

FULL EDITION

MARCH 2025

"1,165 VOICES"

ADULT NEURODIVERGENCE.

**MENTAL HEALTH,
WELLBEING & BURNOUT**

Neurokindness

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FOREWORD



PREPARED BY

[Nick Dean](#)

DESIGNED BY

[Tiff Cameron](#)

PREPARED FOR

Late stage neurodivergent adults.

And for those with power and influence to drive and support change.

TERMINOLOGY

The terminology used throughout the study uses commonly generalised terms to ensure the content speaks to as many people as possible.

THIS IS NOT JUST A STUDY

In February 2025, I asked LinkedIn and Substack to help find 35 late stage neurodivergent adults willing to join the 265 who had shared personal experiences of challenges in the areas of mental health, wellbeing, and burnout.

These are the experiences that most feel ashamed or afraid to talk about: mental health struggles, self-harm, unhealthy coping mechanisms, and suicidal ideation. This is not the kind of information you hand over lightly to a stranger.

Three days later, over 1,000 adults had willingly gifted me their voices and experiences.

What began as a small study has quickly evolved into a narrative that underscores the reality that inadequate access to diagnosis and intervention is not only a challenge for adults whose neurodiversity is identified late, but also a socioeconomic issue on a global scale, ultimately impacting the whole of society.

This is not just a study, this is '1,165 voices'.

ABOUT ME

In 2024, I was fully diagnosed with comorbid complex OCD, ADHD, and autism. It's a long story of years of masking, poor mental health since childhood, suicidal ideation, self-harm, and plenty of unhealthy coping mechanisms, until ultimately burnout struck.

A full diagnosis has made sense of everything.

"If you had known this much sooner, your life may have been very different" – My assessment Psychiatrist.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



SURVEY OBJECTIVE

The survey aimed to gather the lived experiences of late-stage neurodivergent adults to offer a comprehensive understanding of the mental health challenges and burnout effects they face.

The responses highlight significant socioeconomic risks associated with not adequately supporting a population that includes career professionals and full-time employees, self-employed individuals and business owners, part-time workers, underemployed people, and those unable to work.

1,165 VOICES

The data in this report is substantiated through an overwhelming amount of commentary, voluntarily provided, from respondents. If possible, please take the time to read the this study in its entirety and allow each person's voice to be heard.



*We are allowed to be curious about ourselves & **conduct 'research' into being human**, whatever the flavour or angle we want to use as a lens to know who we are. Official academic studies have their rightful place, but so does your unofficial study.*

GOLDEN IMP NOTORIOUS | SUBSTACK



Please note this report shares experiences of harm, suicidal ideation and dependency.

DEMOGRAPHICS



WHO RESPONDED?

At the time of writing, the survey had received 1,165 completed responses.



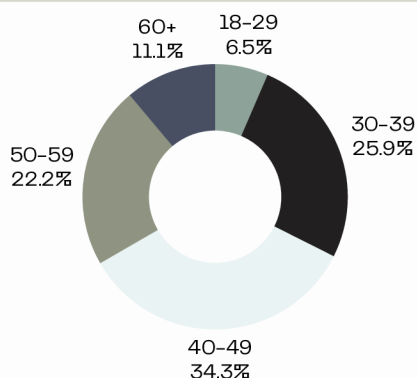
AGE GROUP
34%
40-49



MARGINALISED
41%
"YES"



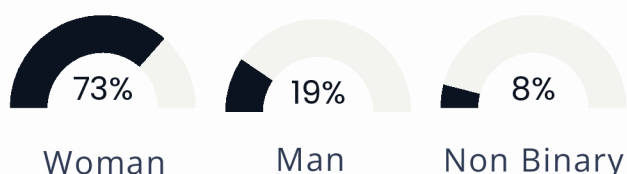
GENDER
73%
FEMALE



AGE GROUPS

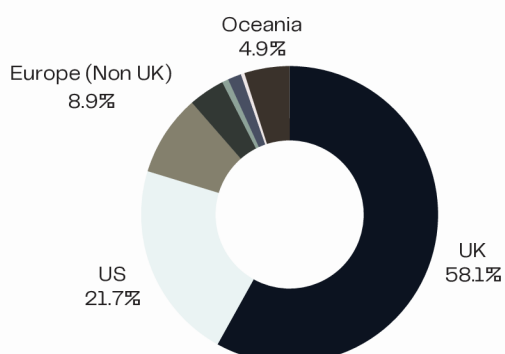
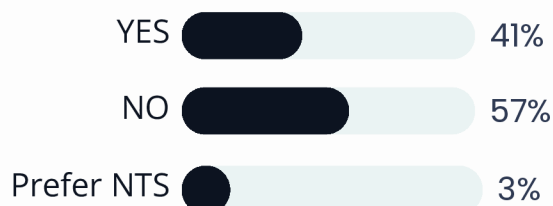
AGE 18-29	7%	AGE 50-59	22%
AGE 30-39	26%	AGE 60+	11%
AGE 40-49	34%		

GENDER



MARGINALISED GROUPS

"Do you belong to any other marginalised groups?"



GEOGRAPHIC LOCATION

UK	58%	Canada	4%
USA	22%	South America	1%
Europe (Non UK)	9%	Asia	2%
Africa	0%	Oceania	5%

VOICES:

GENDER AND MARGINALISATION

PART ONE

Add **intersectionality** as a queer disabled person of colour and you have so many barriers to overcome it often feels impossible ... **PMDD** is a lot more prevalent in neurodiverse people ... I'm a single mom of a special needs teen (AuDHD) **unable to work** and lost my social security. I feel that the extra stress of menopause on top of my late diagnosis is too much ... **Gender equality** is a factor that is critical for women with ADHD ... **Girls and women** hide it well. Screening needs to be tailored to females because the typical questions don't closely apply and can therefore be missed ... **ND motherhood** struggle is a topic that is rarely addressed ... There is more to be done on the impact of **perimenopause** symptoms on ADHD ... I didn't know I had ADHD until after I **became a mom** to a child who was diagnosed as AuDHD. I was **burnt out** from a corporate job and had recently been laid off, which compounded my burn out ... I don't think there is enough awareness about burnout in **women**. I feel like a lot of my close friends have **similar experiences** to me a lot of them have adhd or are self diagnosed | I feel that I used to be able to cope with things much better. Since **menopause** and the death of my mother I feel that I struggle to cope with anything ... I also **grieve** because I now realize that my mother very likely had ADHD and she struggled with so much shame, **masked so heavily**, got pregnant as a teen and was forced to give the baby up - her life could have been so different as well ... All of the **stigma** around adult women going through late diagnosis has impacted my **self esteem** ... I am a mother of a 3 year old, with a massive mortgage and feel completely **at a loss**. I just want to quit everything but I can't. So I just cry a lot ... I think there is a link between **hormonal changes** and the risk of adhd burnout ... I think there needs to be **further research** in how burnout affects women vs men ... I wish I'd known adhd was what i had since my teens instead of being left to think it was me being a creative, or **hormonal** or an over sensitive perfectionist or pregnant or **menopausal**. I've been exhausted for 49 years ... I would say that my **hormones** have a significant impact on my mental health ... I've on occasion been told my neurodivergence is the reason for my **gender identity** so feel there is a stigma around that from both sides ... I'm of a **demographic** (male, over 50) where there is still very clearly a stigma and a lack of understanding around neurodivergance and the associated effects means it can still feel very isolating ... As a woman we are generally **high masking**. Education when I was a girl around ADHD didn't exist. I have to fight my **feelings of failure**, not being enough daily. And it's exhausting ... Menopause has heightened my ADHD symptoms to the point I want to walk away from work forever ... **Motherhood** is hugely affected and parenting ND children even more so ... My experience with burnout has been **severely impacted** by hormonal changes as a woman experiencing menopause. And the research is almost nonexistent on how to navigate this ... **My industry** is traditionally male, so as a woman I mask for lots of reasons. **Perfectionism** is seen as a benefit and drinking is the norm, so it is easy to fall into damaging behaviours trying to prove myself My ND became apparent during **menopause** when other **symptoms** stopped me from masking and so it is also something to be mindful of when understanding ND in **women** during life stages.

