (including insights from the Polyvagal Theory and practical tips)
- The importance of positive communication and utilizing strengths in support, education, and the workplace
- Practical methods and tools from *AutismeKRACHT* that can be applied directly in everyday practice

With this contribution, I aim to show that a strengths-based perspective not only enhances the self-confidence of autistic individuals, but also increases job satisfaction and effectiveness for professionals.

My presentation is relevant for people with autism, professionals, educators, parents, and policymakers who are looking for practical ways to foster inclusion, well-being, and participation.

### Biography

Céline Mollink is a registered clinical psychologist (GZ-psychologist) working in specialized tertiary mental health care for people with autism in the Netherlands. Through her independent practice, *AutismeKRACHT*, she works both as a psychologist and as an experiential expert. Céline frequently gives lectures and trainings, and shares knowledge on social media (Instagram: @autismekracht) to broaden the view on autism. In December 2024, she published her book *AutismeKRACHT*.

# Understanding beyond behavior: A neuroSensory framework informed by a family's journey and a non-speaking autistic adult's path to communication

**Manisha Lad**

*Akhil Autism Foundation – The Sensory Pathway Center, USA*

For more than a decade, our family navigated the complex challenges of raising a minimally-speaking autistic child who understood everything but could not express himself. Traditional behavior- and insurance-driven therapies showed limited progress because they addressed surface behaviors rather than the underlying sensory-motor foundations required for intentional communication. Our perspective changed when we shifted toward neurosensory, reflex-integration, and motor-planning approaches interventions that recognize that cognition is often intact, but the body struggles to execute purposeful movement.

This shift marked a turning point in our son Akhil's life. At age eleven, he broke his silence using a movement-based communication method, and today, at twenty-five, he is pursuing an Associate Science degree. His journey has shaped the development of the NeuroSensory Foundation Program at the Sensory Pathway Center, a structured therapeutic framework designed for minimally-speaking and sensory-motor-challenged individuals. The model integrates four phases Evaluation, Sensory Regulation & Reflex Integration, Executive Functioning & Motor Planning, and Functional & Pre-Vocational Skills to build regulation, communication, learning, and independence.

Through case narratives including Akhil's trajectory and other young adults in our program, this work illustrates how neurosensory readiness and motor planning support functional communication, academic progress, and autonomy. We also introduce emerging digital tools including gesture-based literacy learning and motion-tracking technologies that strengthen motor-language pathways and expand accessibility for families.

Our findings emphasize that when we look beyond behavior and address neurosensory and motor foundations, non-speaking autistic individuals demonstrate remarkable intelligence, agency, and potential. This neurodevelopmental approach invites practitioners, researchers, and educators to reimagine autism intervention through a movement- and sensory-based lens that restores dignity and creates meaningful pathways for lifelong independence.

## Biography

Manisha Lad is the Founder and Director of the Akhil Autism Foundation – Sensory Pathway Center in New Jersey, USA. Her work is inspired by her personal journey raising a minimally-speaking autistic son who broke his silence at age eleven and is now pursuing a college degree. She has developed the NeuroSensory Continuum Model, a structured framework that integrates sensory regulation, reflex integration, executive functioning, and motor planning to support communication and independence for neurodiverse individuals. Manisha trains parents, professionals, and community organizations, and collaborates with universities and innovators in autism technology. Her mission is to transform autism care by shifting from behavior-based approaches to neurodevelopmental, movement- and sensory-driven methods that honor each individual's intelligence, dignity, and potential.

## Between *neuroaffirmation* and access: Parents' experiences of autism caregiving in the UK

Anum Farooq<sup>1\*</sup>, Valentina Sclafani<sup>1</sup>, Rachael Mason<sup>2</sup> and Niko Kargas<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*School of Psychology, Sports Science and Wellbeing, University of Lincoln, UK*

