

# Systematic review finds suicide rate considerably higher for people with autism

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University of Queensland-led research has found people on the autism spectrum are almost 3 times more likely to die by suicide compared to non-autistic people. [The study](#) was published in *Psychiatry Research*.

Dr. Damian Santomauro from UQ's School of Public Health and the Queensland Centre for Mental Health Research led a team which conducted a systematic review of nearly 1,500 international research papers.

"We aimed to quantify the risk, mortality and burden of [suicide](#) among people on the [autism spectrum](#)," Dr. Santomauro said.

"There were several alarming findings in this study, including the fact people on the autism spectrum but without [intellectual disability](#) were more than 5 times more likely to die by suicide compared to people not on the autism spectrum.

"In 2021, the total years of life lost to the increased risk of suicide in the autistic community exceeded those lost to cocaine use, rabies or [testicular cancer](#) across the total global population. And almost 2% of all suicide deaths globally in 2021 could have been avoided if the risk for death by suicide for [autistic people](#) was not elevated."

Dr. Santomauro said there were likely many reasons for the higher associated risk.

"People on the autism spectrum often experience bullying, social rejection, stigma and discrimination—all risk factors for depressive disorders," he said.

"There can also be other challenges for autistic people that impact their educational progress, employment, independent living and peer relationships."

Dr. Santomauro said the findings showed a critical need for interventions and prevention strategies.

"Measures to reduce [risk factors](#) for suicide among autistic people would substantially reduce the fatal burden of suicides globally and the health burden experienced by people on the autism spectrum," he said.

"Studies like this one are important, to get an idea of how issues impact people on the autism spectrum. Without these estimates there would be no gauge for [policy makers](#) or service providers on the mortality and burden of suicide for autistic people."

The study also involved researchers from Deakin University, La Trobe University, the University of Leicester, the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation and the University of Washington.

**More information:** Damian F Santomauro et al, The global burden of suicide mortality among people on the autism spectrum: A systematic review, meta-analysis, and extension of estimates from the Global Burden of Disease Study 2021, *Psychiatry Research* (2024). [DOI: 10.1016/j.psychres.2024.116150](#)

Provided by University of Queensland

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