VOICES:

GENDER AND MARGINALISATION

PART TWO

Part of the group of women that got aware of my ADHD during menopause, due to failing **hormones**. From being a "**superperson**" at work who could deliver a full intranet in six weeks, I went to hardly being able to open my e-mail ... People often forget what neurodivergence is like for deeply **intersectional** marginalized groups. Assessments center white dominance. **White males**. It makes everything worse for those not of the dominant group ... **Autistic perimenopause** was insidious and caused protracted burnout, self-care and **functioning regressions**, and a drastic decline in my mental health. It has been the most impactful event of my life to derail my mental health, aside from **undiagnosed PMDD**, rage during pregnancies, ectopic pregnancy etc. **Very little** so far is known about this phenomenon, but it affects so many people ... **At my age** it's been very hard to know whether it's mental health, **perimenopausal**, ADHD, general burnout....or all of them! ... The ND movement is white washed and I find the community itself harmful and **excludes** people of colour further causing harm and marginalising us more ... The **smash up** that is menopause, cancer and late diagnosed neurospiciness cannot be a rare one. In the old days the solution as to whip out our **wombs** and lock us up as hysterics. At least we seem to have moved on from there ... There is zero support for ND working mothers. Support groups isn't enough, there needs to be real, tangible support ... Research into **women** is needed and an awareness that some of us are **differently abled** and not disabled ... If you're a woman alone under 65, good luck getting much help or support through the **public health** system or community groups, even once you are **officially diagnosed** ... Because women can present so differently, it can be very hard to get taken seriously and get diagnosed. ... Very difficult as a **man** to share any issues as implication is often you are a threat not someone who is hurting ... When you're a **parent**, you can't just take a break from parenting, even if you do take time off work. **Your kids** still want to play with you, even if you're **depressed**, and they still need help getting ready for the day and going to school. It's relentless ... Understanding those of us who are neurodivergent without **intellectual disabilities** is limited, it's even worse if you are a woman. **Female hormones** aren't understood and how they contribute to often hormonal induced mental health issues ... **Perimenopause** has revealed neurodivergence, I never **considered** myself to have ADHD but now it all makes sense! ... My neurodivergence is deeply intertwined with **being black**, fat, queer, gender expansive and low income ... Worse post menopause, hormonal changes. And with Age as some **co morbid** physical conditions affected my energy, ability of exercise which really helps me with energy, mood, motivation & social connection ... **It's exhausting** and has been multiplied (I think) by perimenopause ... **It's hell**. Single mom, working but utterly on my knees through trauma, depression, anxiety.

VOICES:

WOMEN & INTERSECTIONALITY



“ **Autistic perimenopause was insidious and caused protracted burnout**, self-care and functioning regressions, and a drastic decline in my mental health. It has been the most impactful event of my life to derail my mental health, aside from undiagnosed PMDD, rage during pregnancies, ectopic pregnancy etc. Very little so far is known about this phenomenon, but it affects so many people. It seems that the more responsibility we have (mortgage, kids, marriage), the less able we are to cope with it all. ”

“ There needs to be a more holistic assessment of the person beyond the ADHD or other neurodivergence. People and professionals are unwilling to contemplate the multiple dimensions to us and how that affects our experiences, **be that race, gender, orientation, multiple disabilities etc.** If more people understood this, then the supportive mechanisms would actually meet our needs rather than that of the lowest common denominator or of the stereotype. ”

“ I would say that my hormones have a significant impact on my mental health so it's important to mention here. I've experienced burnout a few times I think, but also regularly experience sensory overwhelm - it feels like a mini trauma each time (even just from a hectic school drop off / pick up). **I can come out feeling like I'd almost been hit by a car** - my adrenaline / fight or flight kicks in, everything ramps up and then I feel exhausted. And takes me time to regulate afterwards. ”

“ Adrenaline fuels my life all day, every day. It takes a huge toll mentally and physically. I cannot cope anymore. **But I am a mother of a 3 year old, with a massive mortgage and feel completely at a loss.** I just want to quit everything but I can't. So I just cry a lot and my partner tries to help as best as he can. I don't know what to do. ”

MENTAL HEALTH & NEURODIVERGENCE

“ I don't think that neurodiversity itself causes burnout. **I think the world we have to live in** as a neurodivergent person causes the burnout ”



HIGHEST
RESPONDENT
661
ADHD



SECOND HIGHEST
RESPONDENT
411
AUDHD



THIRD HIGHEST
RESPONDENT
359
AUTISM

ON BALANCE, HOW DO YOU FEEL YOUR NEURODIVERGENCE IMPACTS YOUR MENTAL HEALTH?



VERY
POSITIVE
1%



POSITIVE
3%



NEUTRAL
28%



NEGATIVE
52%



VERY
NEGATIVELY
15%

PRIMARY RESPONDER NEUROTYPES

● ADHD	57%	● SPD	12%
○ AUDHD	35%	● DYSLEXIA	12%
○ AUTISM	31%	○ PDA	9%
○ HSP	22%	● DYSCALCULIA	9%
● OCD	13%	● DYSPRAXIA	8%
○ APD	12%	○ BIPOLAR	4%

VOICES:

ABLEISM

"ABLEISM IS THE CAUSE OF MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES FOR NEURODIVERGENT PEOPLE."

This statement was made in response to the phrasing of the question: 'On balance, how do you feel your neurodivergence impacts your mental health?'

I think internal ableism is also a big factor, especially in us **late diagnosed NDs who have been socialised to try and keep up with neurotypical standards our entire lives.** The inner critic is constantly telling us we're not trying hard enough. Pair that with ableism from others, workplaces that don't meet our needs, lack of access to support and constant attacks in the media and you've got a recipe for long-term, ingrained mental health issues.

Societal expectations can impact neurodivergent mental health, **but so can self-perception, co-occurring differences, and access to the right support.**

When I was experiencing the recurring stress / anxiety **I had no idea about neurodivergence,** therefore had no idea I was trying to fit in. **I had no concept that there was another explanation** or that others weren't experiencing similar challenges. I just thought it was how things are for me. So, while I can now look back and understand how it all fits together, **at no point along the way did I feel it was because I was trying to fit in or comply.**

We will never identify a single cause for mental health problems, because within one individual there will likely be multiple causes, so extrapolating that over any community there are bound to be multiple inter-related causes. Not to forget the physiological causes that can impact mental health too.

Internalized ableism is real. **There's also cultural ableism** that I experience which is a unique form of how cultures particularly and specifically demonstrate ableism. **It's both fascinating and horrifying** at the same time.

NEURODIVERGENCE & MENTAL HEALTH



“The late diagnosis has been great, to know that I am not broken, or that the rest of the world is not broken too. I am still learning myself, and recognizing what historical situations or experiences may have been due to my AuDHD instead of just my own inadequacies.”



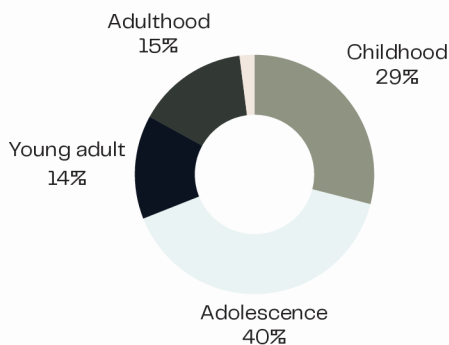
BECAME
AWARE
29%
CHILDHOOD



AFFECTS
RELATIONSHIPS
53%
OFTEN



FEELING
UNDERSTOOD
44%
OCCASIONALLY



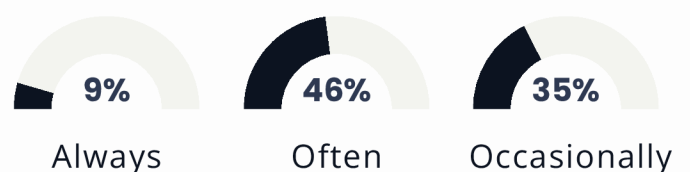
THE AGE WE BECAME AWARE

Childhood	29%	Adulthood	15%
Adolescence	40%	Don't Recall	2%
Young Adult	14%		

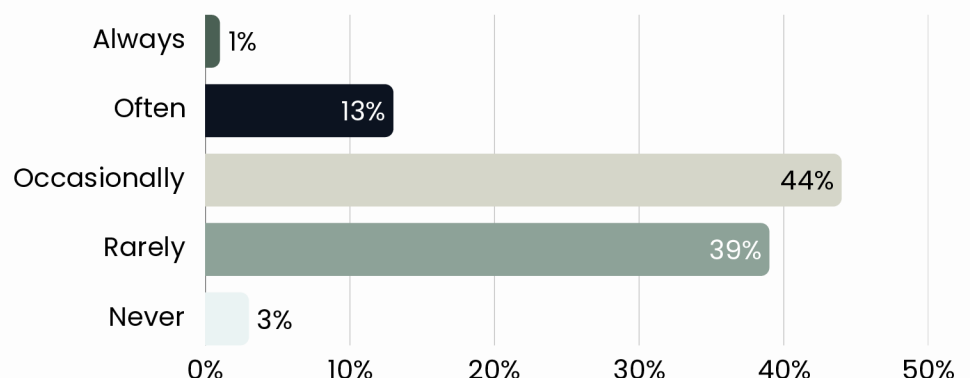
HOW OFTEN ND AFFECTS OUR RELATIONSHIPS



AVOIDING SOCIAL SITUATIONS



EMOTIONS ARE UNDERSTOOD AND VALIDATED



MENTAL HEALTH & UNHEALTHY COPING



“No other solutions were offered. I was very close to suicide for over 12 months, and, without my high levels of education, a good amount of money saved up to live off of and one really good friend, I think the system would have let me die and chalked it up to BPD.”



