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RESEARCH ARTICLE

REVISED Neurodivergent Researchers in Autism Research: A Survey within the AIMS-2-TRIALS Consortium

[version 2; peer review: 2 approved, 1 approved with reservations]
Previously titled: "Examining Neurodiversity and Inclusion in Neuroscience Research Networks: A Case Study of the AIMS-2-TRIALS Autism Research Consortium"

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v2 **First published:** 06 May 2025, **5**:120
https://doi.org/10.12688/openreseurope.19394.1
Latest published: 09 Jul 2026, **5**:120
https://doi.org/10.12688/openreseurope.19394.2

Abstract

Background

Growing emphasis on participatory and community-informed research has increased interest in the representation of neurodivergent researchers within the research workforce. This exploratory study investigated the presence of neurodivergent researchers within a large European autism research consortium and examined associations with selected demographic, occupational, and mental health characteristics.

Methods

An anonymous survey was distributed to active contributors within the consortium. Participants reported autism diagnosis status, self-identification, other neurodevelopmental conditions, demographic

Open Peer Review

Approval Status ? ✓ ✓

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version 2 (revision) 09 Jul 2026		✓ view	✓ view
version 1 06 May 2025	? view	? view	

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characteristics, career stage, and lifetime mental health diagnoses.

Results

33% percent of participants met the study definition of neurodivergence, including researchers with a formal autism diagnosis, those undergoing diagnostic assessment, self-identified autistic researchers, and researchers reporting other neurodevelopmental conditions. Neurodivergent researchers were represented across all career stages within the consortium. Neurodivergence was associated with increased odds of reporting a lifetime mental health diagnosis after adjustment for age and gender. Bayesian sensitivity analyses produced consistent findings.

Conclusions

These findings provide an initial characterisation of neurodivergent researchers within a large autism research consortium and underscore the importance of considering neurodivergent researchers as part of broader discussions on inclusion in autism research. Further research across multiple research settings is needed to better understand workforce experiences, disclosure, and support needs.

Plain Summary

This study explores the growing interest in neurodiversity within research communities, particularly in autism research, as more projects focus on co-production and community-led approaches. It looks at how many researchers in a neuroscience consortium are neurodivergent, especially autistic.

Survey data from active researchers in the consortium showed that autism is fairly common among them, with 23% either formally diagnosed or self-identifying as autistic. This percentage was higher among researchers at career stages up to and including postdoctoral roles. The study also found that neurodivergent researchers reported lower mental well-being, highlighting the need for research environments to better support neurodiversity.

The findings emphasize the importance of creating inclusive and supportive spaces for neurodivergent researchers, particularly in participatory research. Amplifying their voices can make research outcomes more equitable, improve public engagement, and help the community better understand and address diverse needs.

Keywords

Autism, neurodiversity, neuroscience, research, representation

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Any reports and responses or comments on the article can be found at the end of the article.

This article is included in the Neuroscience gateway.

This article is included in the Horizon 2020 gateway.

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Competing interests: No competing interests were disclosed.

Grant information: This project has received funding from the Horizon 2020 Framework Programme, Innovative Medicines Initiative 2 Joint Undertaking under grant agreement No 777394 (Autism Innovative Medicine Studies-2-Trials, AIMS-2-TRIALS) and Innovative Medicines Initiative 1 Joint Undertaking under grant agreement No 115300 (European Autism Interventions, EU-AIMS). This project has also received funding by the Medical Research Council (Grant numbers MR/K021389/1 and MR/T003057/1 for EJHJ), UKRI (Grant number MR/S036423/1for EJHJ and TDB), and the Wellcome Trust (Grant number 204706/A/16/Z for GLE). The funders had no role in the design of the study; in the collection, analyses, or interpretation of data; in the writing of the manuscript, or in the decision to publish the results. Any views expressed are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the funders.
The funders had no role in study design, data collection and analysis, decision to publish, or preparation of the manuscript.

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How to cite this article: Del Bianco T, Lockwood Estrin G, Lautarescu A *et al.* **Neurodivergent Researchers in Autism Research: A Survey within the AIMS-2-TRIALS Consortium [version 2; peer review: 2 approved, 1 approved with reservations]** Open Research Europe 2026, **5**:120 https://doi.org/10.12688/openreseurope.19394.2

First published: 06 May 2025, **5**:120 https://doi.org/10.12688/openreseurope.19394.1

REVISED **Amendments from Version 1**

This manuscript has been substantially revised following peer review. The principal changes include: (1) reframing the study as an exploratory investigation; (2) clarifying the aims and scope of the analyses; (3) revising the statistical analyses, including the addition of Bayesian sensitivity analyses; (4) providing a more detailed description of the study sample and variable definitions; and (5) substantially rewriting the Discussion to ensure that interpretations remain proportionate to the findings and are limited to conclusions supported by the data. The manuscript also includes expanded reporting of methodological limitations and revised conclusions reflecting the exploratory nature of the work.

Any further responses from the reviewers can be found at the end of the article

Abbreviations

AIMS-2-TRIALS: Autism Innovative Medicine Studies-2-Trials
A-Reps: Autistic Representatives
ECRs: Early Career Researchers
Coef: Coefficient
SE: Standard error
P-value: Probability value
SD: Standard deviation

Introduction

The emergence of the Neurodiversity Paradigm (Pellicano & den Houting, 2022), which conceptualises neurological differences as natural forms of human variation rather than deficits, along with the advocacy of individuals with neurodevelopmental conditions, are increasingly empowering neurodivergent populations (Doyle, 2024). Within this framework, *neurodiversity* refers to the diversity of human neurocognitive functioning across populations, while *neurodivergent* describes individuals whose neurological development or functioning differs from societal norms, including autistic people and those with other neurodevelopmental conditions (Doyle, 2024). Within the context of neuroscience, the autistic community is playing a pivotal role in advancing discussions surrounding inclusion and decision-making in research, and shaping the research process from inception to dissemination (Heraty *et al.*, 2023). Amidst these discussions, neurodivergent researchers have started to join the discussion providing insights into their role and challenges (Abubakare, 2022; Botha, 2021). Within this context, this exploratory work aims to assess the representation of neurodivergent researchers as a group within one of the largest existing autism research consortia.

AIMS-2-TRIALS (Autism Innovative Medicine Studies-2-Trials) a large European autism research consortium that brings together researchers neuroscience, psychology, psychiatry, genetics clinical research, and industry and community partners across 14 countries (AIMS-2-TRIALS, 2018). Established in 2018, the consortium aims to improve understanding of the heterogeneity of autism and to support the development of personalised approaches to intervention through large scale studies and clinical trials (Oakley *et al.*, 2022). Beyond scientific outputs and in line with participatory research principles, the consortium has sought to incorporate autistic perspectives through the involvement of a group of autistic public representatives (A-Reps), who contribute to research prioritization, study design, ethics, dissemination, and publications (Heraty *et al.*, 2023).

Over the duration of this consortium (from its predecessor EU-AIMS funded in 2012 and AIMS-2-TRIALS since 2018) there have been substantial societal shifts in the perception and reception of autistic and other neurodivergent people. Historically, autism research has been conducted by researchers, with autistic people having limited involvement in determining research priorities, study design and interpretation (CIT). Both public and scientific communities have questioned the legitimacy of neurodivergence research conducted exclusively by neurotypical individuals, who lack the lived experiences of their research domain (Fletcher-Watson *et al.*, 2019; Levac *et al.*, 2019; Yusuf & Elsabbagh, 2015). The Neurodiversity Paradigm has further contributed to this shift by emphasising neurodivergent lived experience as a valuable source of expertise, rather than viewing autism solely through a deficit-based lens (CIT). Within this context, it has been suggested that biomedical methodological frameworks, including those within AIMS-2-TRIALS, adopt participatory models. These models aim to involve both neurodivergent and neurotypical individuals at every stage of the research process. For instance, within AIMS-2-TRIALS, this involvement included the participation of A-Reps to the research process (Heraty *et al.*, 2023). However, less attention has been paid to the existence of neurodivergent people within the existing research workforce. Individual researchers have shared their experience of neurodivergence with the public (Abubakare, 2022; Botha, 2021), and there is growing discussion within some research communities about actively supporting neurodivergent researchers (e.g., see for example the Neurodiversity and Participatory Research Advisory Group of the Respect4Neurodevelopment research community). Some scientific journals and conferences have

even started asking for statements of neurodiversity from submitting authors and attendees (see 'Community involvement statement' in Jacques *et al.*, 2022). Nonetheless, disclosure is far from systemic in the research world, and the topic has become controversial, with researchers pointing out that those who are neurodivergent may not feel comfortable discussing their identities openly and/or within their work sphere (Jacques *et al.*, 2022).