<sup>2</sup>*School of Health and Social Care, University of Lincoln, UK*

<sup>3</sup>*United Arab Emirates University, UAE*

In the UK, approximately three million caregivers support autistic children and young people (National Autistic Society, 2025), yet qualitative research remains limited in examining how caregiving experiences, service systems, and contextual factors collectively shape FQOL. This qualitative study addresses this gap by exploring caregivers' lived experiences of raising autistic children in England, with a focus on caregiving demands, access to support, coping strategies, and family wellbeing within real-world service contexts spanning health, education, and community systems among diverse backgrounds. Informal caregivers were recruited across England through social media, autism support groups, and community organisations using purposive and snowball sampling. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 15 caregivers from diverse ethnic backgrounds and analysed using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Six interrelated themes characterising families' experiences: (1) *The 24/7 Care Ecology* (2) *Culture, Religion, and Gender as Contextual Amplifiers* (3) *Building or Lacking - the Social Support Architecture* (4) *Fighting the System(s)*; (5) *Adaptive Resilience and Neuroaffirmation* and (6) *Family Quality-of-Life Consequences*, including impacts on employment, finances, physical and mental health, relationships, and social participation. Overall, the findings illuminate the complexity of caregiving as it unfolds across familial, systemic, and contextual domains. While families demonstrated resilience, advocacy, and adaptive capacity, they also encountered persistent challenges in accessing timely, coordinated, and appropriate support. In the absence of culturally inclusive and accessible pathways, neuroaffirmative frameworks risk reproducing existing inequities rather than mitigating them. These findings underscore the urgent need for family-centred, intersectional, and neuroaffirmative approaches across education, health, and social care systems that explicitly acknowledge and address structural inequalities.

### Biography

Anum Farooq is a PhD candidate in the School of Psychology, Sports Science, and Wellbeing at the University of Lincoln. Her work focuses on researching and supporting children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) in mainstream school settings. Her doctoral research explores family wellbeing, social support, and caregiving experiences among ethnic minority and other British families raising autistic children in the UK. Anum's research interests include ethnicity and disability, identifying structural and cultural barriers to accessing support, reducing inequalities in service provision, and promoting culturally responsive care pathways for autistic families. She is particularly interested in decolonizing neurodiversity research and practice by foregrounding underrepresented voices and lived experiences.

## Invisible challenges: Psychological well-being and anxiety in adult women with autism

Ester Cuni<sup>1</sup>, María Cantero-García<sup>1</sup> and Irene Martínez-Gallego<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Universidad a Distancia de Madrid (UDIMA), Spain

<sup>2</sup>Universidad Internacional de La Rioja (UNIR), Spain

The diagnosis of women within the autism spectrum has historically been influenced by gender biases embedded in diagnostic criteria and assessment tools, resulting in a marked underdiagnosis compared to men (ratio 4:1). This diagnostic gap has led to frequent misinterpretations of autistic traits in women, delaying clinical identification and fostering the chronic effects of masking behaviours, which in turn negatively impact psychological well-being. The present study aims to compare the psychological difficulties associated with the autistic condition—specifically psychological well-being and anxiety—between autistic and neurotypical women. A non-experimental, cross-sectional, descriptive-comparative, and correlational design was employed. The sample consisted of 50 women aged between 17 and 54 years, divided into two groups: 24 autistic women (M = 29.36 years) and 26 neurotypical women without an autism diagnosis or clinical suspicion of ASD (M = 40.22 years). Results showed significant differences in overall psychological well-being ( $p = .005$ ), particularly in the subjective ( $p = .015$ ) and material ( $p = .009$ ) dimensions, with autistic women reporting lower scores. No significant differences were found in anxiety—neither state nor trait. Additionally, a negative correlation was observed between anxiety and subjective well-being ( $r = -.462$ ;  $p = .023$ ). These findings indicate lower psychological well-being among autistic women compared to neurotypical women, suggesting that this difference cannot be explained solely by anxiety but rather by structural and social factors related to underdiagnosis and prolonged masking. The study highlights the need to revise diagnostic approaches from a gender-sensitive perspective and to promote intervention strategies that address the unique psychosocial experiences of women on the autism spectrum.

### Biography

Ester Cuni is a psychologist and PhD candidate specializing in autism in adult women. Her research focuses on the chronic effects of masking in autistic women, examining how prolonged camouflaging strategies influence anxiety, psychological well-being, and long-term mental health outcomes. Her work addresses diagnostic invisibility and advances the understanding of the female autism phenotype through gender-informed and lifespan perspectives.

She works in clinical practice providing therapy and autism assessments, with a particular focus on late-diagnosed women. Her approach integrates comprehensive psychometric evaluation, differential diagnosis, and gender-sensitive assessment frameworks tailored to adult female presentations.

In addition to her research and clinical work, she is an active communicator in the field of autism, contributing to professional training and public dissemination on masking, late diagnosis, and the development of more accurate and inclusive diagnostic models for women.

