

Autism rates steady for two decades

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UQ study shows autism rates have remained steady for the past two decades.
Credit: Shuttlestock

(Medical Xpress)—A University of Queensland study has found no evidence of an increase in autism in the past 20 years, countering reports that the rates of autism spectrum disorders (ASDs) are on the rise.

The study, led by Dr Amanda Baxter from UQ's Queensland Centre for Mental Health Research at the School of Population Health, was a first-of-its-kind analysis of research data from 1990 to 2010.

Dr Baxter said she and her colleagues found that rates had remained steady, despite reports that the prevalence of ASDs was increasing.

"We found that the prevalence of ASDs in 2010 was one in 132 people, which represents no change from 1990," Dr Baxter said.

"We found that better recognition of the disorders and improved [diagnostic criteria](#) explain much of the difference in study findings over time."

Part of the Global Burden of Disease project, this is the largest study to systematically assess rates and disability caused by ASDs in the community, using data collected from global research findings in the past 20 years.

ASDs are chronic, disabling disorders that stem from problems with brain development.

They affect people from a young age and are among the world's 20 most disabling childhood conditions.

The study shows that about 52 million children and adults around the globe meet diagnostic criteria for an ASD.

Dr Baxter said researchers hoped the study would help guide health policy and improve support for those with ASD and their families.

"As ASDs cause substantial lifelong health issues, an accurate understanding of the burden of these disorders can inform [public health](#)

[policy](#) as well as help allocate necessary resources for education, housing and employment," she said.

The study, a collaboration with the University of Leicester and the University of Washington's Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, is published in *Psychological Medicine* journal.

More information: The epidemiology and global burden of autism spectrum disorders, [dx.doi.org/10.1017/S003329171400172X](https://doi.org/10.1017/S003329171400172X)

Provided by University of Queensland

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