Here, we conducted a survey within the AIMS-2-TRIALS consortium to estimate the representation of neurodivergent researchers whilst maintaining participants' privacy. Given the increasing emphasis on participatory approaches and the inclusion of neurodivergent perspectives in research (Hoekstra *et al.*, 2018), understanding the composition of a research workforce represents and important, yet relatively underexplored, area of inquiry. The study aimed to describe prevalence and distribution of neurodivergence researchers within the consortium, and explore how neurotype relates to selected demographic and occupational characteristics, such as career stage, and self-reported mental health. As an exploratory investigation, the study was not designed to test specific hypotheses, but rather to provide an initial characterisation within this consortium and inform future discussions regarding diversity, inclusion and researcher well-being in autism research settings.

Methods

Our Methods, Results and Limitations sections and supplementary material are available online (see Data Availability) and follow best practices to ensure reproducibility by providing sufficient detail on materials and methods, in accordance with Kelley *et al.* (2003) and consensus-based reporting guidelines. Where applicable, we adhere to the EQUATOR Network guidelines (https://www.equator-network.org/) to enhance transparency. This study was exploratory in nature and was not pre-registered. Analyses were designed to provide an initial description of the prevalence and distribution of neurodivergent researchers within the consortium and to explore associations between neurotype and selected and occupational characteristics.

Participants

The participants to this study include researchers and/or student and staff members of the research consortium AIMS-2-TRIALS, including clinical, research and project personnel at various career levels, e.g., from professors to interns. Recruitment commenced in January 2022 through the AIMS-2-TRIALS internal mailing list. During the recruitment period, and initial invitation and subsequent reminder emails were distributed inviting individuals actively contributing to the design, execution, and/or analysis of AIMS-2-TRIALS studies to complete the survey.

Tools

We created an in-house survey including multiple choice and open-ended questions that we distributed via the secure platform REDcap. Questions were collaboratively developed by four of the authors (TDB – who is a neurodivergent researcher –, GLE, EJHJ – who are researchers – and MD – who is a neurodivergent researcher and an A-rep) and revised by the AIMS-2-TRIALS Communication team, who manages and facilitates internal and external communication, public relations, media outreach, and dissemination of information to various stakeholders. The 47 questions included in the survey covered demographics, neurodiversity, mental health, and socio-economic status. Each question offered a "Prefer not to say" response option and could also be left unanswered. A detailed list of the questions and options for responses is available online (see section Data Availability).

Procedure

Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the Departmental Ethics Committee of the Department of Psychological Sciences at Birkbeck College, University of London. Members of AIMS-2-TRIALS received the invitation and link providing access to the survey via email from the AIMS-2-TRIALS Communication Team in January 2022. Comprehensive details regarding the study aims and procedures were provided in both the email and the study information sheet displayed after clicking the link. Participants could proceed to the consent at the bottom of the information screen. After confirming consent to participate, participants could proceed to the survey webpage and progress between questions.

Measures and statistical analysis

The following analyses were exploratory in nature and were not pre-registered. Analyses were designed to provide an initial description of the prevalence and distribution of neurodivergent researchers within the consortium and to explore associations between neurotype and selected demographic, occupational, and mental health characteristics. Accordingly, all analyses should be interpreted as exploratory rather than confirmatory.

Unless otherwise specified, unanswered questions were treated as missing values (NA) and were not imputed. Analyses were conducted using available-case data, such that participants with missing data for a given variable were excluded only

from analyses involving that variable. The only exception concerned three free-text occupational responses, which were reclassified into existing career categories based on the reported primary role (see below).

We calculated essential demographics such as means and standard deviation (i.e., for age) and percentages (e.g., for gender and career level) of the respondents. To increase the sample sizes at the level of individual categories and sparse cells, we collapsed the 10 job titles available to respondents (see Table S1 for the complete list) into 3 career pathways (i.e., admin, practitioner, and researcher). Researcher referred to individuals primarily engaged in the design, conduct, analysis, or dissemination of research. Practitioner referred to individuals primarily engaged in clinical or professional practice (e.g., psychologists, psychiatrists, speech and language therapists), whether or not they also contributed to research activities. Admin referred to individuals primarily engaged in administrative, operational, or project management roles supporting the research consortium. We kept the separation between early career researcher roles (ECRs, defined as research assistant, PhD student, research fellow, postdoctoral researcher) and mid-level and senior researcher roles (defined as lecturer, reader, professor, director). While these researcher roles are not ordinally ordered and may not reflect the number of years in academia, the postdoctoral researcher status constitutes, in most countries, the career level prior to tenure, thus defining an earlier career stage. Free-text responses entered under "Other" were reviewed and reclassified where the reported occupation could be assigned to an existing category. Responses that did not describe an occupation (e.g., reporting a qualification instead of a professional role) were treated as missing for this variable.

For the statistical analyses, responses to the questions "Are you autistic?" and "Do you have another developmental condition?" were combined into a single neurotype variable. Participants were classified as neurodivergent if they reported a formal autism diagnosis, being in the process of obtaining an autism diagnosis, self-identification as autistic, or responded "yes" or "maybe/I am not sure" to the question regarding another developmental condition. Participants who answered "no" to both questions were classified as neurotypical. Examples of other developmental conditions (e.g., ADHD, dyslexia, and dyspraxia) were provided within the survey to clarify the latter question.

To assess the distribution of autistic and neurotypical researchers across career pathways and roles, we performed a Chi-Square Test of association in R (Posits Studio, 2025). To aid interpretation of the analysis, sensitivity power analyses were conducted in G*Power (Faul *et al.*, 2009). With N = 124, df = 12, $\alpha = .05$ and 80% power, the minimum detectable effect size was $w = 0.37$. Differences between observed and expected frequencies (i.e., standardized residuals) were examined to determine which career pathways and roles contributed most to the overall association. We report the chi-square statistics, p-values, and standardised residuals for career pathway and neurotype combinations.

To assess the impact of being neurodivergent on having a diagnosis of a mental health condition, we used a generalized linear model with a binomial error distribution and logit link function in R. The outcome variable was lifetime diagnoses of mental health conditions (binary, 0/1); the predictor variables were neurotype, gender, and age. We report the coefficient estimates, standard errors, z-values, and p-values for significant predictors in the text, and for each independent variable. As a sensitivity analysis, we repeated the model using a Bayesian logistic regression with the same predictors using the brms package in R (Bürkner, 2017). The model assumed a Bernoulli likelihood with a logit link and was fitted using four Markov chain Monte Carlo chains with 4,000 iterations each (2,000 warm-up iterations), using the default weakly informative priors. Convergence was assessed using the potential scale reduction factor ($\hat{R}$), effective sample sizes (Bulk and Tail ESS), and posterior predictive checks.

Results

The overall number of respondents was 124 (see Table 1; for a full breakdown of sample sizes, means and percentages for each question, see Tables S2–3 of the Supplementary Material available online). Below, we report percentages of valid answers for each question; please note that percentages may not add up because the number of valid answers varies slightly between questions. We report the number of valid responses for each question in the Supplementary Material available online (see section Data Availability).

The average age was 38.74 years (SD = 12.09, range 20–70). Most respondents were researchers (83.47%), followed by clinicians (10.4%), and administrative staff (3.47%). This figure aligned with the distribution of officially reported members of AIMS-2-TRIALS (researcher = 83%, clinician = 11%, admin = 7%; *AIMS-2-TRIALS - Autism Research For Europe*, 2018). The most common job title was postdoctoral researcher (N = 31, 25.62%), followed by research assistant (N = 19, 15.70%) and PhD student (N = 13, 10.74%), with ECRs being the most represented category overall (in line with officially reported figure of AIMS-2-TRIALS, ECRs = 49%; *AIMS-2-TRIALS - Autism Research For Europe*, 2018).

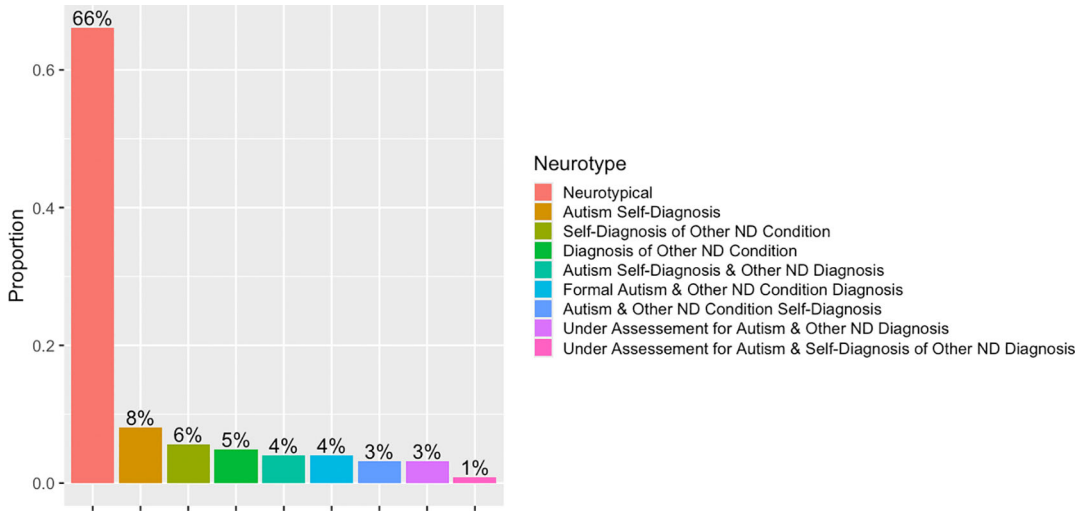

Figure 1. Distribution of neurotype categories among survey respondents, illustrating overlap between self-reported autism status (formal diagnosis, undergoing diagnostic assessment, or self-identified autism) and responses to the question regarding other developmental conditions.

