

January 2025

Adult Neurodivergence

Foundation Study

Impact on Careers

Neurokindness

Foreword



“Adult neurodivergence is in crisis”....

I made this bold statement even before conducting the study. My GP didn't disagree, in fact, I haven't heard anything to the contrary.

PREPARED BY

Nick Dean

PREPARED FOR

A world full of lovely neurodivergent people, many of which have supported me through burnout and demonstrated the power of peer of peer community.

TERMINOLOGY

I would like to add a caveat regarding the terminology used throughout the study. I have opted for commonly generalised terms to ensure the content speaks to as many people as possible.

I based the statement on my growing concerns:

- Understanding of neurodivergence is rapidly increasing among adults, largely due to the growing availability of accessible content.
- Increasingly, evidence is demonstrating the overlap and interactions of neurodivergence's are far from simple and often unrestricted to one single neurodivergence. Enhancing the complexity of barriers to receive effective assessments, diagnosis and intervention.
- Public and private health systems offer very little hope in meeting the needs of adults and children in the foreseeable future.
- The impact of neurodivergence on adult careers appears to be significant, and goes hand in hand with financial, relationship and mental health strains.

“About me and this study”

I have two GCSEs in Art and a BTEC (in Art), not much else. My year head once told me (and my mum) I'd never amount to anything and that I was “a bit thick.” It's no surprise that I have RSD which presents itself when I try to apply myself academically.

Yet here I am, the founder of multiple impact-driven businesses and a not-for-profit organisation in the talent and inclusion sectors.

I am diagnosed with co-morbid complex OCD, ADHD, and autism. I masked my neurodivergence throughout my career, a coping mechanism that ultimately led to burnout in 2024 – 20 years in the making.

There is a wealth of talent, creativity, giftedness, and energy within the neurodivergent community that is often overlooked and misunderstood. Every one of us has the right to show up authentically and build meaningful careers without resorting to masking and risking burnout.

With the right conditions, we can become top performers. We may just need to approach things differently – ways that empower us. I hope this study is a step towards identifying opportunities that will allow more neurodivergent adults to lead successful careers, with improved mental health and wellbeing.

Executive Summary



“Survey Objective”

The objective of the survey was to identify themes and opportunities that neurodivergence (diagnosed, undiagnosed, self diagnosed, or exploring) plays and impacts on adult careers. Additionally, gathering an understanding of the role community plays in supporting neurodivergent people.

The findings in this report highlight response summaries, observations and identified opportunities.

Please feel free to utilise and share these insights to support common goals. Acknowledgement of their source would be greatly appreciated.

“Opportunities for deeper research through 2025”....

Burnout, mental health and wellbeing.

Respondents report a profound impact on their mental health. Widely recognised as increasing the risk of burnout, addiction, and suicidal ideation. Without proper support, individuals often face heightened challenges in managing their wellbeing and navigating societal expectations.

Women

There is a significant increase in women exploring late stage diagnosis. Greater understanding is needed around early stage masking, as well as the interplay of family, work, and physical and mental health during midlife, particularly through the onset of perimenopause and its interaction with dopamine and oestrogen.

Marginalised groups

Almost half of the respondents belong to marginalised groups. There is a pressing need to explore the barriers to employment and healthcare, due to systemic biases and limited access to tailored support.

Co morbid, interactions.

Many respondents report a presence of co-morbid neurodivergence, further complicating diagnosis and intervention with direct consequences on career stability and progression, mental health and personal relationships.