EXPERIENCE
OF SELF HARM
50%

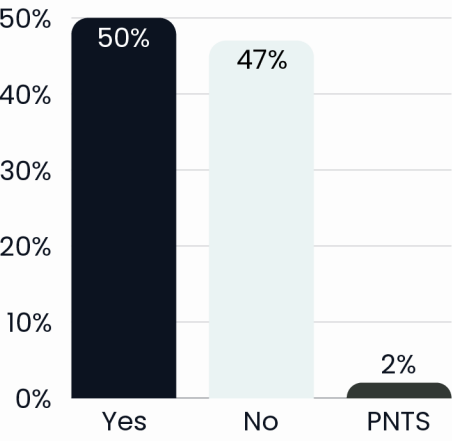


MENTAL HEALTH
DIAGNOSIS
72%

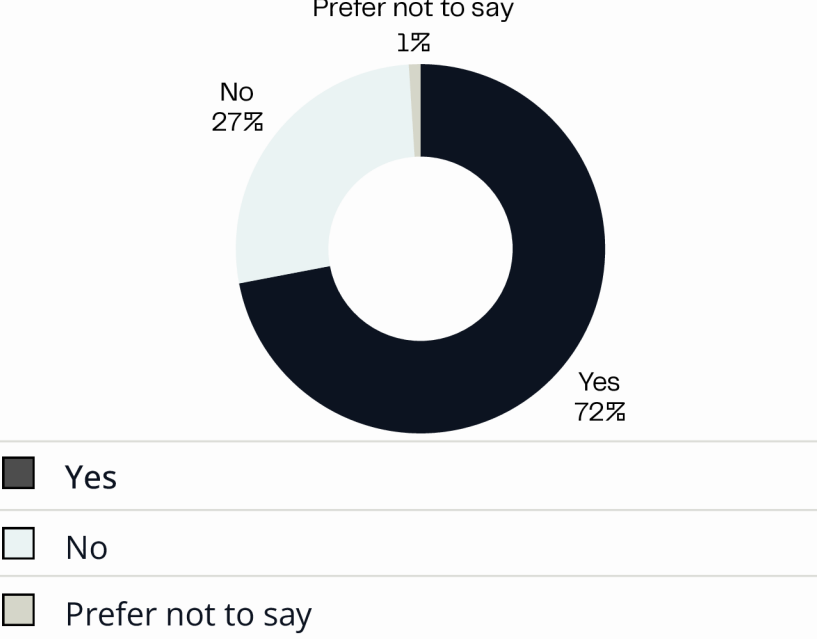


SUICIDAL
IDEATION
68%

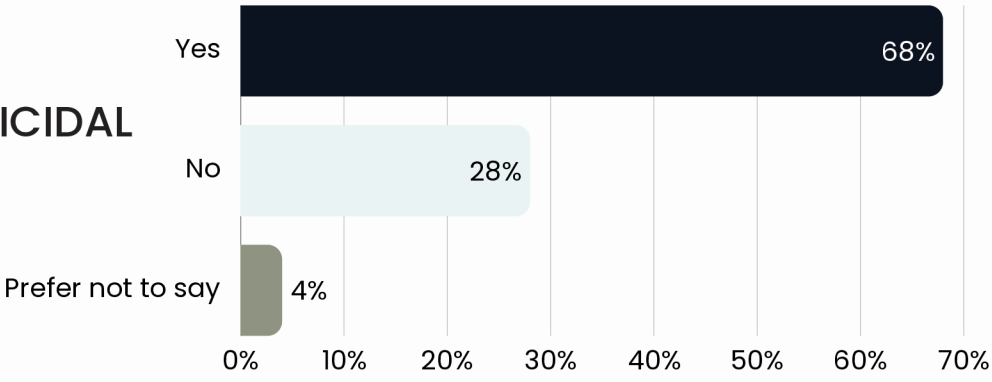
EXPERIENCE OF SELF HARM



MENTAL HEALTH DIAGNOSIS



EXPERIENCE OF SUICIDAL IDEATION



VOICES: DIAGNOSIS

Accelerating **diagnosis** would show that there are more ND than NT people out there 🗨️ A lot of my early answers were after I knew how to manage **anxiety** and got my diagnosis 🗨️ Being undiagnosed for so long means that now I'm a product of a lifetime of **misunderstandings** and miscommunications 🗨️ I **dropped out** of university, lost jobs and friends because I didn't know what the cause was or how to handle it. Earlier diagnosis and more **understanding** in the general public would have helped massively 🗨️ I attempted **suicide** several times in my early 30's (in hindsight burnout was a contributing factor) and suffered a complete breakdown late in 2022 which led me to call the crisis team, and eventually to a diagnosis of cPTSD, which prompted me to seek formal diagnosis for ASD as I became aware of how many traits can overlap 🗨️ Being **misdiagnosed** with 'anxiety and depression' has led to physical and **psychological damage** including addiction to antidepressant. I'm really angry and frustrated by the lack of attention to my MH problems which may have been **improved** with correct diagnosis 🗨️ I've spent my whole adult life being treated for **depression** and anxiety. ASD diagnosis finally came 6 months ago at 54 🗨️ For me, working in the disability sector, being able to be open about my diagnosis, and being in a **high-trust environment** has helped me a lot 🗨️ The **late diagnosis** has been great, to know that I am not broken, or that the rest of the world is **not broken** too. I am still learning myself, and recognising what historical situations or **experiences** may have been due to my AuDHD instead of just my own inadequacies 🗨️ I'm lucky to have savings that I've spent on **therapy**, but I appreciate that's a huge privilege, and doesn't replace medication and official diagnosis etc 🗨️ It's hard to articulate the **sadness** associated with nearly 50 years of feeling '**wrong**' before diagnosis explained it to me and switched the light on. Now I can be a little kinder to myself 🗨️ There needs to be **quicker diagnosis** for adults and support groups for **women of colour** (south Asian women) this group lacks support and there is a huge stigma 🗨️ There's a particular cruelty in **struggling** for a lot of your life and not knowing why, getting a later in life diagnosis, asking for **help**, and being told there's little support available for adults 🗨️ My diagnosis came later in life (2 years ago) when I was referred to **psychiatrist** because severely depressed and suicidal. Had a **breakdown** 6 years earlier which I now realise was the start of **perimenopause** and more likely burnout as felt such a failure as had been juggling two roles and working excess hours. I also have dyslexia and dyscalculia 🗨️ My **major burnout** was a few years ago and before my diagnosis - I have no words to describe how **bleak and destructive** it was - thankfully with the help of **peer support**, self education and a fantastic therapist I am in a much better place than I have been for decades 🗨️ My mental health has been a **rollercoaster**. Getting diagnosed was a major **step forwards**, even though it only came after I had burned out so thoroughly that I didn't know if I would ever recover 🗨️ **TikTok** self diagnosis is taking the shine off people who genuinely were so confused of what their problems were and found out the **long way** round, even baffled when told they had adhd. The self diagnosis 'trends' has normalised the condition and **invalidates** people who are diagnosed and struggling 🗨️ I feel like a lot of my mental health issues could have been **less harsh**, if only I'd been diagnosed **earlier**. Looking back, it would've made life so much easier if I'd known about this and how to **live with** it, cope with it, and get support far far earlier in my life 🗨️ I haven't even told my family about my diagnosis yet because it's just **too much** to process on top of everything going on 🗨️ **Self diagnosis** is a double edged sword - I feel better knowing I'm not just a **lazy** piece of shit, but also grieve that this is not something that has a cure 🗨️ **Undiagnosed ND**, is the problem for me, which has meant over the years the lack of understanding of myself and questioning why I am, how I am, has meant a **very serious** decline in my ability to cope 🗨️ Until diagnosis (**private**, in my case), everything (all mental and physical health issues correlated with being neurodivergent) just gets blamed on "**depression**" and "anxiety", even though they're secondary to underlying neurodivergent conditions. 🗨️ I really **dislike** self diagnosing, I think it's so dangerous. If you **misdiagnose** yourself you could end up more 'lost' in your mind. But appreciate we haven't got the infrastructure for formal diagnoses 🗨️ I was **diagnosed** at the same time my 5 year old son. **I was 46**. It made things make a lot more sense in retrospect 🗨️ I am so desperate for official **validation** and to try ADHD medication to see if I can improve my quality of life 🗨️ Being undiagnosed for so long means that now I'm a product of a lifetime of **misunderstandings** and **miscommunications**.