The most represented gender was female (N = 92, 74.19%), with a M:F ratio of ~5:16, in line with the official figure of gender representation of AIMS-2-TRIALS (M:F ratio ~ 7:13; *AIMS-2-TRIALS - Autism Research For Europe*, 2018). Most respondents were cis-gender (N = 121, 97.58%) with preferred pronouns she or he (N = 122, 98.38%, combined).

Among respondents, 5 (4%) reported a formal autism diagnosis, 5 (4%) reported currently undergoing diagnostic assessment, and 19 (15%) reported that they believed they were autistic but had not pursued a formal diagnosis. Regarding other developmental conditions, 20 (16%) reported having another developmental condition and a further 12 (10%) responded "maybe/I am not sure." For the inferential analyses, these responses were combined into a single neurotype variable, yielding 42 neurodivergent (33%) and 82 neurotypical (66%) participants (Figure 1). Because participants could report both autism and another developmental condition, the autism and other developmental condition categories were not mutually exclusive. Consequently, the neurodivergent category represents the union of these responses rather than their sum.

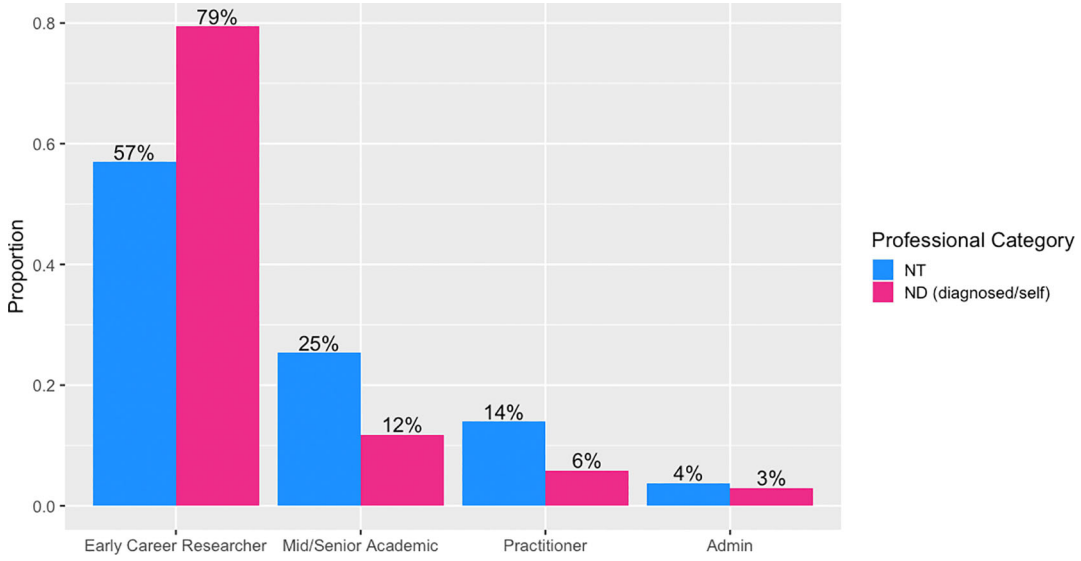

Figure 2. Graphical representation of professional category percentage distribution by neurotype.

Table 1. Complete results of the generalised logistic regression, with formal mental health diagnosis as dependent variable.

Characteristic	n (%) or Mean (SD)
Age	38.74 (12.09)
Female	92 (74.19%)
Male	29 (23.39%)
Non-binary/self-describe	2 (1.61%)
Formal autism diagnosis	5 (4.03%)
Undergoing autism assessment	5 (4.03%)
Self-identified autistic	19 (15.32%)
Other developmental condition	20 (16.13%)
Possible developmental condition	12 (9.68%)
Neurodivergent (analysis variable)	42 (34%)
Lifetime mental health diagnosis	40 (34.78%)

Table 2. Standardized residuals for the chi-square analysis of neurotype by career pathway.

	Standardized Residual	
	Neurotypical	Neurodivergent
Admin	0.25	−0.25
Early Career Researcher	−2.36	2.36
Mid-Senior Academic	1.67	−1.67
Practitioner	1.12	−1.27

Table 3. Complete results of the multiple logistic regression, with formal mental health diagnosis as dependent variable.

	Estimate	SE	Z-Value	P-Value
Intercept	−2.73	1.13	−2.42	0.01
Neurodivergence (Diagnosed/Self)	1.67	0.48	3.45	0.0005*
Age	0.004	0.02	0.22	0.82
Gender (Woman)	1.64	0.70	2.34	0.01*

Association between professional categories and neurodiversity (Chi-Square Tests)

No statistically significant association was observed between neurotype and career category ($\chi^2(3) = 5.73$, $p = .16$, Cramér's $V = .21$). Although the observed effect size suggested a small-to-moderate association, the sensitivity analysis indicated that the study was powered to detect effects of approximately $V = .31$ or larger. Consequently, smaller differences in career distribution cannot be ruled out. Although the overall association was not statistically significant, the largest standardized residuals were observed for the early-career researcher and senior researcher categories (see Figure 2 and Table 2), with neurodivergent researchers appearing more frequently among early-career researchers and less frequently among senior researchers.

Relationship with mental health diagnoses

The logistic regression included 105 participants with complete data on neurotype, age, gender and lifetime mental health diagnosis. Neurodivergence was positively associated with lifetime mental health diagnosis (Coef. = 1.67, SE = 0.48, Z-Value = 3.45, P-value = 0.0005; see Table 3 and Figure 3). Mental health diagnoses were also significantly more

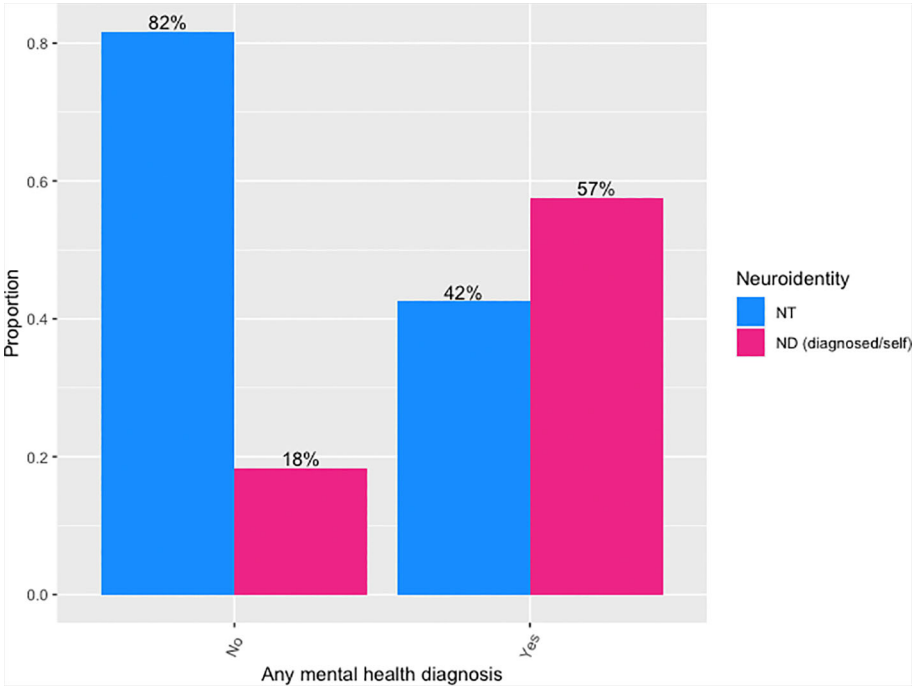

Figure 3. Graphical representation of the distribution of mental health diagnosis by neurotype.

Table 4. Complete results of the Bayesian multiple logistic regression, with formal mental health diagnosis as dependent variable.

	Estimate	Lower Bound 95%	Higher Bound 95%	Bulk ESS	Tail ESS	$\hat{R}$
Intercept	0.05	<0.001	0.51	6058.83	5462.33	1.00
Neurodivergence (Diagnosed/Self)	5.67	2.23	14.96	6577.25	5637.73	1.00
Age	1.00	0.96	1.05	7976.00	5470.85	1.00
Gender (Woman)	6.14	1.59	30.43	6855.95	4748.20	1.00

frequent in females (Coef. = 1.64, SE = 0.70, Z-Value = 2.34, P-value = 0.01). Age did not influence mental health diagnoses (Coef. = 0.004, SE = 0.02, Z-Value = 0.22, P-value = 0.82).