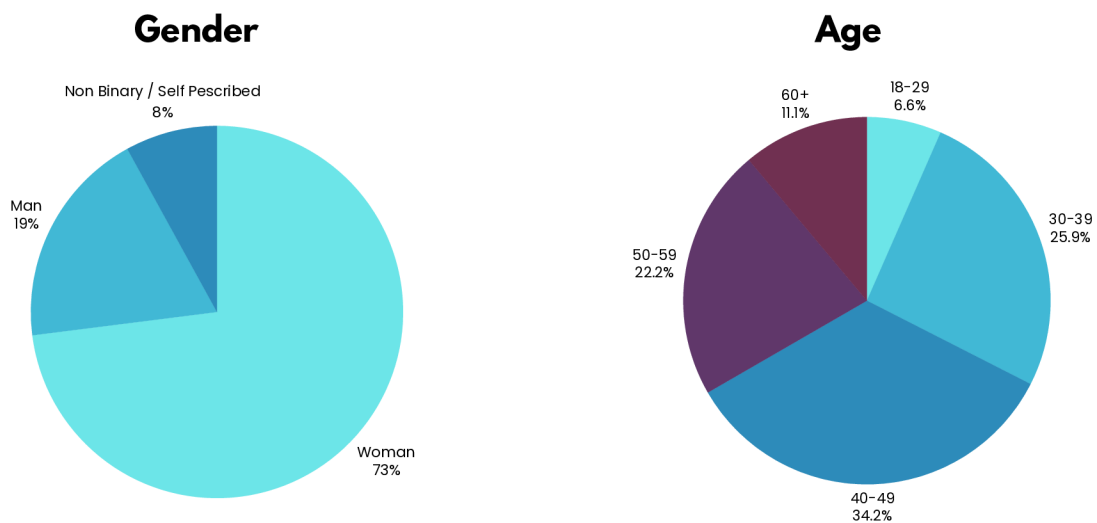
Future studies will be designed in consultation of those with lived experience, with an emphasis on identifying tangible opportunities to create change and advocate for widespread support.

Demographics



Who responded?

The survey received 311 completed responses. It was promoted on SubStack and LinkedIn, and open for a total of nine days.



Respondent gender balance

The survey revealed a clear skew towards greater participation from women. To understand the reasons behind this trend, I asked the community for commentary as to why they felt this pattern had emerged.

The most common theories, voiced by women, are:

- Women are statistically more likely than men to participate in online surveys.
- A general lack of societal support and research into women's healthcare drives motivation to participate in active studies and help create change.
- There is a notable increase in late stage diagnoses in women, often hidden through early life masking, before becoming apparent in mid life.
- There are increasing challenges associated with poor mental health , particularly in the context of late stage neurodivergence, family responsibilities, and career demands.
- The intersectionality between neurodivergence and biological and /or physical health is becoming more widely understood. As an example the link between peri-menopause, dopamine regulation, and oestrogen levels.

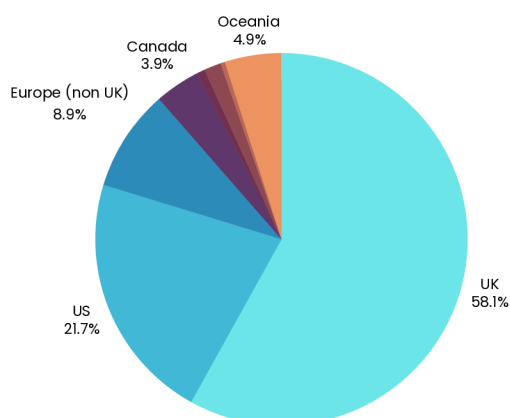
Opportunity 1: Conduct research to gather a deeper understanding of the impacts of neurodivergency in women.

Demographics (cont.)

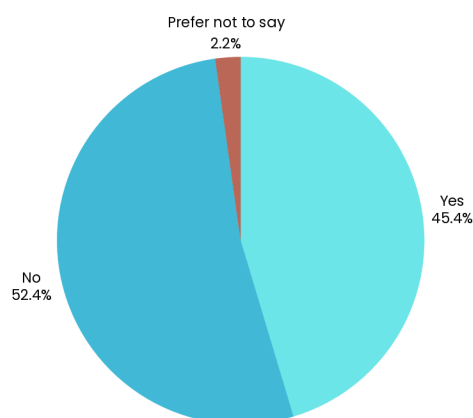


Who responded?

Geographical Location



Marginalised Groups



Marginalised group participation

Over 46% of respondents identify as sitting within marginalised groups.

Research indicates that neurodivergent individuals often face compounded challenges when they belong to marginalised groups, such as those defined by gender, race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status.

These intersections can amplify disparities in diagnosis, access to resources, and social inclusion.

