

Autism in the UK costs more than 27 billion every year, shows new research

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Research published this week in the Journal *Autism*, published by SAGE, estimate the annual costs of autism spectrum disorder (ASD) to be more than £27 billion a year. The costs of supporting children with ASDs were estimated to be £2.7 billion per year, £25 billion each year for adults. The findings will be presented at the *Autism & Employment* Workshop taking place today at Goldsmiths, University of London.

With the National Audit Office report on the provision of services for Autism imminent, participants at the workshop will review current research, policy and services and discuss the challenges facing people with ASDs finding work and in the workplace.

The Economic impacts of autism research, led by Professor Martin Knapp of the London School of Economics, provides the most comprehensive analysis of the economic impacts of ASD in the UK to date. Speaking at the Goldsmiths event, Knapp will reveal the significant costs to the public sector, in particular the health system, social care agencies, education and housing budgets. He will also outline the steep rise in costs for adults, calling for increased early intervention for those with ASDs.

Costs were based on estimates for 539,766 people with ASD in the UK: 432,750 adults (aged 18 and over) and 107,016 children and adolescents (aged 0-17). There was no single, nationally representative data source in the UK looking at these costs, so the researchers combined existing data estimating prevalence; intellectual disability; place of residence; service

use; lost productivity; and costs per individual. Average annual costs were also aggregated to estimate the lifetime cost of someone with ASD, calculated by combining costs for different age groups with life expectancy estimates.

The costs of supporting children with ASDs were estimated to be £2.7 billion per year. For adults, these costs rise to £25 billion each year. Lifetime costs for someone with autism were calculated as £0.8 million for someone with autism without intellectual disability, and £1.2 million for someone with autism who was also intellectually disabled (50 percent higher).

Significant costs were attributed to public services. For children, the highest costs were for special education, health and social care and respite care. 95 percent of the total national cost for children was accounted for by services funded by the state, and 5 percent by family expenses.

For adults, the largest cost elements were staffed/supported accommodation, lost productivity because the individual with ASD was not employed, and hospital services. For non-intellectually disabled adults, the largest elements were lost productivity for the individual, hospital costs, and lost productivity for parents. 59 percent of the total was attributable to publicly funded services, 36 percent to lost employment for the individual with ASD, and the remaining 5 percent to family expenses.

The researchers suggest that the high costs associated with supporting adults with ASD warrant attention, supporting calls for wider provisions of early interventions with children and young people with ASD, which have been shown to alter patterns of behaviour. They also call on the government to review policy frameworks for supporting those with ASDs, in particular reviewing support for independent living and for

increasing productivity.

The researchers however caution that the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of intervention must be evaluated further. They add, “given the autistic spectrum includes a number of disorders and a wide range of needs, symptoms and characteristics, it is likely that a wide range of behavioural, educational and medical interventions could be required in order to meet some or all individual needs.”

They conclude, “the costs presented in this paper certainly do not provide an economic case for early intervention, but they do emphasise the importance of addressing just that question. If early intervention could successfully change some aspects of behaviour that are cost-raising, both in childhood and subsequently, it may allow cost savings to be made and quality of life improvements to be achieved.”

The research is published in a special issue of *Autism* which focus on adults with ASD. The Autism & Employment Workshop will be attended by representatives of the National Audit Office, the Department of Health, the National Autistic Society, and Prospects an ASD supported employment consultancy, as well as by researchers, and industry representatives including those from BT and Goldman-Sachs.

More information: Economic cost of autism in the UK by Martin Knapp, Renée Romeo, and Jennifer Beecham is published in the May 2009 issue of *Autism* (2009 13: 317-336). The paper will be free to access for a limited period from aut.sagepub.com/cgi/reprint/13/3/317 . *Autism* is published by SAGE on behalf of the National Autistic Society.
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