To assess the robustness of the association between neurotype and lifetime mental health diagnosis, we conducted a Bayesian logistic regression including neurotype, age, and gender. The model showed satisfactory convergence (all $\hat{R} = 1.00$, ESS > 1000; see Table 4), good posterior predictive performance (see Figure 4). Consistent with the frequentist analysis, neurodivergence was positively associated with lifetime mental health diagnosis, with the 95% credible interval excluding zero (Table 4).

Discussion

The primary goal of this study was to investigate the presence of neurodivergent researchers within the research consortium. Additionally, we explored the distribution of neurodivergent researchers across career stages and examined the association between neurotype and self-reported lifetime mental health diagnoses.

Formal autism diagnoses were reported by 4% of respondents, with an additional 4% reporting that they were undergoing assessment and 15% self-identifying as autistic. Overall, neurodivergent researchers were represented across career stages within the consortium, although no statistically significant differences in distribution were observed.

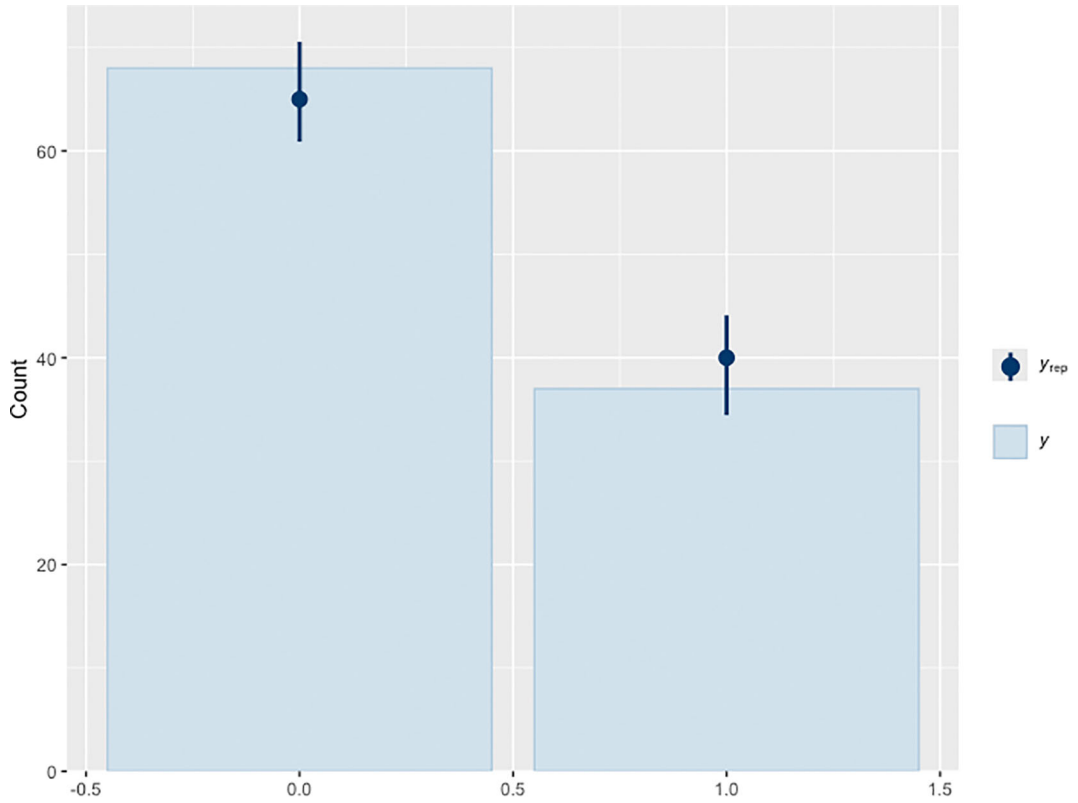

Figure 4. The observed outcome (blue bar) falls within the posterior predictive distribution (error bars), indicating good model fit.

The proportion of respondents reporting a formal autism diagnosis (4%) was higher than published estimates of autism prevalence in the general population (e.g., 0.6%, 95% CI: 0.1–1; Salari *et al.*, 2022). However, this comparison should be interpreted cautiously, as the present study was exploratory, based on a voluntary survey, and conducted within a specialised autism research consortium rather than a representative population sample. The relatively high proportion of respondents who self-identified as autistic without a formal diagnosis may reflect several factors, including increased awareness of autism within an autism research consortium, barriers to adult diagnosis (Ardeleanu *et al.*, 2025), and the predominance of women in the sample, given the well-documented underdiagnosis of autism in females (Kreiser & White, 2014).

Although neurodivergent researchers were represented across career stages, we did not observe statistically significant differences in their distribution within the consortium. This finding should be interpreted cautiously. The study was exploratory, and the number of neurodivergent researchers, particularly those with a formal autism diagnosis, was relatively small, limiting the ability to detect more subtle differences in career distribution.

Neurodivergence was associated with increased odds of reporting a lifetime mental health diagnosis, even after adjustment for age and gender. This finding is consistent with previous literature demonstrating elevated rates of anxiety, depression, and other mental health conditions among neurodivergent individuals (Lai *et al.*, 2019; Lever & Geurts, 2016). Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that the prevalence of lifetime mental health diagnoses was relatively high across the sample as a whole, including among neurotypical researchers. This likely reflects the demanding nature of academic research careers, although the present study was not designed to investigate occupational contributors to mental health.

The presence of neurodivergent researchers within the consortium highlights an often overlooked dimension of participatory research. Participatory models have rightly emphasized the involvement of autistic community members and public representatives. However, our findings suggest that lived experience may already exist within the research workforce itself. Nevertheless, neurodivergent researchers occupy a dual position: they contribute both professional expertise and, for some, lived experience of neurodivergence (Abubakare, 2022; Botha, 2021). This perspective may enrich research by helping to identify assumptions, improve study design, and broaden interpretation. At the same time,

neurodivergent researchers remain members of the academic community and therefore occupy a different position from community representatives participating through formal involvement structures. Their lived experience should therefore be recognising and viewed as complementary to, rather than as a replacement for, established participatory practices.

We also observed a relatively low rate of disclosure of neurodivergent identities (see Table S3 in Supplementary Material 2), particularly among researchers who self-identified as autistic without a formal diagnosis. The survey was not designed to investigate reasons for disclosure, and these may include uncertainty around diagnosis, privacy preferences, workplace culture, or concerns around stigma. Previous research has highlighted that neurodivergent professionals may experience apprehension about disclosing their identities within academic and professional settings (Abubakare, 2022; Botha, 2021; Jacques *et al.*, 2022). Although AIMS-2-TRIALS has implemented several initiative to promote neuro-affirmative research practices and collaboration with the autistic community, our findings suggest that further work may be beneficial to ensure that researchers feel able to disclose their identities and request support where appropriate.

Although the survey was primarily quantitative, participants also responded to two open-ended questions regarding current and future priorities for autism research. These responses were not intended for formal qualitative analysis, but illustrate the diversity of perspectives held by neurodivergent researchers within the consortium (see Table S4 in Supplementary Material 2).

Limitations

A limitation of this study is that it was not possible to determine a precise response rate. The survey was distributed through consortium mailing lists; however, AIMS-2-TRIALS does not maintain a fixed census of active researchers. Membership of research teams changes over time, particularly among early-career researchers and project staff, and individuals may continue to contribute to consortium analyses after moving to other institutions or positions. Consequently, the total number of researchers eligible to participate at the time of survey distribution could not be established reliably. The findings should therefore be interpreted as reflecting the characteristics of survey respondents rather than a definitive estimate of the entire consortium workforce. In addition, the absolute number of autistic individuals in the sample was relatively small, warranting caution when interpreting subgroup analyses and generalising the findings.

An additional limitation concerns the scope and framing of the survey questions. To minimise participant burden and preserve anonymity, several questions used broad categories rather than more detailed information (e.g., predefined examples and self-report categories for mental health conditions and neurodevelopmental differences). This may have obscured heterogeneity within both neurodivergent and neurotypical groups, and may have influenced responses towards the conditions explicitly listed.

To reduce concerns regarding identifiability, responses were anonymous and participants were informed that all data would remain confidential. In addition, all questions were optional, allowing participants to omit information they considered potentially identifying. These measures were implemented to facilitate participation from researchers who might otherwise have concerns about disclosure. Nevertheless, it remains possible that researchers who were less comfortable disclosing aspects of their identity chose not to participate or omitted particular responses. Furthermore, the participant information sheet described the study as focusing on neurodivergence and well-being. This framing may also have influenced participation and response patterns, potentially increasing engagement among individuals with a particular interest in neurodiversity or personal experience of mental health difficulties. As a result, self-selection and response biases cannot be ruled out.