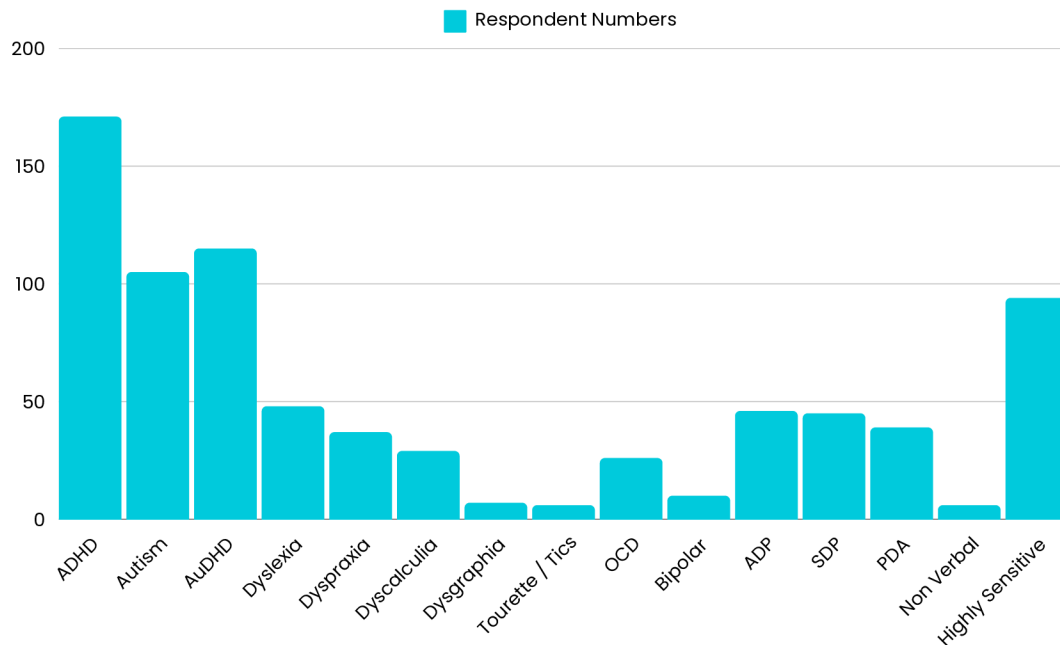
For example, women and non-binary individuals are frequently underdiagnosed due to gender biases in diagnostic criteria, while neurodivergent people from racial or ethnic minorities often encounter systemic barriers to healthcare and education. Socioeconomic status can further exacerbate these challenges, limiting access to support services and accommodations.

Opportunity 2: Conduct research to gather a deeper understanding of the impacts of neurodivergency across marginalised groups.

Neurodivergency



Current understanding of respondents neurodivergency



Interactions and co morbidity

From the options provided, 784 were selected from a total of 311 respondents.

It has taken me over 50 years to receive a co morbid diagnosis of ADHD, Autism and OCD. I am also aware of further characteristics that interact.

The response highlights that neurodivergent individuals, like all humans, are unique. For example, the characteristics of two people with ADHD may present differently when additional neurodivergence's are present concurrently. The high number of respondents with AuDHD supports this theory. Regardless of geography, the route to diagnosis is already complex and, for many, a long and potentially harmful process. The complexity of understanding the true extent of co-morbidity further complicates the situation. A comprehensive understanding of an individual's full neurodivergence profile is required to ensure appropriate intervention from the outset.

Additional conditions recorded include:

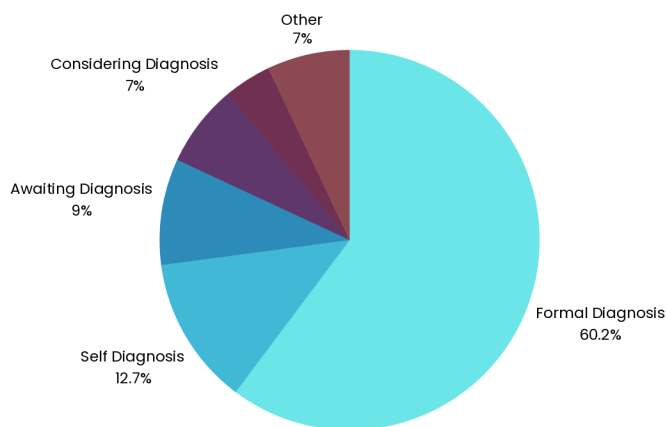
- CPTSD. PTSD. Gifted. Empath. Dysphoria. Hyper Empathy. Narcolepsy. Fibromyalgia. Chronic Depression. Oppositional Defiant. Broader Autistic Phenotype. Psychosocial Impairments. Aphantasia. Chronic Anxiety. Extreme Intelligence. Schizoid Personality Disorder. Misophonia. Persistent Drive for Internal Integrity.

Opportunity 3: Conduct research to gather a deeper understanding of the impacts of co-morbid and complex interactions in adult neurodivergence.

