

Good Work for Autistic Women



IES Webinar

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Agenda

Background

Research methods

Key findings

Recommendations

Real world implications

Questions



3 in 10 autistic
adults are in work

3:1 male-female
autism diagnosis
ratio

Increased
likelihood of
masking

Misconceptions
about increasing
autism diagnoses

Later diagnosis
and co-occurring
health conditions

Misunderstandings
about autism
leading to barriers

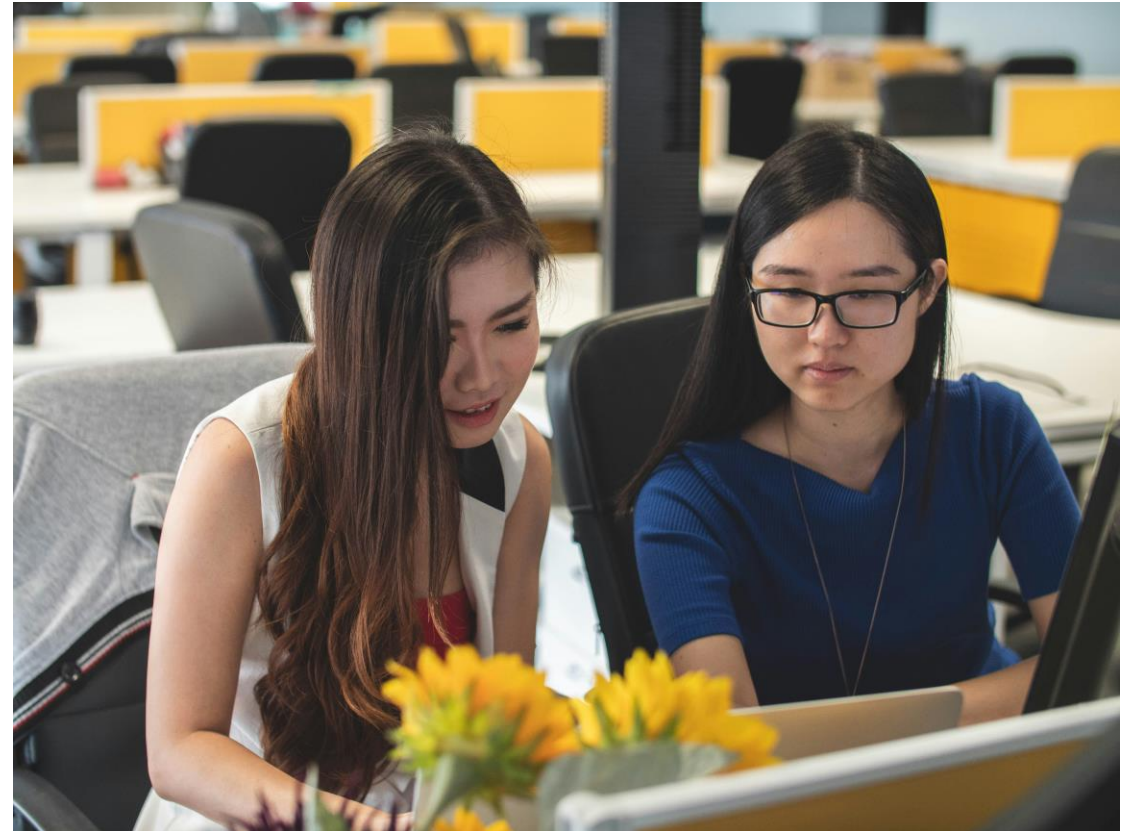


Research methods



Key findings

- Dual process of camouflaging autistic characteristics or sensory needs, and performing feminine behaviours due to fear of stigma or prejudice
- Impact of this process on mental health, performance, and productivity at work
- Tension between individual needs and collective workplace outcomes
- Call for greater knowledge and awareness based on the neurodiversity model to enable safe spaces
- Autistic women value being able to be themselves at work and explore individual interests or skills