Conclusions

This exploratory survey provides an initial description of the presence of neurodivergent researchers within a large European autism research consortium. Neurodivergent researchers were represented across a range of career stages, and neurodivergence was associated with increased odds of reporting a lifetime mental health diagnosis. Together, these findings highlight that lived experience of neurodivergence is present within the autism research workforce and should be recognised alongside established participatory approaches involving community representatives.

The present findings suggest several priorities for future work. First, replication across other autism and neuroscience research settings is needed to establish whether similar patterns are observed beyond AIMS-2-TRIALS. Second, longitudinal studies could investigate career progression and disclosure over time, while qualitative research could explore workplace experiences, support needs, and the relationship between professional and lived expertise among neurodivergent researchers. Finally, research organisations adopting participatory approaches may benefit from considering how neurodivergent researchers within the workforce can contribute alongside community representatives, while ensuring that appropriate support and opportunities for disclosure are available.

Declarations

Several authors are current or former members of the AIMS-2-TRIALS consortium. The present study was conducted independently and was not commissioned by the consortium.

Ethics and consent

Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the Departmental Ethics Committee of the Department of Psychological Sciences at Birkbeck College, University of London on 26/07/2021 (reference number: 2021091).

Members of AIMS-2-TRIALS received the invitation and link providing access to the survey via email from the AIMS-2-TRIALS Communication Team in January 2022. Comprehensive details regarding the study aims and procedures were provided in both the email and the study information sheet displayed after clicking the link.

Participants could proceed to the consent at the bottom of the information screen.

Participants provided written consent by confirming that:

- They understood the details of the study as explained to them and willingly consented to take part.
- They were aware that they could ask further questions to the study investigator via email at any time.
- They understood that their participation would remain anonymous, and all information provided would be used solely for the purposes of the study.
- They could decline to answer specific questions and withdraw their data at any time before submitting the questionnaire, after which the anonymized data could no longer be identified.
- All information provided would be kept confidential, and no personally identifiable data (e.g., name, date of birth) would be collected.
- Anonymous responses would be stored securely and accessed only by authorized researchers.
- The results of the study would be written up for a project/thesis and presented at conferences and in academic journals. Any individual data presented would be completely anonymous, with no means of identifying participants.
- They were 18 years or older.

After confirming consent, participants could proceed to the survey webpage and progress between questions.

Materials

Supplementary Material 1, 2.

Data are available under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International license (CC-BY 4.0).

All the materials (including the information sheet, consent form and survey questions), analysis code and extended data have been made available on a public access repository at the following link: https://doi.org/10.17605/OSF.IO/7PBVR.

Owing to the sensitive nature of the data and the risk of deductive disclosure within a relatively small research community, the dataset is not publicly available. Requests for access to the data for the purpose of reproducing the analyses may be directed to the corresponding author and will be considered subject to ethical and data protection requirements. This approach aligns with the specific security and privacy requirements outlined in the participants' consent for this study (available along with all study materials at the link above), as approved by the Departmental Ethics Committee of the Department of Psychological Sciences at Birkbeck College, University of London. Additionally, it is supported by evidence indicating that autistic individuals and their families prefer curated over open data-sharing (see Ashworth *et al.*, 2021; Begum Ali *et al.*, 2024; Hobson *et al.*, 2023).

Data availability

Underlying data

Del Bianco, T. (2026, July 2). Neurodivergent Researchers in Autism Research: A Survey within the AIMS-2-TRIALS Consortium. https://doi.org/10.17605/OSF.IO/7PBVR

The project contains the following underlying data:

Analysis Scripts.

Ethics.

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Open Peer Review

Current Peer Review Status: ? ✓ ✓

Version 2

Reviewer Report 04 August 2026

https://doi.org/10.21956/openreseurope.26533.r77268

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✓ **Lauren Lestremau Allen**
SUNY Empire State University, New York, NY, USA

Thanks to the authors for investigating this area by examining the extent to which Autistic and Neurodivergent researchers are represented in the membership of the targeted research consortium. The work clearly and concisely offers a purpose, outlines methodology, and presents results and implications. It engages with relevant literature and offers detailed materials and methodology to allow for replication. Although materials are included, data are not available due to the risk for identification as a result of the small community. The conclusions are aligned to the provided results and the recommendations for future research were meaningful. The authors concluded higher proportions of Autistic and Neurodivergent individuals were represented in the sample than in the population, with substantial participants undergoing assessment or self-identifying. The revisions made in the earlier round(s) were supportive based on the summary provided of those changes.

Is the work clearly and accurately presented and does it engage with the current literature?
Yes

Is the study design appropriate and is the work technically sound?
Yes

Are sufficient details of methods and analysis provided to allow replication by others?
Yes

Are all the source data and materials underlying the results available?
No

If applicable, is the statistical analysis and its interpretation appropriate?
I cannot comment. A qualified statistician is required.

Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the results?

Yes

Competing Interests: No competing interests were disclosed.

Reviewer Expertise: Neurodiversity and disability as diversity, neuro-affirming and neuro-inclusive approaches particularly in higher education and P-12 education, Universal Design, and community-informed research

I confirm that I have read this submission and believe that I have an appropriate level of expertise to confirm that it is of an acceptable scientific standard.

Reviewer Report 16 July 2026

https://doi.org/10.21956/openreseurope.26533.r77175

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Emma Wilson
University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, England, UK

I'd like to thank the authors for taking the time to read and respond to my comments. I have now read through the responses and the revised version of the manuscript and am happy that my comments have been addressed.

Competing Interests: No competing interests were disclosed.

Reviewer Expertise: Autism research, open research practices, research support, and research culture

I confirm that I have read this submission and believe that I have an appropriate level of expertise to confirm that it is of an acceptable scientific standard.

Version 1

Reviewer Report 30 September 2025

https://doi.org/10.21956/openreseurope.20988.r60174

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Emma Wilson
University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, England, UK

Thank you for the opportunity to review this work. Overall, I thought it was a highly interesting and important study. I've added some comments below to improve clarity in places and also to strength the call to action of the paper.

Abstract / Plain Summary
- Perhaps the work could benefit from a sentence describing the overarching aims of the AIMS-2-TRIALS Autism Research Consortium, to provide some context?

Introduction
- Definitions of neurodiversity and neurodivergent in the first paragraph of the introduction would be helpful to set the scene
- The references are good but I think you could make it more explicit in the text that autistic people have historically been excluded from autistic research and what impact that has had on autism research, including why the Neurodiversity Paradigm changes that narrative
- In the sentence beginning "Since its inception in 2018…", are you able to include any information on how the consortium has been perceived by the autistic community as a marker for impact (I'm conscious that publication and citation counts shouldn't be the only impact markers used)?
- Can you clarify what "promoting shared practices and data" refers to? My assumption is that data might mean data sharing – if so, what kind of data? And I'm not sure what shared practices means.
- It may be my misunderstanding, but I'm curious about the use of the term "non-neurodivergent" as opposed to the more commonly used term "neurotypical" in the paragraph beginning "Over the duration of this consortium…"

Methods
- Missing the words "are" and "and "from the sentence "Our Methods, Results and Limitations sections and supplementary material [are] available online (see Data Availability) [and] follow best practices to ensure reproducibility by providing sufficient detail on materials and methods…"
- The word "a" should be removed from the sentence "Recruitment was carried out in January 2022 through the AIMS-2-TRIALS internal mailing list, with [a] four emails…"
- Referring to the sentence "Members of AIMS-2-TRIALS received the invitation and link providing access to the survey via email from the AIMS-2-TRIALS Communication Team in January 2022", where all four emails sent in January 2022? If not, can you provide the timeline?
- The word "samples" should be replaced with "sample" in the sentence "To increase the [samples] sizes at the level of individual categories"

Results
- Some of the colour contrast in the pie chart figures (e.g., colour of text compared to background colour) is low and makes the text hard to read. I recommend the WebAim Contrast Checker (https://webaim.org/resources/contrastchecker/) to make sure there is adequate colour contract between text and background colour.
- Referring to the sentence "76.61% responded that they are not autistic, under assessment or think they are/might be autistic" the wording here tripped me up because it made it seem like these respondents thought they are/might be autistic rather than didn't think they were. Perhaps could be reworded?

- Referring to the sentence “All self-detected respondents left this question blank” does this mean that all self-detected respondents did not say whether they had disclosed to their line manager? If so, could this be made clearer?
- Referring to respondent gender, did any respondents identify as non-binary? Could this be clarified in the text? I can see from the supplementary materials that non-binary was an option, but this doesn’t come across in the text, so it’s unclear if no one responded as such or it simply wasn’t an option.

Discussion

- It might be helpful to have a separate action items or recommendations section to pull out some of the suggestions from the discussion section, as currently I think there get a little lost on the text.