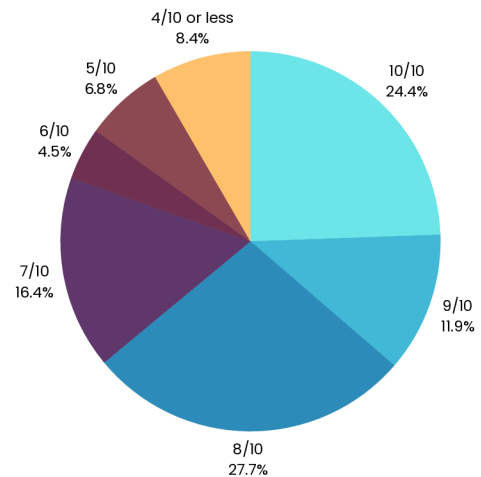
Diagnosis & Impact



Diagnosis Status



Negative Impact of ND on Mental Health



Negative impacts on mental health

The impact of neurodivergence on respondents' mental health is concerning.

- 64% of respondents rate the negative impact of neurodivergence on their mental health as 8/10 or higher.
- 92% of respondents rate the negative impact of neurodivergence on their mental health between 5/10 or higher.

Risk to neurodivergent adults

Numerous reports indicate that neurodivergent individuals face a higher risk of major depressive disorders, burnout, addiction and suicidal ideation.

It is widely recognised that mental health services are struggling to meet increasing demand. In part a reflection of the community's increasing self awareness and understanding of their needs. However, the lack of adequate resources and support continues to have a detrimental effect on individuals mental health.

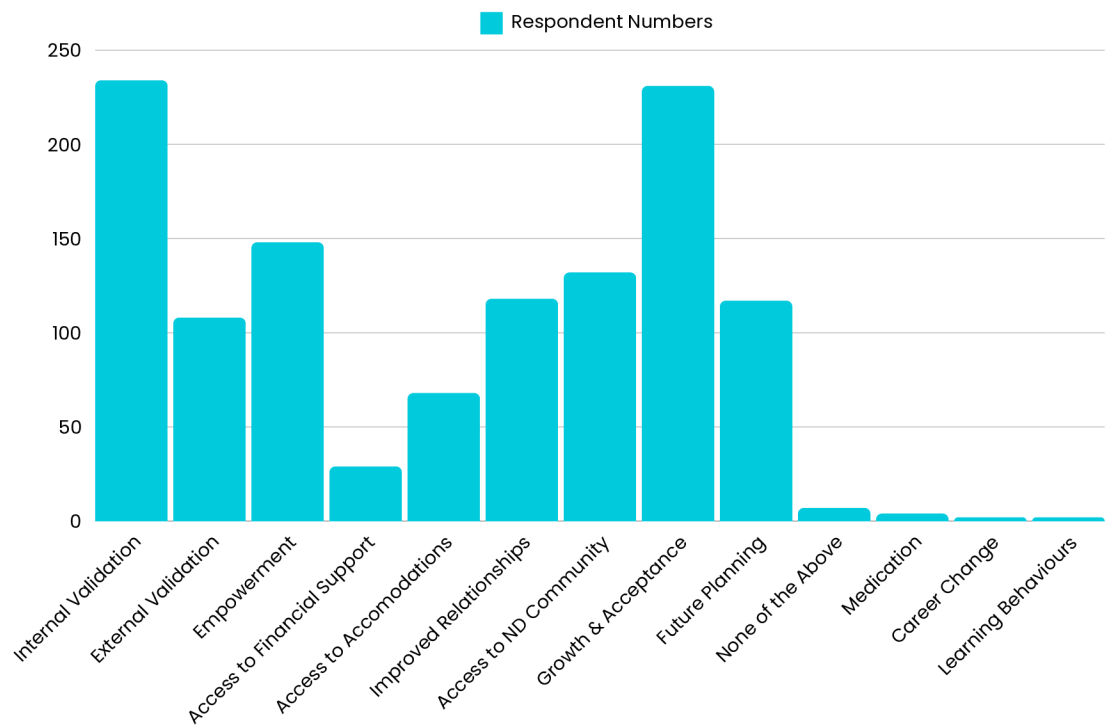
The demise and strain of mental health will often directly impact job security, career advancement and financial security. A vicious cycle is created without intervention.

Opportunity 4: Conduct research to gather a deeper understanding of the impacts of mental health, burnout and wellbeing in late stage adult neurodivergence.