UNHEALTHY COPING MECHANISMS



“I feel that ND individuals are more keenly aware of and impacted by the systemic failings of our current societal model and **as a result more in need of escapism to numb themselves** to what is so glaringly obviously wrong but everyone else seems oblivious to.”



UNDER/OVER EATING
76%



OVER WORK & PERFECTIONISM
75%



ALCOHOL ABUSE
49%

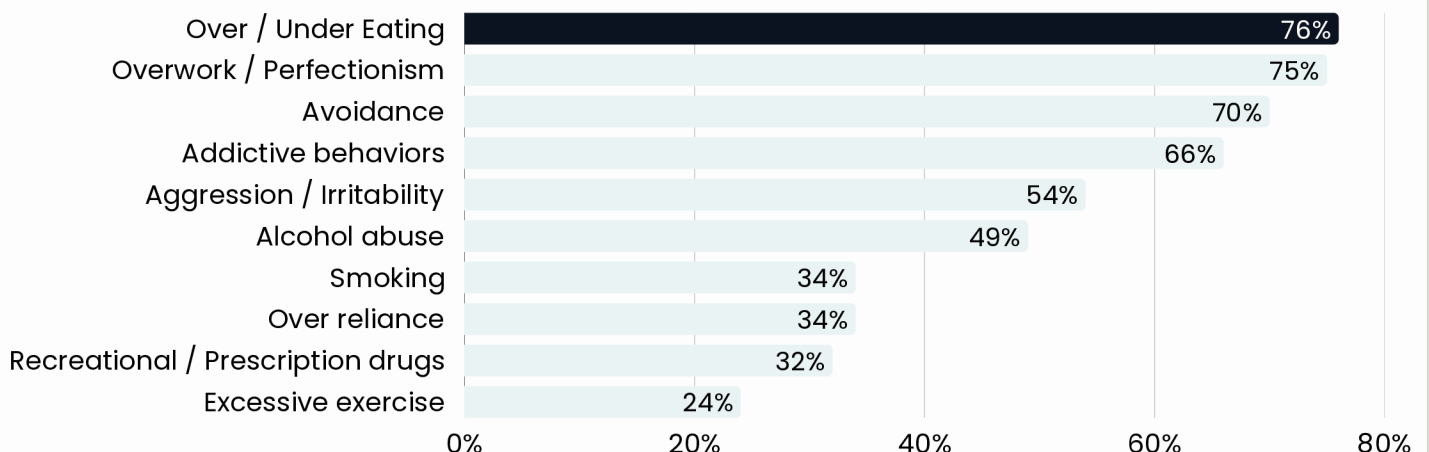
PRIMARY COPING MECHANISMS

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ Addictive behaviours | ☒ Over / Under Eating |
| ☐ Aggression / Irritability | ☐ Over reliance |
| ☐ Alcohol abuse | ☐ Overwork / Perfectionism |
| ☐ Avoidance | ☐ Recreational / Prescription Drugs |
| ☐ Excessive exercise | ☐ Smoking |

ENGAGED IN UNHEALTHY COPING MECHANISMS



PERCENTAGE OF COPING MECHANISMS



VOICES:

UNHEALTHY COPING & IDEATION

Though I have never felt suicidal I have had **strong urges** that if I were somewhere else and out of my family's life they'd be better off. No desire to commit suicide. Just to leave ... **Addictions/neuroses** come from **trauma**. But it's linked to neurodivergence because of a lack of understanding how to fit oneself into society's daily life is often repeatedly traumatic ... I was very close to **suicide** for over 12 months , and, without my high levels of **education**, a good amount of money saved up to live off of and one really good friend, I think the system would have **let me die** and chalked it up to BPD ... I'm medicated, I've recognized that I used drugs and alcohol as **coping behaviors** and replaced them with healthier ones. I'm more knowledgeable, and have **supports** in place and am able to adjust before I get to a place that I can no longer **function**. It's not perfect, but I am afraid to know where'd I'd be without this understanding and awareness. Especially after kids and perimenopause ... I have felt **suicidal** throughout my adult life (I'm now 31). I have extremely **high expectations** of myself, and yet burnout is leading me into a **constant cycle** of not being able to achieve my goals ... I have had many incidents of **suicidal ideation**, and asked for help many times. I've only recently realised that I have probably been living with ADHD all my life ... **Dissociation**, or lack of feeling anything at all, is the coping mechanism that is most damaging for me ... I quit drinking **alcohol** 2 years ago after a horrible hangover (lasting a month) and I've never looked back. I didn't know it back in the day but weed, **drugs and alcohol** made things much worse ... I consider **suicide** multiple times a day, every day ... It's taken me 50 years to begin to understand myself, and **lucky** I'm still here (3 suicide attempts in my early 30's) ... With OCD comes **perfectionism** and an unwillingness to give in. I always keep going to give my best and set myself **unrealistic demands** and goals to prove that I can do everything. Living like this is utterly exhausting and I need to be **kinder** to myself and less of a perfectionist, worrier and routine orientated in order to live a more fulfilling life and stop the **exhaustion** ... I tend to over do it (become hyper focussed, over organise, seek perfection etc) but I also only do this with things I'm **passionate** about, so I guess it has made me more successful in my field ... I've come close to **suicide**, it's heavily taken its toll on my marriage in the past, I don't have any **close friends**. I'm exceptionally talented at what I do, but it's hard to enjoy that because **the strain** from external forces just ruins the day to day which in turn impacts everything else ... I believe my brother who died by **suicide** was ND and I myself have experience **suicidal ideation** many times and attempted this in my teens, however I believe more as coping or impulse to a **fight or flight** response and feeling powerless ... Too many burnouts. Too much **wasted potential**. Too many suicides ... It's hard to explain how it feels but I have spent my entire life wondering why I am **not "normal"** and until a few years ago, sincerely held the belief I would die by **suicide** by the age of 30. I regret the circumstances that led to my most recent burnout, which I think was a culmination of unacknowledged neurodiverse-ness and an incredibly **high pressure** work environment ... **My friend** who had ADHD took her own life three weeks ago and i am totally devastated. She was productive and **overwhelmed** at work ... Self care went out the window, I struggled to look after my children, **I didn't eat**, couldn't sleep, my mind was so loud replaying the whole situation, and I did not want to live anymore. The only thing that kept me here was **my children** ... I am going through burnout **right now** and I genuinely don't see how it could get better. I'm not coping with work and I am becoming more reliant than I have been in a while on my **unhealthy coping** mechanisms, which makes me want to **no longer** be here.

MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT



“

Until diagnosis (private, in my case), **everything** (all mental and physical health issues correlated with being neurodivergent) just **gets blamed on "depression" and "anxiety"**, even though they're secondary to underlying neurodivergent conditions. And because women can present so differently, it can be very hard to get taken seriously and get diagnosed.

”



SOUGHT
HELP
92%
FOR MENTAL
HEALTH



NOT
UNDERSTOOD
47%
BY HEALTH
PROFESSIONALS

THOSE WHO SOUGHT PROFESSIONAL HELP

Help for mental health

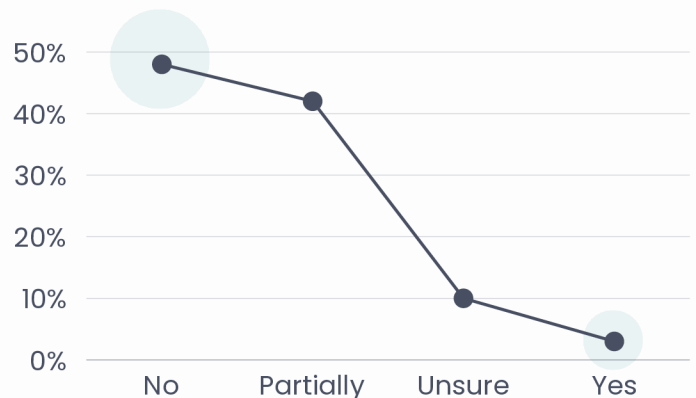
92% YES

Help with coping mechanisms

22% YES

IS NEURODIVERGENCY UNDERSTOOD BY MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONALS?

**47% of respondents chose "No"
compared to 3% who chose "Yes"**



SUPPORT RESOURCES & ACCESS



“Coaching sounds like a dream to me. I know I could benefit immensely from it, but unfortunately it’s simply out of reach due to my financial limitations. **I am in such a financial crisis that I often have to choose between bills and food, so coaching is an unattainable luxury for me.** I dream of these barriers dissolving because it’s something I’d really like to immerse myself in. If I could, I would, in less than a heartbeat’s time.”



