ON THE STARTING LINE

Baseline data on the mental health of autistic students at the University of Bristol
Dr Felicity Hedgewick
Background

Autistic people have worse mental health than non-autistic people

More likely to have issues accessing services - or not access them at all

Results in far worse outcomes long term
- Employment
- Self-harm
- Suicide

Some research on students - time of transition
- Support drops off at move to adulthood, plus geography (Friedman, Warfield & Parish, 2013)
- Autistic students more likely to drop out (Wei et al., 2014)
- High levels of mental health issues, but academically confident (Jackson, Hard, Brown & Volkmar, 2018)
Research Questions

What is the mental health status of autistic students at the University of Bristol?

How does mental health among these students change over the course of the academic year?

What do autistic students say about the support on offer at UoB?
### Current students

- **Total** - 226
  - Arts, Humanities, Social Sciences - 76
  - STEM subjects - 150
  - UG - 160
  - PG - 66
Methods

Study One

- Following 29 students
- Recruited in first term of 2019/20
- SCID screening, SCID Depression, GAD-7, Social Phobia Inventory, SCOFF, SCID ARFID, Z-FOCS, AUDIT, DAST-10

Study Two

- Invite 20 participants to interview
- Experiences of mental health at university
- Whether they sought help
- How useful the help was
- What might have worked better for them
# Results - Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Age at diagnosis</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Physical diagnoses</th>
<th>Mental diagnoses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male = 8</td>
<td>18 – 35</td>
<td>4 – 35</td>
<td>White British = 26</td>
<td>14 participants</td>
<td>19 participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female = 19</td>
<td>M = 21.65</td>
<td>M = 15.17</td>
<td>Latino = 1</td>
<td>GI common</td>
<td>Anxiety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-binary = 2</td>
<td>SD = 4.06</td>
<td>SD = 6.89</td>
<td>Mixed = 1</td>
<td>CF/EDS common</td>
<td>Depression</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years in Higher Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First year UG = 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second year UG = 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masters = 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PhD (3rd year) = 1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
RESULTS – ANXIETY AND DEPRESSION

Anxiety (max 21)
Range: 1 - 21
Mean: 9.92
SD: 5.42

Social Anxiety (max 68)
Range: 10 - 55
Mean: 34.96
SD: 13.22

Depression (max 63)
Range: 1 - 40
Mean: 17.07
SD: 9.45
RESULTS – EATING DISORDERS

**SCOFF (max 5)**
- Range: 0 – 5
- Mean: 1.43
- SD: 1.52

**ARFID (max 18)**
- Range: 0 – 12
- Mean: 3.75
- SD: 2.70
RESULTS - ADHD AND OCD

ADHD (max 24)
Range: 1 – 22
Mean: 13.71
SD: 5.22

OCD (max 6)
Range: 0 – 6
Mean: 3.25
SD: 1.88
RESULTS – ALCOHOL AND DRUG USE

Alcohol (max 40)
Range: 0 – 11
Mean: 3.43
SD: 3.85

Drug Use (max 10) Users: 4
Range: 0 – 8
Mean: 1.61
SD: 1.96
Conclusions

1. Limited range of students responding
   - But reflective of both UoB and diagnosed population
   - ~10% of total UoB population

2. High levels of all mental health issues
   - Anxiety and social anxiety significant
   - Mild depression common
   - ADHD significant overlap

3. Low levels of maladaptive coping strategies
   - Little evidence of ED
   - Most drink safely
   - Few take drugs – only two in risky patterns

Conclusions
Next Steps

T2 data collection: 9\textsuperscript{th} December

Compare T1 and T2 scores

Interviews from Feb 2020 onwards

T 3 data collection: 10\textsuperscript{th} Feb

T 4 data collection: 8\textsuperscript{th} June (post-exams)