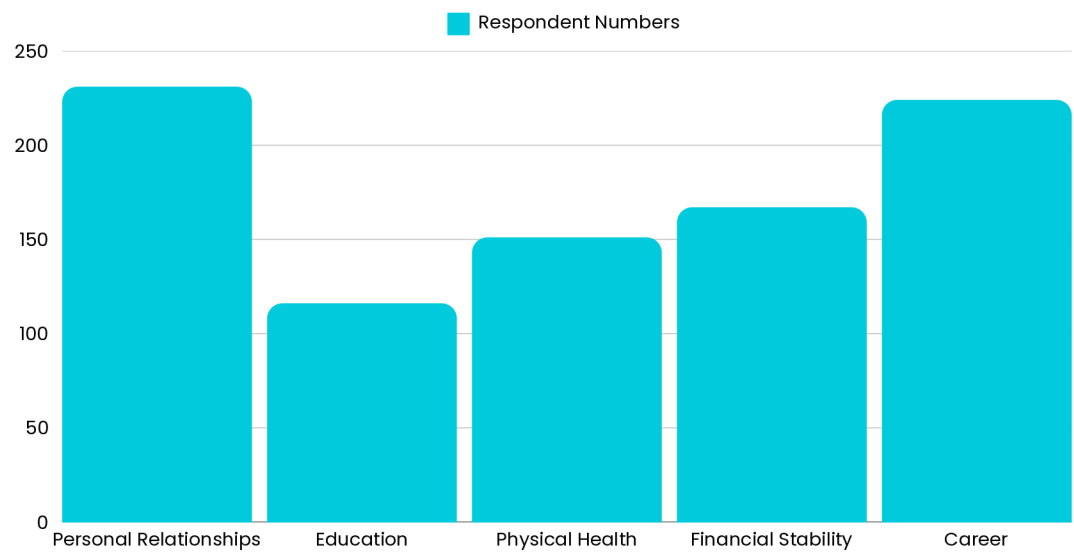
Diagnosis & Impact



Desired outcomes of diagnosis



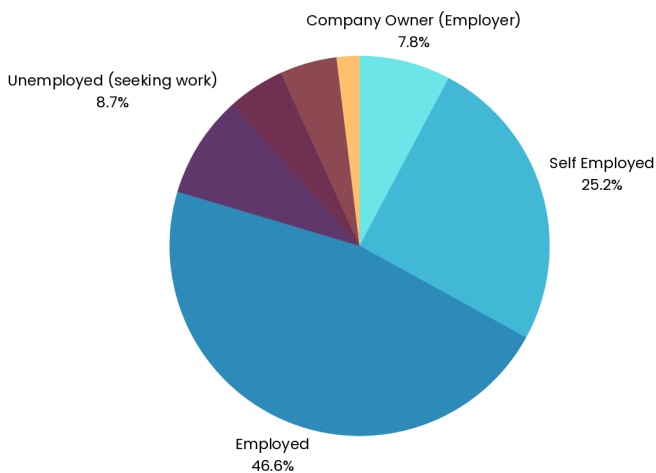
Significant impacts neurodivergency brings to individuals