## ***De novo* variants predominate in autism spectrum disorder**

**Richard G Boles<sup>1,2\*</sup>, Omri Bar<sup>1</sup>, Philip T Boles<sup>1</sup>, Zoë Hill<sup>3</sup> and Richard E Frye<sup>3</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Mitochondrial & Molecular Medicine, USA

<sup>2</sup>NeuroNeeds®, USA

<sup>3</sup>Autism Discovery and Treatment Foundation, USA

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a common condition with substantial personal and financial burdens of lifelong implication. Multiple twin studies have confirmed a hereditary component at ~80%, higher than any other common condition and suggesting a genetic etiology. However, ASD's rapidly-accelerating prevalence, now at 1 in 31 in the USA, appears to defy a predominantly genetic basis and implements our rapidly-changing environment. A potential explanation of this paradox is *de novo* variants (DNVs), which are "new" mutations present in the patient yet absent in both parents. The present authors recently reported that DNVs highly likely to be disease causal ("Principal Diagnostic Variants", PDVs), mostly missense variants, are present in (25/50) 50% of the ASD patients clinically evaluated by our team. In the current study, replicate our previous study using in an unrelated 100 ASD patients evaluated by our team. *De novo* PDVs were identified in (54/100) 54% of cases, in close approximation to our previous work. Not previously considered, multiple synonymous (silent) DNVs were added as PDVs, increasing the DNV PDV proportion to 60% of the patients. Additionally, a very-large number of inherited variants, missense and nonsense, were also identified as associated with ASD among the 100 patients, ensuring a highly-polygenic model. Environmental factors are likely involved as well. Our proposed model for ASD, with prominent DNVs in most, that are genetic yet not inherited, predicts the known predominate genetic pathogenesis, accelerating prevalence (chemical mutagenesis as the basis of recent DNVs), the highly non-Mendelian nature of most families with ASD, and reports of clinical improvements with many Functional Medicine approaches. Additionally, identifying a *de novo* PDV is the basis for anecdotally-effective, personalized-medicine approaches in several ASD patients.

### **Biography**

Richard G. Boles is a medical geneticist and a pediatrician who specializes in mitochondrial medicine, functional disease (including cyclic vomiting syndrome, other atypical forms of migraine, and chronic fatigue syndrome) and autism spectrum disorders. His expertise stems from decades of both clinical work and research at a major academic center as well as from his most recent experience in cutting edge biotechnology and genomics. He uses an innovative and integrative approach in both diagnosis and treatment to best serve his patients.

# Why inclusive teaching for autistic students should begin with realistic self-understanding

**Frederik Boven**

*Independent Researcher, The Netherlands*

This presentation emerged from a reflection on the learning experiences of autistic university students, including those of the author. The reflection was phenomenological in nature, which means that it focused exclusively on what is given in and through the lived experience of the students themselves. The aim was to conceptualize the conditions that allow autistic students to learn effectively and sustainably. The principle precondition identified is the development of a realistic self-understanding.

From a phenomenological perspective, such a self-understanding must be grounded in the structures implicit in the student's own experience. This insight challenges approaches that emphasize adherence to external norms or examples. Autistic students often base their decisions on what they believe is considered 'normal', or compare themselves to non-autistic peers. Similarly, teachers when offering guidance tend to rely on their experience with neurotypical students. In both cases, well-intentioned assumptions can obscure the actual conditions needed for autistic students to learn.

The practical outcome of this reflection is the development of a three-part method for fostering realistic self-understanding. First, educators invite students to reflect on their learning experiences through open-ended, exploratory questions. Second, they support students in identifying and articulating the conditions that have hitherto enabled or hindered their learning. Third, they collaborate with students in developing strategies to strengthen these conditions in ways that are authentic to the student's own way of being.

This approach contributes to inclusive education by showing that, before autistic students can effectively engage in learning, something else may be needed first: the development of a realistic self-understanding. At first glance, this may seem like additional work for educators. However, by helping students identify what genuinely supports their functioning from the outset, this approach can actually save time in the long run, reducing frustration, disengagement, and repeated interventions.

## Biography

Frederik Boven is an independent researcher connected to the University of Groningen. He has a coaching company for autistic university students and is founding board member of a Dutch foundation offering online information about autism in adulthood. His activities include coaching autistic university students, managing volunteers, political organizing and literature research. He has a PhD in the History of Psychology and his dissertation focused on early psychiatric theories of autism in childhood. He is currently a PhD candidate in Political Philosophy. His main research interests are the philosophy of autism, a subjective phenomenology and political talk. He was diagnosed with autism as an adult.

