

Eye Contact Seen from Autism: A Descriptive Qualitative Multicenter Study into Visions and Experiences with Regard to Eye Contact, A Comparison between Adults with and without Autism

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Abstract : Background: Eye contact in autism is said to be different than in all other populations worldwide. But despite decades of research on the nature of eye contact in autism, no definitive conclusions can be made. This while more understanding of this phenomenon could help overcome social problems that arise from atypical eye contact. One of the reasons for this lack of understanding could be that the visions and experiences of people with autism are barely taken into account. Aim: Aim is to compare visions and experiences related to eye contact in adults with and without autism in the Netherlands. Method: A descriptive qualitative multicenter study with the use of semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis. N=15 adults with autism who are getting treatment at different mental health institutions in the Netherlands (region of Zwolle, Rotterdam and Amsterdam) and N=15 adults without autism living all across the Netherlands. Adults with and without autism were matched based on characteristics: nationality, sex, age, educational degree and living situation. Results: Data analysis is almost complete. Preliminary conclusions that can be drawn are that adults with and without autism indeed have different opinions about what eye contact is and how it should be handled. Adults with and without autism also experience eye contact differently. The article is expected to be published early in 2025, after which the views and experiences of adults with and without autism can be explained in more detail. Implications for practice: Insight into the nature of eye contact in autism provides more guidance on how this can best be dealt with in the future. This makes it easier to work towards fewer problems in social interactions as a result of atypical eye contact in this population.

Keywords : autism, eye contact, experience, non-verbal

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