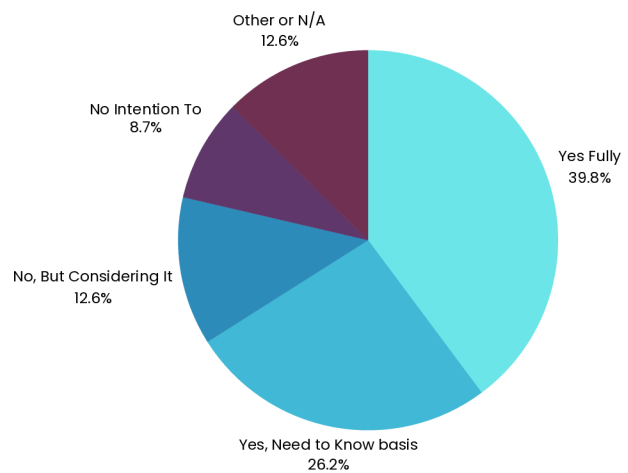
Careers & employment



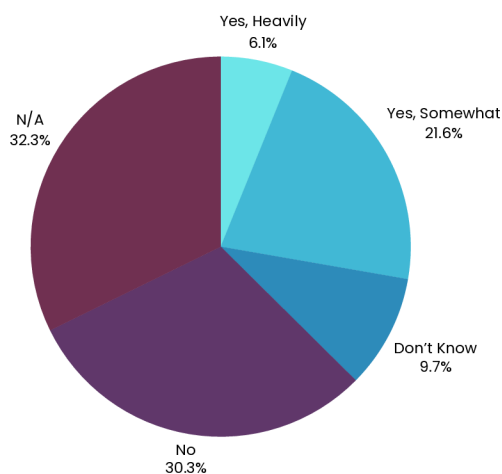
Employment Status



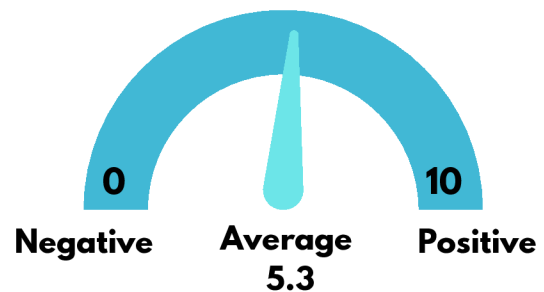
Employer Disclosure



Employer Investment



Impact of disclosure



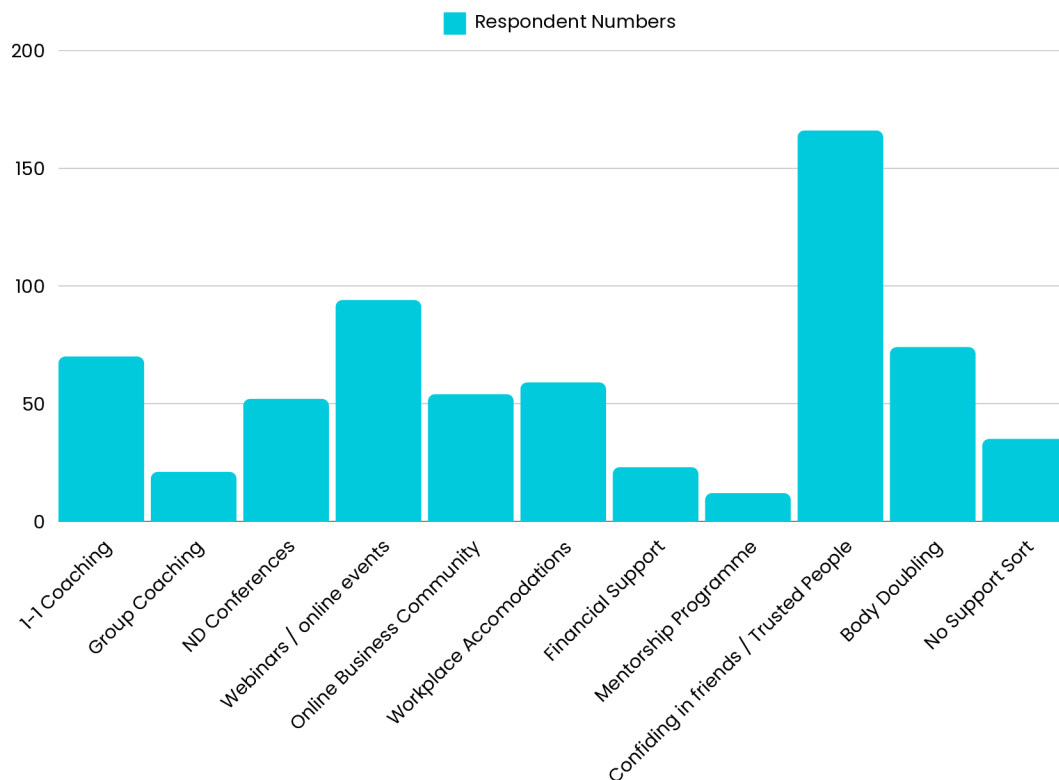
Observations

- 34% of respondents are either business owners or self employed, reflecting a need for talented individuals to move away from traditional employment. Taking the UK as a barometer, the office for national statistics suggest that the total number of self employed people in the UK sits at 13%.
- Fewer than 40% of employees have fully disclosed their neurodivergence to their employers.
- Only 6.1% of respondents believe their employer has made significant investments in neurodivergent inclusion.
- Among those who have disclosed, the average sentiment is fairly neutral as to whether disclosure has positively impacted their career.