# Mental health and well-being: Key challenges and evidence-based interventions

**Arpine Hovakimyan**

*Don State Technical University, Russia*

Mental health and well-being represent critical priorities for contemporary psychological research and practice. Increasing rates of anxiety, depression, stress-related disorders, and emotional burnout highlight the growing psychological burden experienced across diverse populations. Rapid social transformation, economic uncertainty, digitalization, and the pressures associated with modern lifestyles have significantly influenced psychological functioning and overall well-being. These challenges underscore the need for effective, evidence-based strategies aimed at promoting mental health and strengthening individual resilience.

One of the major obstacles in addressing mental health issues remains the persistent stigma surrounding psychological disorders, which often discourages individuals from seeking professional support. Furthermore, disparities in access to mental health services, limited mental health literacy, and shortages of qualified specialists continue to hinder effective prevention and treatment efforts worldwide. Recent global crises, including the COVID-19 pandemic, have further intensified these challenges, emphasizing the importance of developing sustainable mental health support systems.

This paper examines key challenges affecting mental health and well-being and explores evidence-based psychological interventions designed to improve emotional resilience and psychological functioning. Particular attention is given to preventive and early intervention approaches, including psychoeducational programs, the development of adaptive coping strategies, and the promotion of emotional regulation skills. In addition, the effectiveness of cognitive-behavioral interventions, mindfulness-based practices, and community-based mental health initiatives is analyzed as practical mechanisms for supporting psychological well-being. The findings highlight the importance of integrating mental health promotion within educational institutions, workplaces, and community environments. Strengthening interdisciplinary collaboration, improving access to psychological services, and advancing mental health awareness are essential for fostering resilient individuals and healthier societies. The study contributes to the ongoing international discourse on mental health by emphasizing the role of evidence-based psychological interventions in promoting sustainable well-being.

**Keywords:** Mental Health, Psychological Well-Being, Evidence-Based Interventions, Emotional Resilience, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy

## Biography

Arpine Hovakimyan is a lecturer in psychology with experience in teaching, academic research, and participation in international scientific conferences. Her professional interests focus on mental health, psychological well-being, and the development of effective educational approaches. Her work explores the integration of psychological theory with practical applications in education and social contexts. Arpine Hovakimyan regularly participates in national and international scientific conferences, contributing to discussions on contemporary psychological challenges and evidence-based interventions. Her research interests include mental health promotion, psychological support, and the role of education in fostering personal development and well-being. Through her academic and research activities, she aims to contribute to the advancement of psychological science and the improvement of educational and mental health practices.

## Interprofessional collaboration to address communication-related behaviors: A case study

**Tiffany Hines**

*A.T. Still University, USA*

**Overview:** This presentation outlines a collaborative case study of a 10-year-old autistic student who exhibits challenging behaviors stemming from underlying communication needs. The study details how a School Psychologist and a Speech-Language Pathologist (SLP) partnered to conduct a Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA). The FBA moved beyond a behavioral-only lens to identify the communicative function of the student's behaviors. We will describe the collaborative process of joint data collection, hypothesis formulation, and the design of a comprehensive, communication-based behavior support plan.

**Key Findings:** The FBA revealed that the student's behaviors were forms of communication, primarily serving to escape social demands when he was unable to express his needs verbally. By teaching the student replacement communication skills, the team observed a significant reduction in the target behaviors and an increase in his use of the new communication strategies. This case demonstrates that a joint, interdisciplinary approach is more effective than traditional, single-specialty interventions, leading to better outcomes for the student and a more holistic understanding of his needs.

### Biography

Tiffany Hines, CCC-SLP, is an Assistant Professor in the Speech-Language Pathology Graduate Program at A.T. Still University's Arizona School of Health Sciences.

She holds a BA in Linguistics from the University of Georgia, MEd in Speech-Language Pathology from the University of West Georgia, and PhD in Educational Psychology from Capella University, and is licensed in South Carolina and Georgia.

# The evolving landscape: A bibliometric and visual analysis of language interventions research for children with ASD Low ovarian reserve, do they have a chance?

Yuanyuan Liu\* and Yu Zhang

*School of Foreign Studies, China University of Petroleum (East China), China*

**Purpose:** This study conducts a multi-database bibliometric analysis to map the intellectual landscape of language intervention research for children with ASD from 2001 to 2024, seeking to identify foundational and trending topics, map collaborative networks, and trace thematic evolution, thereby offering data-driven guidance for setting research priorities, fostering international cooperation, and informing clinical practice translation.