THERAPY
58%
MOST USEFUL
SUPPORT SERVICE

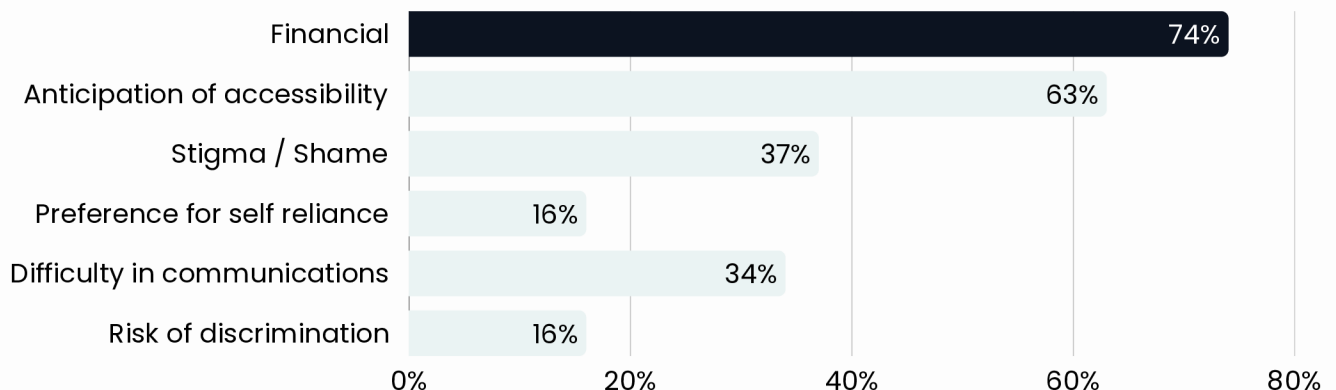


FINANCIAL
74%
BIGGEST
BARRIER

MOST USEFUL SUPPORT SERVICES



BARRIERS TO ACCESSING SUPPORT?



VOICES:

SUPPORT

I am still livid and raging how pervasively misogynistic and **neurotypically** enabling (even with female professionals) the **mental health** community has been. ADHD was diagnosed in girls back in the 90's, and yet despite a high prevalence, hardly any **psychiatrist/psychologist** has it on their list of differential diagnoses. ... There are **NO free** services to help you through it. This needs to change ... Finding peer-to-peer support was transformative. For the first time, I felt seen ... Through **therapy** & on-going education, I learned how much more was going on and how deeply it all impacted me ... **GPs** need better understanding of neurodivergent burnout ... So sick of being told to have **CBT** when all I want is to actually talk to someone ... There is no support available on the **NHS** so I've had to rely on private care, which I mostly can't afford ... Yes, no-one seems to care as there is **under funding**, its all about literally ticking boxes ... **Total lack** of understanding, empathy or support from health professionals or society in general ... Unfortunately ADHD has cost me upwards of **£3,000** in the past 6 months alone ... They should screen **pregnant** people for autism ... The NHS provision for ADHD sufferers is utterly broken ... Often, peer groups and therapists or **counsellors** cannot help as they don't understand my situation and how important these traits are to maintain - I am often **frustrated** because many of these people do not work at a business **professional** level and never have ... Combine that with an NHS that is also burnt out and that you need to strength to **advocate** and push for help, and you can end up feeling pretty helpless and hopeless ... The doctor told me flippanantly that with my score, I should be **locked up** as an outpatient on a psychiatric ward but I wasn't presenting as **highly anxious** so he wouldn't do that and gave me medication instead ... **Psychoeducation** and Self-Advocacy is not only everything... it is **SURVIVAL!** ... The GP is in his 70's and totally out of touch with ND and Mental Health management ... Medical care/ hospitals deregulate me. **Medicine sucks** for HSP ... Whether a therapist or peer-peer support is able to be helpful on these issues is such a coin toss. They may or may not be **educated** on ND issues/research/best practices ... **Misdiagnosis** from NHS led to hospitalisation for mental health but was probably more likely to be Austistic traits / burnout ... The **Adderall shortage** made me go cold turkey with **no warning**. One of those recent burnouts did lead to me quitting my job at the time ... Even though I work in the **healthcare industry**, I can't find or don't know who to trust for mental health care. I have been misdiagnosed so many times, I would like a provider who **hears me** instead of jumping to conclusions and labeling me **dysthymic**. One went so far as to call me "not normal" ... There needs to be more dedicated **support services** for adults who are ND in the community as a lot of the support seems to stop after childhood ... Even adults with 'low support needs' can really **struggle**. I do. But don't get me wrong I feel **privileged** to be able to work and maintain a semblance of standard of living ... I wish I had considered peer support when I experienced **burnout** but more importantly that I had access to this before I reached burnout ... The NHS **therapy** offerings were limited and unhelpful for me ... A lot of the support / understanding promised is nothing more than corporate **virtue signalling**. This is depressing, **demoralising** and needs to change ... I see an counsellor fortnightly that is AuDHD herself, and it has changed my life. **Prevention** of burnout is much more straightforward than healing from it ... When I raised autism as a possibility to MH professionals initially, they were quite **dismissive** as to impact on mental health ... I will never again **trust** a health care worker to know how to treat any ailment ... Being able to support / listen to others who are in the middle of **crisis**/burnout themselves - increased **empathy**, willingness to speak with directness, having experienced crisis before ... My mental health improved hugely when I was granted **Access to Work** funding ... What I learned since the last bout of burnout was that I needed a different kind of professional support, and that I needed to **address** some **traumatic** issues from my past so that they don't end up being part of the way I bring myself to my work ... I think it would be very interesting to consider the specific support needs of **nd mothers** who are 'coping'.

WORK, STUDY, & MENTAL HEALTH



“If more organisations took this problem seriously and provided access to professional support, **training for leaders** and time for employees to work on themselves, then we'd see **less burnout in the workplace and a happier, more engaged and more successful workforce.**”



EMPLOYED
55%
EMPLOYMENT
STATUS

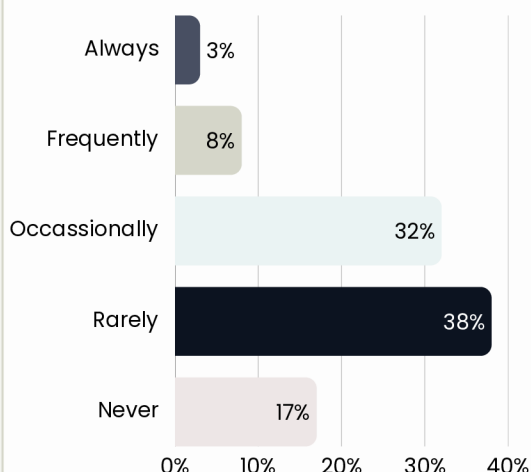


NEED TO KNOW
32%
MH
DISCLOSURE



RARELY
39%
SUPPORT
RECEIVED

SUPPORT RECEIVED

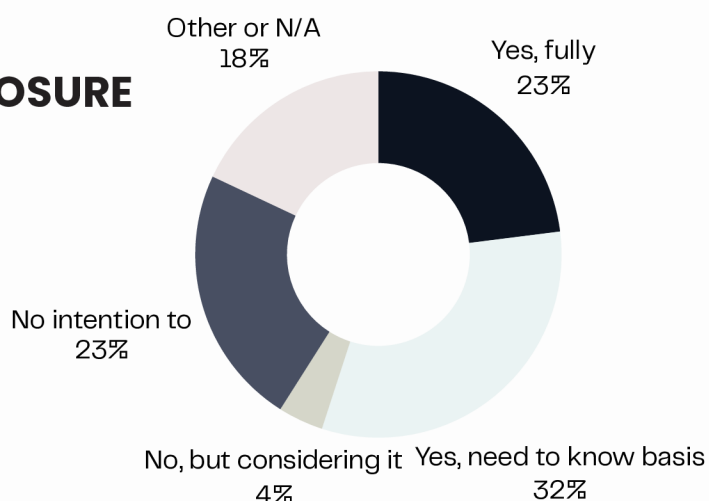


EMPLOYMENT STATUS

Employed	55%
Self Employed / Business owner	25%
Unemployed (seeking to work)	10%
Unemployed (unable to work)	5%
Student / Studying	3%
Retired	2%

MENTAL HEALTH DISCLOSURE

- ☒ Yes, fully
- ☐ Yes, need to know basis
- ☐ No, but considering it
- ☐ No intention to
- ☐ Other or N/A



WORK, STUDY, & MENTAL HEALTH



“I feel that reasonable adjustments in the workplace are hugely important. I work in an environment where everyone works in the office and it is frowned upon to work from home. Hence the fact I don't feel comfortable to disclose my ADHD because **I worry I'll be viewed as less capable without being offered the adjustments I need**”

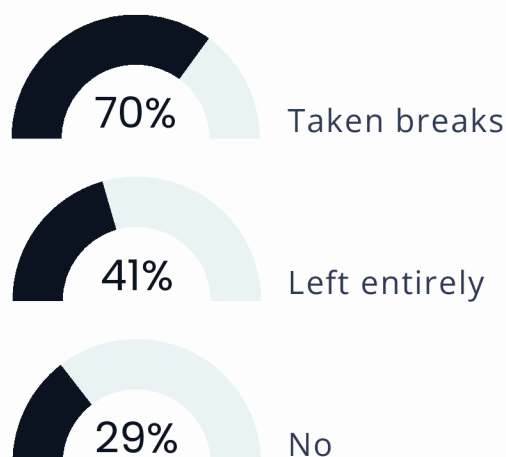


“I live with it every day (particularly where there are executive functioning demands, and thus, frequent failures), and it affects every aspect of my life. **Thank goodness I have a career that I love**, which is supporting with neurodivergent youth, and I get to give back. Every moment with them fuels me and motivates me. I see their strength and courage, and it fuels me and Inspires me.”