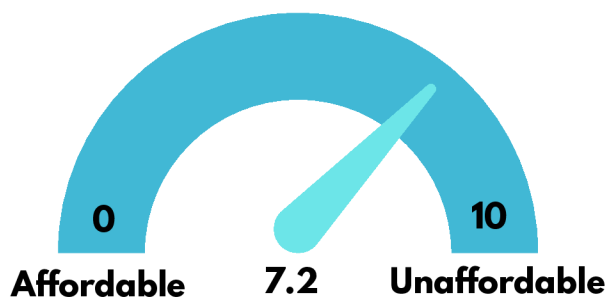
Support & Resources



Resources accessed to support neurodivergent careers



The barrier of finance to access support



It is evident that finance is a significant barrier to accessing meaningful support.

Common 'effective' resources

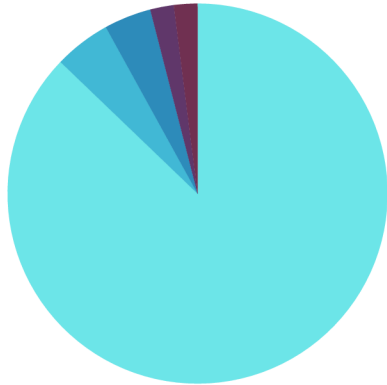
Body doubling, self help books, coaching, therapy, workplace accomodations, CBT, peer to peer support, community groups, self understanding, medication, social media, niche groups, access to financial support.

Burnout



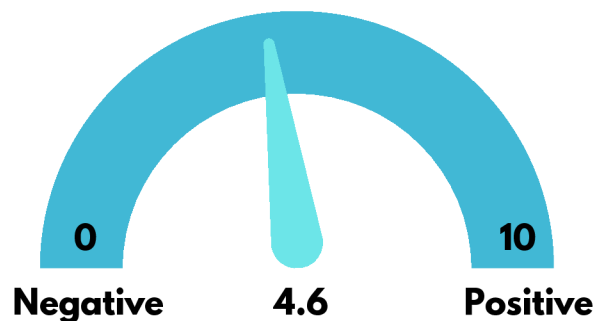
Burnout and impact on career

Exp. Burnout, No Affect on Career
4.8%



Exp. Burnout, Affected Career
87.2%

The overall impact of neurodivergence on careers



87.2% of respondents have experienced burnout that has directly impacted their career.

Burnout among neurodivergent people has significant personal, professional, and societal impacts.

Burnout causes mental and physical exhaustion, reduced self esteem, and heightened stress. Many experience long term health issues due to the strain of masking traits in environments not designed for their needs.

For employers, this results in lost talent, lower morale, and increased recruitment costs. Without proper support, organisations miss out on the strengths neurodivergent employees bring.

Societally, the consequences include increased healthcare costs, unemployment, and barriers to inclusion, preventing society from benefiting fully from neurodivergent contributions.

This alarming statistic highlights the urgent need for intervention.

Opportunity 4: Conduct research to gather a deeper understanding of the impacts of mental health, burnout and wellbeing in late stage adult neurodivergence.

Community & gratitude



“A strong community builds strong people”....

Having experienced burnout in November 2024, I was uncertain about what lay ahead. However, through publishing my journal, *The Neurokindness Club*, on Substack, I found myself immersed in a peer to peer community. This community, comprised primarily of strangers from around the world, made me ‘feel seen’, supported and gave me insight that the crisis felt globally.

The value exchange was simple: shared common ground through lived experiences and a genuine desire to support one another, nothing more, nothing less.

Such communities offer an opportunity to create meaningful peer-to-peer support systems from within. And an opportunity to build data-informed advocacy programmes, that work constructively to address barriers and improve access to resources tailored to the unique needs of different communities.

I am actively consulting and working towards the development of a peer to peer global community solution with the objective of bridging many of the issues highlighted in this report. Importantly, this has to be created as a not for profit model, putting impetus and power at the heart of the community to fuel its own success and reap the benefits.

This will run concurrently with deep research programmes identified, driving ever growing solutions and improvements.

“Thank you”...

Endless gratitude to every single person who has helped me get to this point. Whether it has been on Substack, in person, LinkedIn, friends, strangers, readers, contributors to this study, the people in the shadows who are navigating their own journey. So, so many people who care about the neurodivergent community.

“Connect”...

www.neurokindness.com

[Join me on Substack](#)

[Connect with me on LinkedIn](#)

email me nick@neurokindness.com