**Methods:** We systematically searched Web of Science Core Collection, EBSCOhost, and PubMed. After deduplication and screening, 2720 publications were retained for bibliometric analysis using CiteSpace. Co-citation analysis, time-zone map, burst detection, and network visualization identified research clusters and temporal evolution trajectories.

**Results:** Publications exhibited three distinct growth phases: initial exploration (2001–2012), accelerated expansion (2013–2017), and exponential growth (2018–2024). Ten major research clusters comprising 573 nodes demonstrated high structural validity (mean silhouette=0.835, modularity Q=0.812). Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) exhibited the highest structural importance (burst=17.34, sigma=17.15), while computational methods, particularly machine learning (323 citations), showed rapid growth despite peripheral network positions (centrality=0.09), indicating they are emerging yet not central to the mainstream discourse. The United States dominated collaborative networks (betweenness=0.68, 57 connections), with emerging contributions from China, UK, and Canada.

**Conclusion:** The temporal analysis reveals that the field has successfully navigated multiple paradigm expansions, evolving from initial behavioral approaches to encompass technological and neurobiological perspectives. Five emerging frontiers warrant strategic investment: computational-clinical integration, telehealth implementation science, AI-enhanced AAC systems, neurobiological phenotyping, and community-based early detection. Future research should prioritize implementation science, foster interdisciplinary collaboration, and embed participatory principles.

## Biography

Yuanyuan Liu is an Associate Professor and Master's Supervisor at China University of Petroleum (East China). Recognized as an Outstanding Young Talent, her research focuses on cultural communication, public opinion governance, media convergence, and social care for special populations—particularly language intervention and social inclusion of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder. She engages in interdisciplinary exploration at the intersection of cultural studies and special education, with related findings published in CSSCI, SCI, and SSCI journals. She has led one National Social Science Fund project and one Ministry of Education Humanities and Social Sciences project, completed provincial and ministerial-level research projects, and participated in national and provincial research programs. She has authored two academic monographs and three undergraduate textbooks, and has received awards for outstanding achievements in humanities and social sciences. One of her policy briefs on social support for special groups has received affirmative feedback from provincial-level leadership.

## Braided ontologies: Māori and autistic ways of being

**Jolene Stockman**

*Ōtākou Whakaihu Waka, New Zealand*

Māori worldviews affirm autistic ways of being as ancestral intelligence, disrupting deficit narratives.

This presentation, grounded in Māori scholarship and autoethnographic inquiry, explores *takiwātanga*—our own time and space—as a relational ontology that frames neurodivergence as brilliance, connection, and cosmological inheritance.

The research examines intersections of Māori and Autistic knowledge through three themes: parallel oppressions (shared histories of erasure and epistemic violence), emergent counter-narratives (Autistic- and Māori-led reclamations of identity), and ontological resonances (nonlinear, embodied ways of knowing). Braiding *Kaupapa Māori*, *Rhizomatic Theory*, and *Neuroqueer critique*, the work resists neuronormativity and colonial framings, weaving pathways towards a strengths-based model for Autistic Māori identity.

Global educator and author Jolene Stockman, *tangata whaitakiwātanga* (autistic), carries her positionality as a compass rather than a constraint. Language, storytelling, and Indigenous cosmologies disrupt deficit paradigms and create space for Māori Autistic voices to claim epistemic authority.

Framing autism through *takiwātanga* contributes to epistemic justice, relational wellbeing, and culturally affirming practice. Addressing a critical research gap, this work centres Māori Autistic ontologies and offers a pathway to re-Indigenise neurodiversity discourse—advancing inclusion as transformation—beyond assimilation.

### Biography

Jolene Stockman is a Māori Autistic researcher, author, and educator currently pursuing her Master's degree at the University of Otago, New Zealand. Her work weaves lived experience with *Kaupapa Māori*, *Neuroqueer Theory*, and Indigenous metaphysics to reframe autism as *takiwātanga*—a relational, ancestral ontology. Jolene has presented internationally through TEDx, award-winning books (*Autistic World Domination*, *Neuro Navigators*), articles, and contributions to leadership, education, and neurodiversity conferences. She is committed to advancing Indigenous neurodivergent scholarship and developing culturally grounded frameworks that centre Māori autistic voices. Her research interests include participatory methodologies, epistemic justice, and the intersections of identity, wellbeing, and cosmology. Jolene's work bridges academic rigour with lived experience, ensuring relational accountability and impact across academic, community, and institutional contexts.

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