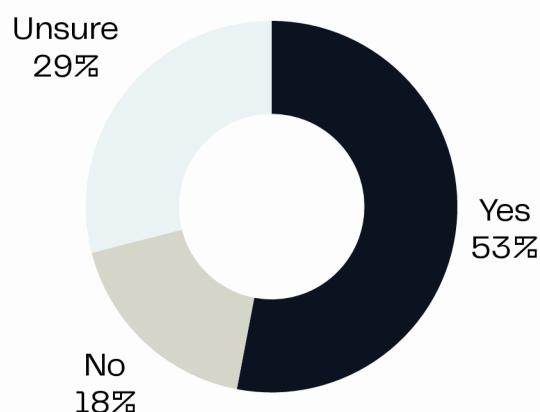
TIME OUT FROM EMPLOYMENT / STUDY

Taken breaks	70%
Left entirely	41%
No	29%



EXPERIENCE OF DISCRIMINATION

Yes	53%
No	18%
Unsure	29%



VOICES: WORK

Deep deep burnout played a significant role in me choosing (from a place of despair) to close my successful creative agency 🗨️ The **inability** to share my situation with an understanding employer in the past lead me to going in to the office at **3am** to make sure I hadn't missed anything 🗨️ Adhd means I **work hard**, creatively and have terrible RSD which leads to difficulties saying no 🗨️ After burning out I went freelance 🗨️ Mon-Fri 9-5 **isn't made** for my brain 🗨️ I'm ambitious, and a perfectionist and I'm years away from where I think I should be or possibly **deserve** 🗨️ I have lost considerable money in my career 🗨️ Diversity and **adjustments** need to come from the top down 🗨️ Happily self employed and wish I'd done it sooner 🗨️ I wonder if I'll ever be able to hold a job again 🗨️ I **can't allow** myself time to heal out of fear of losing my job 🗨️ Burnout lead to **unemployment** and depression 🗨️ Feel that I am **unemployable** and hence I work for myself where I can go with my body's flow more 🗨️ Feeling **stupid** or thick. Still to this day I feel like that, especially in work 🗨️ I always wonder if the **stress** of work was a factor in losing our baby. The lack of support in **aftermath** certainly changed my life 🗨️ I dissolved a business of **17 years** and sold everything 🗨️ I feel that reasonable adjustments in the workplace are hugely important 🗨️ I'd like to see more university supervisors, and employers be **educated** in this difficulty for autistic people 🗨️ If I had **known** about my my neurodivergence earlier I could've understood myself better and sooner and probably would've chosen a **different** career path 🗨️ I had to quit my job without notice and **no income**. I feel shame due to this 🗨️ The focus should be on **prevention**, rather than recovery and employers should recognise the same 🗨️ I thought working within the NHS would mean a better understanding and **consideration** but it has not. I've realised that most workplaces don't actually care so there's **no point** sharing 🗨️ I would say try not to impulsively leave a workplace, find other options first 🗨️ It's definitely had a real **detrimental** impact on my life at key stages – exam periods in school and uni, busy/full-on periods at **work**, post partum etc 🗨️ I've dropped out of 3 universities, walked out of numerous jobs and faced frequent **discrimination**. It makes my life absolute **chaos** 🗨️ Work can be extremely challenging for those who are neurodiverse. Employers need to do better 🗨️ Leaving employment due to burnout is only available to a **privileged** few who have the financial resources to do so 🗨️ My **experience** has shown me if the environment is right, if there is a level of understanding and acceptance of me as a person, if I am **suited** to the job then the chances of me experiencing very poor mental health and **burnout** is significantly reduced 🗨️ Unfortunately being unable/unwilling to **"play the politics"** in workplaces leads to added pressures and burnout 🗨️ The biggest challenge that we have with burnout in professional settings, in my **humble** opinion, is that the textbook approach to solving it is designed with **neurotypical** colleagues in mind 🗨️ The impact line managers have on **mental health** cannot be overstated. They are your communication with the company, and if they don't understand the issues at hand they **misrepresent** them to the company 🗨️ The **shame** of "losing" a job is so high 🗨️ Work isn't a good place for some neurodivergent people like myself. But we live in a world where you're looked down upon for not being **"normal"** 🗨️ Workplaces need to learn to accept ND behavioural differences and learn to support people as **individuals** 🗨️ Mental health can be bit of a **label** to stick on yourself – seen many people have burnout and stress and changed career, found **passion** projects and that's what's saved them (it has for me) 🗨️ I am very aware that I have avoided dealing with burnout, partially because I had **bosses** treat burnout like **personal failure** 🗨️ I believe it keeps me from advancing in my career to the level I know I am capable of 🗨️ It has stopped me being as confident as I would like and has **definitely held** me back in my career 🗨️ It is really difficult to work when you are **struggling** with your mental health. I wish we would have been supported by employers on those periods 🗨️ **Microaggressions** (eg colleague saying they are having a **dyslexic day** to describe when they do something stupid) and downgrading needed adjustments .

BURNOUT EXPERIENCES



“I don't think that neurodiversity itself causes burnout. I think **the world we have to live in as a neurodivergent person causes the burnout.** When left to my own devices, I'm a perfectly happy person but I have to function in a world based on capitalism and output and in a country where there is little to no funding for children with SEND which makes my work as a SENCO x10 harder.”



YES
95%
EXPERIENCED
BURNOUT

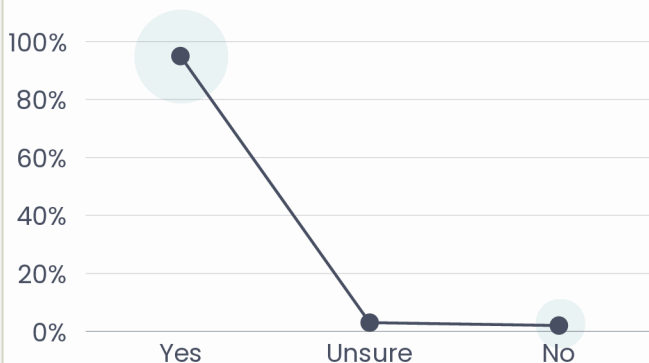


EMOTIONAL FATIGUE
39%
PRIMARY
DEFINITION



“FEW TIMES”
48%
FREQUENCY
OF BURNOUT

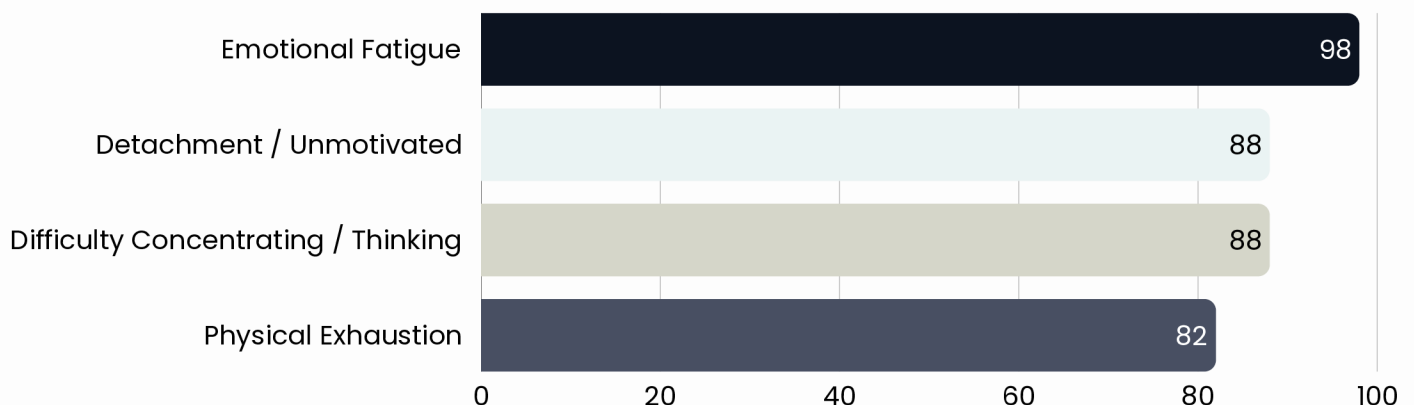
EXPERIENCE OF BURNOUT



FREQUENCY OF BURNOUT

Once	4%
Few times	48%
Frequently	29%
Constant state of	19%

PRIMARY DEFINITIONS OF BURNOUT



BURNOUT

IMPACT AND RECOVERY



“**Burnout is horrible.** I feel paralysed. I can't make decisions, don't want to make decisions, I have fights with my husband, I feel more angry/defensive and like I'm in a boat, and no matter how many buckets of water I throw out the boat, two more are added in so I can never catch up.



