

# Adults with Asperger Syndrome at significantly higher risk of suicidal thoughts than the general population

June 25 2014

---

Adults with the autism spectrum condition known as Asperger Syndrome are nine times more likely to experience suicidal thoughts than people from the UK general population, according to the first large-scale clinical study of its kind, published in *The Lancet Psychiatry*.

The study surveyed 374 individuals (256 men and 118 women) diagnosed with Asperger Syndrome as [adults](#) between 2004 and 2013 at the Cambridge Lifetime Asperger Syndrome Service (CLASS) clinic in Cambridge UK. It revealed a significantly higher rate of [suicidal ideation](#) among adults with Asperger Syndrome (66%), compared with the rate found in the general population (17%), and patients with psychosis (59%) taken from other data sources.

The research, led by Dr Sarah Cassidy and Professor Simon Baron-Cohen, from the Autism Research Centre at Cambridge University, and the CLASS clinic in the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough NHS Foundation Trust (CPFT), found that two-thirds (66%) of adults with Asperger Syndrome had contemplated [suicide](#) and a third (35%) had planned or attempted suicide during their lifetime. Suicidal thoughts and behaviours were significantly more common in adults with Asperger Syndrome and a history of depression.

Among adults with Asperger Syndrome, those with depression were four times more likely to experience [suicidal thoughts](#), and twice as likely to

plan or attempt suicide, compared to individuals with Asperger Syndrome but without a history of depression. A second risk factor for suicide plans or attempts was a higher level of autistic traits.

"Our findings confirm anecdotal reports that adults with Asperger Syndrome have a significantly higher risk of suicide in comparison to other clinical groups, and that depression is a key risk factor in this", said Dr Cassidy.

According to Professor Baron-Cohen, "Adults with Asperger Syndrome often suffer with secondary depression due to social isolation, loneliness, social exclusion, lack of community services, under-achievement, and unemployment. Their [depression](#) and risk of suicide are preventable with the appropriate support. This study should be a wake-up call for the urgent need for high quality services, to prevent the tragic waste of even a single life. "

Autism spectrum conditions are a group of developmental brain conditions that cause difficulties in communication and social interaction, alongside the presence of unusually narrow interests and difficulties in adapting to change. In Asperger Syndrome, people show the key symptoms but without delayed language or intellectual disability. In the UK, one in 100 people (around 700 000) has an autism spectrum condition.

Provided by Lancet

Citation: Adults with Asperger Syndrome at significantly higher risk of suicidal thoughts than the general population (2014, June 25) retrieved 25 February 2023 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2014-06-adults-asperger-syndrome-significantly-higher.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private

study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.