Data availability

- Very minor and not obligatory at all but it might be worthwhile to assign a DOI to your OSF project
- It may be easier to navigate the supplementary material if each material (e.g., survey questions, survey results, contributions) is its own file. Additionally, survey result may be better suited to a spreadsheet/CSV file format than PDF.
- To make the analysis code more reproducible, it may be helpful to add an anonymised dataset (only if this can be shared).
- In the survey results, can you place “prefer not to say” at the end of each of the options, rather than alphabetically, so it’s easier to see?
- It may be easier to navigate the OSF project if you include a README (could be part of the project wiki text) that specifies the folder structure and a brief description of each files’ contents.

Is the work clearly and accurately presented and does it engage with the current literature?
Yes

Is the study design appropriate and is the work technically sound?
Yes

Are sufficient details of methods and analysis provided to allow replication by others?
Yes

Are all the source data and materials underlying the results available?
Partly

If applicable, is the statistical analysis and its interpretation appropriate?
I cannot comment. A qualified statistician is required.

Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the results?
Yes

Competing Interests: No competing interests were disclosed.

Reviewer Expertise: Autism research, open research practices, research support, and research culture

I confirm that I have read this submission and believe that I have an appropriate level of expertise to confirm that it is of an acceptable scientific standard, however I have significant reservations, as outlined above.

Author Response 02 Jul 2026

Teresa Del Bianco

Thank you for taking the time to thoroughly review our work. Please find our responses and outline of changes to the manuscript below: **Abstract / Plain Summary**

- Perhaps the work could benefit from a sentence describing the overarching aims of the AIMS-2-TRIALS Autism Research Consortium, to provide some context?
  - Thank you for this suggestion. We have expanded the description of AIMS-2-TRIALS in the Introduction to provide additional context for readers unfamiliar with the consortium. Specifically, we now describe its multidisciplinary composition, overarching aims to improve understanding of autism heterogeneity and support the development of personalised interventions, and its inclusion of autistic public representatives (A-Reps) as part of its participatory research approach (last paragraph of page 4).

Introduction

- Definitions of neurodiversity and neurodivergent in the first paragraph of the introduction would be helpful to set the scene
  - Thank you for this suggestion. We have added definitions of both neurodiversity and neurodivergence to the opening paragraph of the Introduction and clarified their relationship to the Neurodiversity Paradigm.
- The references are good but I think you could make it more explicit in the text that autistic people have historically been excluded from autistic research and what impact that has had on autism research, including why the Neurodiversity Paradigm changes that narrative
  - Thank you for this helpful suggestion. We have revised the Introduction to make this historical context more explicit. Specifically, from page 5: “Historically, autism research has been conducted by researchers, with autistic people having limited involvement in determining research priorities, study design and interpretation (…) The Neurodiversity Paradigm has further contributed to this shift by emphasising neurodivergent lived experience as a valuable source of expertise, rather than viewing autism solely through a deficit-based lens”.
- In the sentence beginning “Since its inception in 2018…”, are you able to include any information on how the consortium has been perceived by the autistic community as a marker for impact (I’m conscious that publication and citation counts shouldn’t be the only impact markers used)?
  - We agree that publication and citation metrics do not fully capture impact. However, we were unable to identify published evaluations of the consortium's impact from the perspective of autistic communities. Rather than speculate about community perceptions, we have revised the text to focus on the consortium's scientific outputs and its participatory structures, including the involvement of autistic representatives (A-Reps).
- Can you clarify what “promoting shared practices and data” refers to? My assumption

is that data might mean data sharing – if so, what kind of data? And I'm not sure what shared practices means.
    - Thank you for this observation. We agree that the wording was unclear. The phrase referred to collaboration and data sharing between consortium partners, including the harmonisation and pooling of research data across participating sites. However, as this detail was not essential to the rationale for the present study, we have removed the sentence and simplified the description of the consortium.
- It may be my misunderstanding, but I'm curious about the use of the term "non-neurodivergent" as opposed to the more commonly used term "neurotypical" in the paragraph beginning "Over the duration of this consortium…"
    - Thank you for highlighting this point. We agree that "neurotypical" is the more widely used term in this context. To improve clarity and consistency with the broader literature, we have replaced "non-neurodivergent" with "neurotypical" throughout the manuscript where appropriate.

Methods

- Missing the words "are" and "and "from the sentence "Our Methods, Results and Limitations sections and supplementary material [are] available online (see Data Availability) [and] follow best practices to ensure reproducibility by providing sufficient detail on materials and methods…"
    - Thank you for noticing this, it has been corrected.
- The word "a" should be removed from the sentence "Recruitment was carried out in January 2022 through the AIMS-2-TRIALS internal mailing list, with [a] four emails…"
    - Thank you for noticing this, it has been corrected.
- Referring to the sentence "Members of AIMS-2-TRIALS received the invitation and link providing access to the survey via email from the AIMS-2-TRIALS Communication Team in January 2022", where all four emails sent in January 2022? If not, can you provide the timeline?
    - Thank you for highlighting this ambiguity. The original wording may have implied that all four emails were distributed in January 2022. While recruitment commenced in January 2022, the precise dates of the subsequent reminder emails are no longer available to the authors. We have therefore revised the manuscript to clarify that recruitment began in January 2022 and that reminder emails were distributed during the recruitment period.
- The word "samples" should be replaced with "sample" in the sentence "To increase the [samples] sizes at the level of individual categories"
    - Thank you for noticing this, it has been corrected.

Results

- Some of the colour contrast in the pie chart figures (e.g., colour of text compared to background colour) is low and makes the text hard to read. I recommend the WebAim Contrast Checker (https://webaim.org/resources/contrastchecker/) to make sure there is adequate colour contract between text and background colour.
    - Thank you for this helpful suggestion. We have revised the figures for better contrast and clarity.
- Referring to the sentence "76.61% responded that they are not autistic, under assessment or think they are/might be autistic" the wording here tripped me up

because it made it seem like these respondents thought they are/might be autistic rather than didn't think they were. Perhaps could be reworded?
    - Thank you for raising this, we have substantially reviewed this section for clarity and readability.
- Referring to the sentence "All self-detected respondents left this question blank" does this mean that all self-detected respondents did not say whether they had disclosed to their line manager? If so, could this be made clearer?
    - Thank you for this comment. We have now reworded this sentence for clarity and moved it to the Discussion: "We also observed a relatively low rate of disclosure of neurodivergent identities (see Table S3 of the Supplementary Material), particularly among researchers who self-identified as autistic without a formal diagnosis."
- Referring to respondent gender, did any respondents identify as non-binary? Could this be clarified in the text? I can see from the supplementary materials that non-binary was an option, but this doesn't come across in the text, so it's unclear if no one responded as such or it simply wasn't an option.
    - Participants could indicate their gender as male, female, non-binary, or self-describe. Given the very small number of respondents selecting non-binary or self-described gender identities, these categories are not reported separately in the main text in order to reduce the risk of deductive disclosure, however, we have included it in Table 1. Where gender is reported descriptively or included in analyses, categories were collapsed into female versus all other responses.

Discussion

- It might be helpful to have a separate action items or recommendations section to pull out some of the suggestions from the discussion section, as currently I think there get a little lost on the text.
    - Thank you for this suggestion. We have now included a separate paragraph at the end of the Conclusions: "The present findings suggest several priorities for future work. First, replication across other autism and neuroscience research settings is needed to establish whether similar patterns are observed beyond AIMS-2-TRIALS. Second, longitudinal studies could investigate career progression and disclosure over time, while qualitative research could explore workplace experiences, support needs, and the relationship between professional and lived expertise among neurodivergent researchers. Finally, research organisations adopting participatory approaches may benefit from considering how neurodivergent researchers within the workforce can contribute alongside community representatives, while ensuring that appropriate support and opportunities for disclosure are available."

Data availability

- Very minor and not obligatory at all but it might be worthwhile to assign a DOI to your OSF project
    - Thank you for this suggestion. We have now created a DOI for the OSF project
- It may be easier to navigate the supplementary material if each material (e.g., survey questions, survey results, contributions) is its own file. Additionally, survey result may be better suited to a spreadsheet/CSV file format than PDF.

- Thank you for your suggestion. We have now converted the supplementary material to an excel spreadsheet.
- To make the analysis code more reproducible, it may be helpful to add an anonymised dataset (only if this can be shared).
  - Thank you for this suggestion. Due to the sensitive nature of the data and the relatively small and identifiable research community from which participants were recruited, we are unable to make the dataset publicly available, as complete anonymisation cannot be guaranteed. However, to promote transparency and reproducibility, we have made the analysis code available. Researchers interested in accessing the dataset for the purpose of reproducing the analyses may contact the corresponding author, and requests will be considered in accordance with the participants' consent and applicable ethical and data protection requirements (see Data Availability statement).
- In the survey results, can you place “prefer not to say” at the end of each of the options, rather than alphabetically, so it’s easier to see?
  - Thank you for your suggestion, we have moved the prefer not to say option to the end of each option.
- It may be easier to navigate the OSF project if you include a README (could be part of the project wiki text) that specifies the folder structure and a brief description of each files’ contents.
  - Thank you for this suggestion, we have now created a READ ME front page for the OSF project and in the 'Analysis Scripts' folder.

