

Poor judgment of autistic adults

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Autistic adults can be wrongly perceived as deceptive and lacking credibility, Flinders University researchers say, with this working against many caught in the legal system.

Ahead of World Autism Awareness Day (2 April 2021), a new paper in

the *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders* asked 1,410 civilians to respond to [video recordings](#) with 30 adults with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and 29 non-ASD individuals to examine whether stereotypical behaviors associated with autism influenced [people's perceptions](#) of the individual.

Common behaviors include gaze aversion, repetitive body movements, literal interpretations of figurative language and poor reciprocity.

Co-author Flinders Professor Robyn Young, author of *Crime and Autism Spectrum Disorder: Myths and Mechanisms* (2015) with Emeritus Professor Neil Brewer, says "it's unfortunate that many of the behaviors that are believed to be portrayed by people who are being deceptive, often erroneously, are also commonly seen among people on the [autism spectrum](#)".

These behaviors can therefore disadvantage a person who has [autism](#) when they interact with the criminal judicial system, the Flinders University professors argue.

Professor Young regularly consults with the legal system to educate judges and juries about ASD so that an autistic person's presentation will not be misinterpreted by people who do not understand their condition. "We have now extracted recent statistics suggesting that sentences of autistic people are on average higher than their non-autistic peers who have committed similar offenses," she says.

"If you ask most people how they determine if someone is not telling the truth, they will often refer to lack of eye contact or fidgety behavior," says lead author Dr. Alliyza Lim.

"Even though our study actually showed that none of these behaviors individually were directly linked to a person being considered as less

credible and more deceptive, overall autistic people are considered less reliable than their non-ASD peers."

Autistic individuals may be erroneously perceived as deceptive and lacking credibility (2021) by A Lim, RL Young and N Brewer has been published in the Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders (Springer Nature) [DOI: 10.1007/s10803-021-04963-4](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-021-04963-4).

Autism, or ASD, refers to a broad range of conditions characterized by challenges with [social skills](#), repetitive behaviors, speech and non-verbal communication. Autism affects an estimated 1 in 160 children and the WHO is calling for more intervention services and broader actions for making physical, social and attitudinal environments more accessible, inclusive and supportive for people with ASD.

An Autism Awareness Australia report (2020) revealed 60.5% of adults with ASD surveyed had communication issues and 48% behavior issues which led them to seek help.

More information: Alliyza Lim et al, Autistic Adults May Be Erroneously Perceived as Deceptive and Lacking Credibility, *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders* (2021). [DOI: 10.1007/s10803-021-04963-4](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-021-04963-4)

Provided by Flinders University

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