HIGHEST CONTRIBUTOR
84%
EMPLOYMENT +
STUDY DEMANDS



DAILY LIFE
86%
INCREASED
ANXIETY

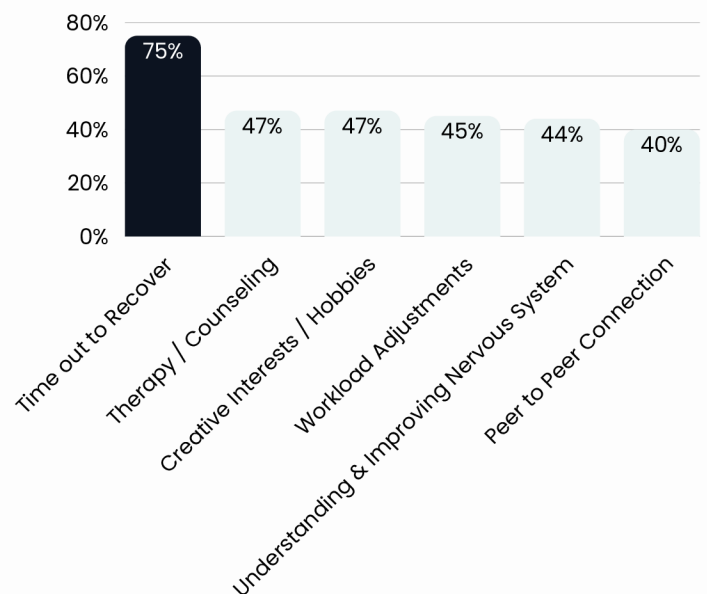


BURNOUT RECOVERY
75%
TIME OUT TO
RECOVER

IMPACT ON DAILY LIFE

Increased anxiety	86%
Difficulty completing tasks	85%
Withdrawal from society	82%
Physical health issues	79%
Strain on personal relationships	76%
Loss of interest in hobbies	73%
Strain on employment / career	71%
Strain on finance	55%

SUPPORTING BURNOUT RECOVERY



CONTRIBUTING FACTORS



BURNOUT & MENTAL HEALTH



“**Burnout is horrible.** I feel paralysed. I can't make decisions, don't want to make decisions, I have fights with my husband, I feel more angry/defensive and like I'm in a boat, and no matter how many buckets of water I throw out the boat, two more are added in so **I can never catch up.**”

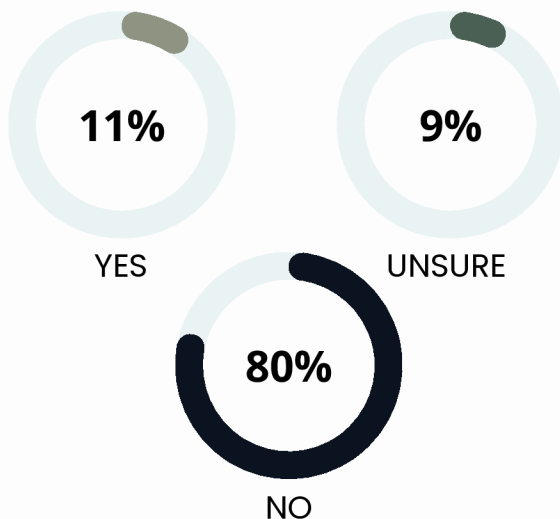


“YES”
13%
STIGMA AROUND
ND & MH

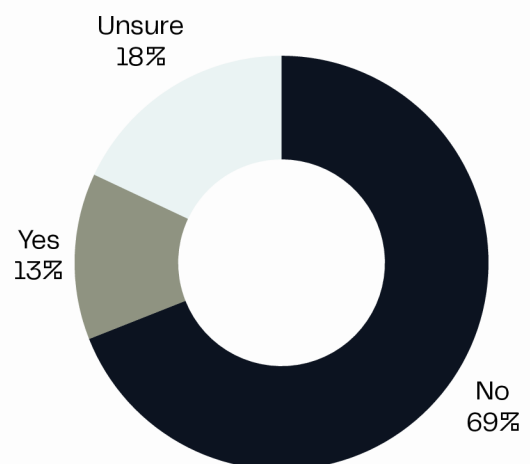


“NO”
80%
ACCESS TO
SUPPORT

ADEQUATE ACCESS TO SUPPORT



STIGMA AROUND ND AND MENTAL HEALTH?



BURNOUT AFFECT ON MENTAL HEALTH AVERAGE



VOICES: BURNOUT

PART ONE

It feels like I'll never be the same person again. A part of me died 🗨️ Over the course of my 45 years, I've experienced five major **burnouts**. One of them brought me to the brink of losing my life, twice. But it was the final **burnout** that truly changed everything. It wasn't just painful; it was a catalyst for a profound transformation 🗨️ As an ND parent with AuDHD and SEN children, they are my priority and therefore contribute heavily to my **burnout** 🗨️ Autistic **burnout** is devastating 🗨️ Being a parent significantly increases **burnout**. Especially for birthing mothers who experience hormone shifts that can make ADHD symptoms worsen 🗨️ **Burnout** is paralyzing and all consuming 🗨️ Discussing **burnout** is getting increasingly more difficult 🗨️ **Burnout** always removes the progress I make 🗨️ **Burnout** has contributed to many instances of suicidal thoughts in the past. It's serious and important to understand its deep impact in conjunction with neurodivergence and additional mental health challenges 🗨️ **Burnout** has affected my ability to advocate for myself and be able to articulate where and how I need more support 🗨️ **Burnout** has been both the best and worst thing I've ever been through. Even the abuse I suffered as a child hasn't impacted me as much as the hole I went into during the worst of my **burnout**. I am constantly afraid of going back down that slope 🗨️ **Burnout** has cost me jobs, relationships (friends, partners, family, relationship with myself) 🗨️ **Burnout** has got me into debt & other negative situations such as self neglect 🗨️ One of the hardest parts was the isolation 🗨️ **Burnout** has negatively affected my sex life 🗨️ **Burnout** is complex and individual 🗨️ **Burnout** is debilitating 🗨️ **Burnout** leaves its victims left behind and/or labeled anti-social, needy, dramatic, negative, selfish...or at minimum, self-labeled as such 🗨️ **Burnout** is difficult to discuss, like depression was thirty years ago. 🗨️ **Burnout** is not an individual problem but the signal of systemic failure 🗨️ **Burnout** is so under recognised and stigmatised still 🗨️ **Burnout** knocked me down for a full six months and it was hell pulling through it 🗨️ **Burnout** left me unable to work or do anything for over a year 🗨️ Burnout lingers. I hit my bottom two plus years and still struggle with mental fog and exhaustion. Capitalism and the systems of oppression we are locked in will forever impact my mental health in a negative way 🗨️ When **burnout** is over it leaves you with a crashed self-esteem, increased sensitivity to criticism and mistrust in the world 🗨️ I broke down and lost the ability to communicate effectively due to exhaustion, anxiety and fear of judgement 🗨️ I've found burnout a very difficult place to come back from and unfortunately learnt the hard way 🗨️ **Burnout** feels particularly bad for me 🗨️ I am a nurse. **Burnout** over the last 12 years 🗨️ I am in a constant state of **burnout**. I don't remember how it feels to not be burnt out 🗨️ I experienced more **burnout** when eating processed foods and carbs 🗨️ I discovered my neurodivergence on the verge of having a third **burnout**. The trigger was very much RSD related and from there, I connected the dots, reached out to our ERG and got my diagnosis not long after that. Neurodivergence and mental health is intertwined: anxiety, depression, **burnout** and addiction. This NT world is not designed for how our ND brain functions and consequently, we spend extra energy just to function normally 🗨️ It's strange as you become a former shell of your "usual" self 🗨️ It's very difficult to manage if you don't have money. You need to take time off work completely but need to work to get money to cover your expenses. Sometimes feels like a never-ending cycle 🗨️ The hardest thing about workplace **burnout** is that the onus is on you to identify it and make the necessary adjustments to get through 🗨️ There is still a sense that if you are **burned** out that you are a failure and/or irreparably broken 🗨️ There is still so much stigma around **burnout** and mental health, and frankly not enough understanding of how much 'worse' it may be for a neurodivergent individual compared to a neurotypical one 🗨️ To me, my neurodivergence, mental health and **burnout** are all inextricably linked, it's like 'which came first, the chicken or the egg?' 🗨️ Ultimately, I believe self-awareness, support and education are key when it comes to addressing **burnout** 🗨️ Sometimes it feels never-ending and when you're in the midst of it, you feel very isolated which can make it worse 🗨️ Set me back financially, damaged self-esteem, missed career opportunities and the ability to live a fulfilling life.