Competing Interests: I am a former member of the AIMS-2-TRIALS consortium. The present study was conducted independently and was not commissioned by the consortium.

Reviewer Report 13 June 2025

https://doi.org/10.21956/openreseurope.20988.r54311

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Lucy H Waldren
University of Bath, Bath, UK
Luca D Hargitai
University of Bath (Ringgold ID: 228664), Bath, UK
Olujolagbe Layinka
University of Bath (Ringgold ID: 228664), Bath, UK

Thank you for the opportunity to review *Examining Neurodiversity and Inclusion in Neuroscience Research Networks: A Case Study of the AIMS-2-TRIALS Autism Research Consortium*. This paper

presents an exploratory investigation into the prevalence and distribution of neurodivergent researchers within the AIMS-2-TRIALS Autism Research Consortium. Whilst helpful, we believe this works would benefit from substantial revisions to improve its transparency, rigor, and accuracy.

Introduction

- Considering the broad scope of research published in Open Research Europe, readers may benefit from a description and definition of neurodiversity.
- Please could the authors clarify whether the 'shared practices and data' resulting from the consortium refers to internal collaborations or published openly accessible datasets, as the examples currently provided are not associated with open data?
- Please could the authors provide specific examples of when 'principal investigators have [prioritized] the recruitment of professionals who openly identify as autistic'?
- The final paragraph of the Introduction needs to be rephrased to significantly reduce the importance and impact that can be drawn from this work. Indeed, a running issue in this paper (that is reflected in our later comments) was that findings and interpretations were continually drawn beyond what can accurately be determined from the current results – that is – an estimation of prevalence and distribution of neurodivergent researchers within the AIMS-2-TRIALS Autism Research Consortium.

Methods

- Please could the authors comment on whether this work was pre-registered, clarifying that this is an exploratory investigation if appropriate.
- This work would benefit from further details concerning sample size. First, without knowing how many people were invited to complete the survey, it is difficult to ascertain the representativeness of the current sample compared to the wider AIMS-2-TRIALS Consortium. Second, readers would benefit from sensitivity power analyses, to gauge the generalisability of the current results. Third, considering questions were optional, it is important to clarify how you handled missing data.
- We strongly encourage the authors to reflect and comment on the limitations and potential biases within their survey questions. For example, questions on mental health (e.g., anxiety and depression) and other neurodevelopmental conditions (e.g., ADHD or dyslexia) both limit future interpretations by not collecting more nuanced insight whilst also potentially biasing responses towards only the example conditions listed. Furthermore, the information sheet highlighted that this work was interested in exploring neurodivergence and wellbeing – please could the authors comment on how they think this may have primed responses across both neurodivergent and neurotypical participants?

Results

- The authors should specify that multiple *logistic* regression models were run and report null results in addition to significant outcomes in the Main Text. Indeed, given the large quantity of null results, the current findings would be bolstered by the inclusion of supplementary Bayesian analyses that can help to quantify the evidence for the null vs alternative hypothesis.
- We would recommend moving the demographics table from the Supplementary Material to the Main Text, as this information is very helpful for interpreting the wider results.
- The clarity of all figures could be improved. Specifically, we recommend using a more distinct colour palette in Figure 1 and including a y-axis label and figure note for Figures 2 and 3 highlighting that this is percentage per group, to avoid incorrect or misleading interpretations.

Discussion

The Discussion needs to be substantially re-written to more accurately reflect the conclusions and interpretations that are permissible from the current results:

- The researchers do not ask any questions about the lived experiences of the participants or their perceptions of inclusivity and support. As such, numerous statements throughout the Discussion need to be rephrased and diluted as they cannot be interpreted from the current results.
- Non-disclosure does not inherently mean that participants are stigmatised. Participants may not have felt the need to disclose their diagnoses because they are already well-accommodated. Whilst we agree stigma is an important issue to consider, stigma was not explicitly measured and thus these assumptions cannot be drawn.
- Similarly, you say wider initiatives within the AIMS-2-TRIALS help to reduce stigma, however this was not assessed and thus cannot be known.
- When you discuss wider neurodevelopmental and mental health conditions, it needs to be made clear that these are only examples, as specific conditions were not accounted for in your methodology.
- The qualitative questions specifically focus on participants' research trajectories and cannot be used to infer their personal sense of satisfaction and belonging.
- Please could the researchers comment on the potential impact of age on the higher prevalence of neurodivergent ECRs, rather than solely focussing on the (untested) link between neurodivergence and lack of career progression support?

General

- In light of the above, it may be apt for the authors to re-phrase their title, to more accurately reflect the current research.
- It should be noted as a potential conflict of interest that the authors are funded by the AIMS-2-TRIALS they are currently investigating.
- We encourage the authors to be consistent in their use of neurodiverse language, in line with current recommendations (e.g., Bottema-Beutel et al., 2021).

*Please note, all authors contributed equally to this review.

References

1. Bottema-Beutel K, Kapp S, Lester J, Sasson N, et al.: Avoiding Ableist Language: Suggestions for Autism Researchers. *Autism in Adulthood*. 2021; **3** (1): 18-29 Publisher Full Text

Is the work clearly and accurately presented and does it engage with the current literature?

Partly

Is the study design appropriate and is the work technically sound?

Partly

Are sufficient details of methods and analysis provided to allow replication by others?

Yes

Are all the source data and materials underlying the results available?

Yes

If applicable, is the statistical analysis and its interpretation appropriate?

Partly

Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the results?
No

Competing Interests: No competing interests were disclosed.

Reviewer Expertise: Neurodevelopmental Conditions, Quantitative Methods.

We confirm that we have read this submission and believe that we have an appropriate level of expertise to confirm that it is of an acceptable scientific standard, however we have significant reservations, as outlined above.

Author Response 02 Jul 2026

Teresa Del Bianco

Thank you to the reviewers for taking the time to thoroughly review our work. Please find below a point-by-point response outlining the changes to the manuscript based on the feedback. **Introduction** 1) *Considering the broad scope of research published in Open Research Europe, readers may benefit from a description and definition of neurodiversity.* Thank you for this suggestion. We have now added definitions of both neurodiversity and neurodivergence in the opening paragraph of the Introduction. Specifically, we clarify that neurodiversity refers to the diversity of human neurocognitive functioning across populations, while neurodivergent refers to individuals whose neurological development or functioning differs from societal norms, including autistic people and those with other neurodevelopmental conditions. We have also linked these definitions to the Neurodiversity Paradigm to provide additional context for readers. 2) *Please could the authors clarify whether the 'shared practices and data' resulting from the consortium refers to internal collaborations or published openly accessible datasets, as the examples currently provided are not associated with open data?* Thank you for this observation. We agree that the wording was unclear. The phrase referred to collaboration and data sharing between consortium partners, including the harmonisation and pooling of research data across participating sites. However, as this detail was not essential to the rationale for the present study, we have removed the sentence and simplified the description of the consortium. 3) *Please could the authors provide specific examples of when 'principal investigators have [prioritized] the recruitment of professionals who openly identify as autistic'?* Thank you for this observation. We agree that the original statement required stronger supporting evidence. Rather than provide anecdotal examples, we have revised the text to focus on documented discussions and initiatives aimed at supporting neurodivergent researchers, providing one example: "Individual researchers have shared their experience of neurodivergence with the public (Abubakare, 2022; Botha, 2021), and there is growing discussion within some research communities about actively supporting neurodivergent researchers (e.g., see for example the Neurodiversity and Participatory Research Advisory Group of the Respect4Neurodevelopment research community)." 4) *The final paragraph of the Introduction needs to be rephrased to significantly reduce the importance and impact that can be drawn from this work. Indeed, a running issue in this paper (that is reflected in our later comments) was that findings and interpretations were continually drawn beyond what can accurately be determined from the current results – that is – an estimation of prevalence and distribution of neurodivergent researchers within the AIMS-2-TRIALS Autism Research Consortium.* Thank you for this