Understand individual motivators, interests, and skills

1

- Key to enabling sustainable, high-quality work for autistic women
- May involve exploring purposeful, meaningful work as a motivator
- A tailored approach can be the difference between autistic women surviving or thriving at work
- Consider how this aligns with job crafting, performance management, and professional development

Adapt work environments

2

- Consider the impact of lighting, smells, sounds, crowds, temperature, movement and social interaction
- Sensory experiences are individual and often isolating
- Ensure workplace adjustments respond to individual experiences and preferences
- Utilise existing best practice to start conversations



Develop awareness of masking for wellbeing support

3

- Mitigate negative impacts of camouflaging through wellbeing support grounded in understanding
- Address the mental health impact of both masking (burnout) and unmasking (stigma)
- Consider intersectional experiences and stigma
- Adopt a zero-tolerance approach to discrimination

Be open to understanding social preferences

4

- Social connections are different to social interactions
- Avoid assumptions about autistic people's social preferences
- Explore from the perspectives of social differences, not deficits
- Social preferences may be related to sensory needs
- Listening to employees is learning



Shift away from 'disorder' and 'superpower' language

5

- These terms are considered damaging and misrepresentative of experience
- Both were perceived as based on a lack of understanding or outdated perceptions towards autism
- Move from "fixing the problem" to "enabling performance"
- Instead, lead with a neurodiversity mindset and normalise difference

Enable access to support to aid performance

6

- Barriers include lack of knowledge, prejudice and the need to self-advocate
- Avoid 'tick-box' initiatives or 'one-size-fits-all' solutions
- Prioritise individual needs
- Involve people with lived-experience in solutions
- Encourage feedback loops to accommodate evolving needs



Recognise managers as people who "make or break" employment experience

7

- Recognised as the most important relationship at work
- Influence on policies, hiring, training and organisational design
- Encourage curiosity and strengths-based management
- **Managers as a barrier to good work:** through deficit thinking, destructive criticism, and being ego-driven
- **Managers as an enabler of good work:** by challenging deficit thinking, creating safe spaces and adopting strength-based techniques

Acknowledge the impact of colleague's attitudes

8

- Co-worker attitudes influence experiences of good work
- Autistic women experience autism and gender related stigma
- Compounded stigma for multiple marginalised identities
- Negative attitudes prevent disclosure, support, and opportunities
- Consider co-design for policy and training design



Summary of recommendations

Understand individual motivators, skills and abilities

Adapt work environments

Provide wellbeing support

Improve understanding and avoid assumptions

Shift from 'disorder' and 'superpower' language

Enable access to workplace support

Recognise manager 'make or break' role

Acknowledge the impact of colleague's attitudes

Most importantly, consider the whole individual

Real-world implications for employers

Leaders model inclusive behaviours and set the culture

Build autism awareness through inclusive policies and practice

Use a strengths-based approach with support available to all

Create inclusion strategies driven by real needs

Real-world implications for HR

Provide clear access to workplace adjustments

Ensure training is available and up-to-date

Use feedback mechanisms to tailor support

Introduce an inclusion passport with user-controlled sharing

Address inclusion needs proactively

Real-world implications for line managers

Create psychologically safe spaces for open conversations

Apply and live by company policies to support inclusion

Bring curiosity and personalised support to each relationship

Key takeaways from today

1. Normalise difference

- Question traditional norms
- Value what diversity brings to the workplace

2. Experience is intersectional

- Understand individual needs, experiences, and motivations
- Avoid making assumptions based on diagnoses, labels or stereotypes

3. Managers and leaders are catalysts for change

- Role model the responsibility for driving change
- Challenge deficit thinking and exclusionary practices





Future of work

Behind the masks: good work for autistic women

A toolkit for employers, HR, line managers and autistic people

Stevie Barnes,
Claudia Plowden Roberts
and Becci Newton
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For access to the toolkit:





Any questions?

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