comment. We have now revised the last paragraph of the introduction as follows: “Here, we conducted a survey within the AIMS-2-TRIALS consortium to estimate the representation of neurodivergent researchers whilst maintaining participants’ privacy. Given the increasing emphasis on participatory approaches and the inclusion of neurodivergent perspectives in research (Hoekstra et al., 2018), understanding the composition of a research workforce represent and important, yet relatively underexplored, area of inquiry. The study aimed to describe prevalence and distribution of neurodivergence researchers within the consortium, and explore how neurotype relates to selected demographic and occupational characteristics, such as career stage, and self-reported mental health. As an exploratory investigation, the study was not designed to test specific hypotheses, but rather to provide an initial characterisation within this consortium and inform future discussions regarding diversity, inclusion and researcher well-being in autism research settings”. **Methods**
5) *Please could the authors comment on whether this work was pre-registered, clarifying that this is an exploratory investigation if appropriate.* Thank you for this suggestion. We have now clarified both in the Introduction and Methods that this study was exploratory in nature and was not pre-registered. Specifically, from the last paragraph of the Introduction: “The study aimed to describe prevalence and distribution of neurodivergence researchers within the consortium, and explore how neurotype relates to selected demographic and occupational characteristics, such as career stage, and self-reported mental health. As an exploratory investigation, the study was not designed to test specific hypotheses, but rather to provide an initial characterisation within this consortium and inform future discussions regarding diversity, inclusion and researcher well-being in autism research settings.”, and from the Methods > Measures and Statistical Analysis: “The following analyses were exploratory in nature and were not pre-registered. Analyses were designed to provide an initial description of the prevalence and distribution of neurodivergent researchers within the consortium and to explore associations between neurotype and selected demographic, occupational, and mental health characteristics. Accordingly, all analyses should be interpreted as exploratory rather than confirmatory.” 6) *This work would benefit from further details concerning sample size. First, without knowing how many people were invited to complete the survey, it is difficult to ascertain the representativeness of the current sample compared to the wider AIMS-2-TRIALS Consortium. Second, readers would benefit from sensitivity power analyses, to gauge the generalisability of the current results. Third, considering questions were optional, it is important to clarify how you handled missing data.* Thank you for these useful comments. Please find below each of them addressed by theme. Sample size: We agree that the absence of a defined sampling frame limits conclusions regarding representativeness. Unfortunately, it was not possible to determine the exact number of eligible researchers at the time of survey distribution. AIMS-2-TRIALS does not maintain a fixed census of active researchers, and membership changes frequently due to staff turnover, particularly among ECRs and project staff. In addition, researchers may continue to contribute to consortium analyses after moving to other institutions or positions. We have now clarified this limitation in the Limitations, concluding that: “The findings should therefore be interpreted as reflecting the characteristics of survey respondents rather than a definitive estimate of the entire consortium workforce”.
Sensitivity analyses: Thank you for this helpful suggestion. We have now included a sensitivity power analysis for the chi-square test in the Methods section: “To assess the distribution of autistic and neurotypical researchers across career pathways and roles, we performed a Chi-Square Test of association in R (Posits Studio, 2025). To aid interpretation

of the analysis, sensitivity power analyses were conducted in G*Power (Faul et al., 2009). With N = 124, df = 12, α = .05 and 80% power, the minimum detectable effect size was w = 0.37". In addition, to assess the robustness of the logistic regression findings, we conducted a Bayesian logistic regression using the same model specification (see one of the points below).
Missing data: We have clarified how missing data were handled (see second paragraph of section 'Measures and Statistical Analysis'). Optional questions were treated as missing values and were not imputed. Analyses were conducted using available-case data, with participants excluded only from analyses involving variables for which responses were missing. We also clarified that three free-text occupational responses were reclassified into existing categories based on the reported primary role. 7) *We strongly encourage the authors to reflect and comment on the limitations and potential biases within their survey questions. For example, questions on mental health (e.g., anxiety and depression) and other neurodevelopmental conditions (e.g., ADHD or dyslexia) both limit future interpretations by not collecting more nuanced insight whilst also potentially biasing responses towards only the example conditions listed. Furthermore, the information sheet highlighted that this work was interested in exploring neurodivergence and wellbeing – please could the authors comment on how they think this may have primed responses across both neurodivergent and neurotypical participants?* Thank you for this comment. We have expanded the Limitations section to reflect these points: "An additional limitation concerns the scope and framing of the survey questions. (…) This may have obscured heterogeneity within both neurodivergent and neurotypical groups, and may have influenced responses towards the conditions explicitly listed". And: "the participant information sheet described the study as focusing on neurodivergence and well-being. This framing may also have influenced participation and response patterns, (…) As a result, self-selection and response biases cannot be ruled out."
Results 8) *The authors should specify that multiple logistic regression models were run and report null results in addition to significant outcomes in the Main Text. Indeed, given the large quantity of null results, the current findings would be bolstered by the inclusion of supplementary Bayesian analyses that can help to quantify the evidence for the null vs alternative hypothesis.* Thank you for this helpful suggestion. We have revised the regression analyses and Methods section to clearly specify that a multiple logistic regression model was fitted. To better align the analysis with the revised exploratory aims of the manuscript, the model was simplified to include the primary predictor of interest (neurotype) and the demographic covariates age and gender. We now report the regression coefficients for all predictors, including null findings, in the main text and accompanying table. In addition, we conducted a Bayesian logistic regression with the same model specification as a sensitivity analysis. The Bayesian model showed satisfactory convergence and posterior predictive performance, and the results were consistent with the frequentist analysis. Together, these analyses provide a more complete assessment of the evidence while acknowledging the exploratory nature of the study. 9) *We would recommend moving the demographics table from the Supplementary Material to the Main Text, as this information is very helpful for interpreting the wider results.* We agree that key demographic information is important for interpreting the findings. Accordingly, we have moved a revised summary demographics table containing the principal participant characteristics to the main text. The more detailed demographic information collected as part of the survey has been retained in the Supplementary Material to avoid interrupting the flow of the manuscript and because several variables were not included in the revised analyses. 10) *The clarity of all figures could*

be improved. Specifically, we recommend using a more distinct colour palette in Figure 1 and including a y-axis label and figure note for Figures 2 and 3 highlighting that this is percentage per group, to avoid incorrect or misleading interpretations. Thank you for the helpful suggestion. We have reformatted all figures for better contrast and clarity. **Discussion** 11) *The Discussion needs to be substantially re-written to more accurately reflect the conclusions and interpretations that are permissible from the current results:*

- *The researchers do not ask any questions about the lived experiences of the participants or their perceptions of inclusivity and support. As such, numerous statements throughout the Discussion need to be rephrased and diluted as they cannot be interpreted from the current results.*
- *Non-disclosure does not inherently mean that participants are stigmatised. Participants may not have felt the need to disclose their diagnoses because they are already well-accommodated. Whilst we agree stigma is an important issue to consider, stigma was not explicitly measured and thus these assumptions cannot be drawn.*
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- *The qualitative questions specifically focus on participants' research trajectories and cannot be used to infer their personal sense of satisfaction and belonging.*
- *Please could the researchers comment on the potential impact of age on the higher prevalence of neurodivergent ECRs, rather than solely focussing on the (untested) link between neurodivergence and lack of career progression support?* We thank the reviewers for these important observations. We have substantially revised the Discussion to better reflect the exploratory nature of the study and to ensure that interpretations remain proportionate to the data. Specifically:
- We have removed or substantially rephrased statements that inferred participants' lived experiences, perceptions of inclusivity, or workplace support, as these were not directly assessed by the survey.
- We no longer interpret low rates of disclosure as evidence of stigma. Instead, we acknowledge that disclosure decisions may reflect a range of factors, including privacy preferences, workplace culture, and concerns about disclosure, and we identify these as important areas for future research.
- We have removed statements suggesting that AIMS-2-TRIALS initiatives reduced stigma, as this was not evaluated in the present study.
- We have clarified throughout the Discussion that references to specific neurodevelopmental and mental health conditions are illustrative examples rather than conditions that were individually assessed within the survey.
- We have revised the discussion of the open-ended responses to reflect their intended purpose. Rather than inferring participants' sense of satisfaction or belonging, we now describe these responses as providing preliminary insights into research priorities and identify them as a potential avenue for future qualitative investigation.
- We have substantially revised the discussion of career stage. In line with the revised analyses, we no longer interpret the findings as evidence of delayed career progression. Instead, we acknowledge that age and cohort effects may contribute to the observed distribution and emphasise that longitudinal research will be required to distinguish

between these possibilities. **General**
12) *In light of the above, it may be apt for the authors to re-phrase their title, to more accurately reflect the current research*. Thank you for this observation. We have changed the title to "Neurodivergent Researchers in Autism Research: A Survey within the AIMS-2-TRIALS Consortium" to accurately describe the study. 13) *It should be noted as a potential conflict of interest that the authors are funded by the AIMS-2-TRIALS they are currently investigating.* Thank you for raising this point. Several authors have been members of, and have received funding through, the AIMS-2-TRIALS consortium. However, the present study was not commissioned by the consortium, and no authors received specific funding to conduct or publish this work. We agree that the authors' involvement within the consortium is relevant context and have clarified this relationship in 'Declarations'. 14) *We encourage the authors to be consistent in their use of neurodiverse language, in line with current recommendations (e.g., Bottema-Beutel et al., 2021).* Thank you for this suggestions, we have revised the paper based on the attached recommendations.

Competing Interests: I am a former member of the AIMS-2-TRIALS consortium. The present study was conducted independently and was not commissioned by the consortium.