VOICES: BURNOUT

PART TWO

I believe unidentified autistic **burnout** was the precursor to depressive episodes ... I didn't know it was **burnout**, I still don't really fully let myself acknowledge or say that it is - is that shame? or fear that naming it as such will make it something unrecoverable ... I didn't know what I was going through was **burnout**. There's a lack of acceptance from neurotypicals on how we operate ... I don't think that neurodiversity itself causes **burnout**. I think the world we have to live in as a neurodivergent person causes the **burnout**. When left to my own devices, I'm a perfectly happy person but I have to function in a world based on capitalism and output ... I feel **burnt out** in terms of social relationships because, given the severe rejection I've experienced, it sometimes feel like I should isolate ... I seem to burn out every 5 years ... Each time I feel like I have to start again from scratch. I spectacularly **burnt out** in September 2024 and its taken 4 months to re-emerge from it ... I suspect **burnout** has caused me to leave 3 jobs ... I think it's important to separate the **burnout** that neurotypicals people have than the autistic burnout ... I still don't know how to spot the "warning signs" of burnout ... I was only diagnosed 1 year ago so I feel I've lived most of my life in **burnout** mode trying to fit in with everyone and everything ... I'm learning to accept my needs and I'm getting better at anticipating them before **burnout** occurs ... I've experienced **burnout** a few times I think, but also regularly experience sensory overwhelm - it feels like a mini trauma each time ... **Burnout** is horrible. I feel paralysed. I can't make decisions, don't want to make decisions ... **Burnout** amongst neurodivergent must surely be a silent killer! ... It took years to know why I felt that why or what **burnout** was I didn't understand why I felt the way I did with little or no support ... I think not being 'present' in my life is a huge sign of an incoming burnout for me! ... Don't want you to think ND adults are doomed to constantly experience cycles of **burnout** for the rest of our lives. It does get better ... It's forced me to live in survival mode where my dreams become unreachable due to an inability to get close to them without experiencing physical or mental **burnout** ... When I had my major **burnouts** it was before I knew I was audDHD and since they have been much less severe,, it changed my life knowing I'm ND and I now catch my maladaptive coping mechanisms sooner before too much harm is done ... Knowing I am neurocomplex helps me shed the sense that something is wrong with me and focus instead on honoring my seen and unseen differences as insight and strengths. Immune system disorders, along with bad mental health/**burnout** periods make it much worse ... My heaviest **burnout** experience fried my brain so badly, that I practically had to learn how to speak my second language anew. Took around 3 months to feel confident in speaking English again ... I feel like I swept it under the carpet and back to business ... I haven't had anyone over to my house in 6 months. I haven't changed my sheets in over a month. I am struggling to stay on top of personal care tasks ... I got into a really dark place - feeling stupid, and useless, and worthless for apparently failing at the basic parts of life. Now I understand myself a bit better, and can recognise when my brain is throwing a fit before spiralling again (usually) ... **Burnout**, brain fog, brain calendar out of order, completely forget about appointments and important job Do's. Been an awful journey ... Poor mental health and burnout, which I believe stemmed from undiagnosed/ unsupported neurodivergence, had a profound impact on a decade of my life ... Stigma about **burnout** and ND is rampant and can make things so much worse when the people around you don't get it or try to get it ... I'm currently in the process of a year-long AuDHD **burnout** after being laid off and it's been the single hardest thing I've had to do in my life ... The worst cause of burnout for me currently is the UK benefits system ... Very often **burnout** is treated as a mental breakdown with medication and talking therapy. But understanding my autism and triggers for **burnout** helps me to navigate my overwhelm ... Through my teens, 20s and 30s I was diagnosed variously with depression and chronic fatigue - I now understand these to have been **burnout**. The treatments offered for them (SSRIs in particular) were extremely counterproductive.

SOCIOECONOMIC COST

I am not alone in feeling that **adult neurodivergent diagnosis and intervention is in crisis**. The same is true for **children and young people**, perpetuating the cycle.

The **socioeconomic impact** extends far beyond neurodivergent adults, placing significant financial strain on employers, government tax revenues, and multiple layers of public services, and society as a whole.

Currently, an **estimated 20% of the global population is neurodivergent**. This figure is expected to rise significantly as a more accurate picture emerges.

So, what happens if the crisis only worsens? What happens if accessible forms of intervention don't materialise at the rate the crisis becomes more apparent, and increases in its intensity?

If the data from these 1,165 people is representative of the global neurodivergent population (and who knows, it may well be), **then what?**

WE LEARNED FROM 1,165 LATE STAGE NEURODIVERGENT ADULTS

- **91%** are **employed, an employer, self-employed, seeking work, or studying**.
- **96%** have engaged in **unhealthy coping mechanisms**.
- **72%** have been diagnosed or self-diagnosed with a recognised **mental health disorder**.
- **68%** have experienced **suicidal ideation**.
- **50%** have engaged in **self harm**.
- **92%** have sought **professional help** for their mental health.
- **4%** feel that neurodivergence is well understood by **mental health professionals**.
- **3%** felt they had access to **adequate support** during periods of burnout.
- **75%** are **unable to access support** due to financial implications.

WE LEARNED FROM 1,142 ADULTS WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED BURNOUT

- **96%** have experienced burnout more than once, frequently, or **live in a constant state of**.
- **70%** have taken a **break from employment** or education due to burnout.
- **40%** have **left employment** or education entirely due to burnout.

Capturing neurodivergence in childhood or youth brings understanding, supports executive functioning and learning styles, promoting a thrive mentality, opposed to coping. All of which significantly reduce the potential for long standing mental health conditions that appear to be associated with late stage.

Adult diagnosis **expedites validation, understanding, unlearning, and relearning**. It can prevent burnout, improve employment and career prospects, increase societal contributions, and reduce the demands on multiple overwhelmed public services.

“My mental health has been a rollercoaster. **Getting diagnosed was a major step forward**, even though it only came after I had burned out so thoroughly that I didn't know if I would ever recover.”

BUILDING MOMENTUM

COLLECTIVELY



ADVOCACY & STORYTELLING

STORYTELLING & PUBLIC SHARING

This all started on Substack. Evidence that by sharing personal narratives helps us to challenge misconceptions and humanise the reality of late stage ND. Feeling seen, supported and less isolated is a vital component in moving forward.

PETITIONS & POLICY ENGAGEMENT

Collective action on a regional level can support direct policy engagement, working with institutions and governments to address systemic barriers. This may appear out of reach in the world at present, however solutions that create positive socioeconomics have the potential to let money do the talking.

WORKPLACE ADVOCACY

The rise in late stage understanding and diagnosis brings strength in numbers. As representation in workplaces increases, as does the opportunity to advocate for inclusive policies, accessibility, and training. All of which prevents burnout, improves attendance and productivity.

RESEARCH & DATA

ONGOING COMMUNITY STUDIES

This 'Mental Health & Burnout' study will remain open, building on the pool of data and lived experiences.

April/May will see the launch of the 'Women's neurodivergence' study, designed in collaboration with experts in diagnostic journey, healthcare and support services.

PEER SUPPORT

INTRODUCING...



NEUROKINDNESS COMMUNITY

Only a matter of weeks ago, the team behind the Neurokindness Community concept hadn't met or even spoken to each other. Yet here we are, all neurodivergent, all unique, all authentic. A collective with shared values, a mission, and a vision to create a not for profit, equitable solution, to help late stage adults thrive.

Kelly, Amber, Sher, Tiff & Nick.

Plus a stack of talented supporters who have shown their hands and are ready to go.

THE MISSION

The Neurokindness Community will empower neurodivergent adults to show up as their full, authentic selves, without masking or judgment, forging deep connections and uplifting one another.

It's a trusted space to find peers and role models who truly get it. People who've walked similar paths and know the struggles and victories firsthand. Together, we build resilience, create meaningful relationships, and grow stronger, not just surviving but thriving through shared experiences and collective wisdom.

THE VISION

We aim to develop a self-sustaining ecosystem of empowerment and leadership for neurodivergent adults, drawing on the community's incredible wealth of talent, authenticity, and kindness.

HOW WILL IT WORK?

GET INVOLVED



GET INVOLVED

We are opening 75 early-joiner spaces for people who are interested in playing an active role in developing the foundations of this community.

In particular, we are looking for folks who are already actively sharing stories and knowledge in a positive and empowering way.

We believe these people will be the perfect bedrock to the Neurokindness community - bolstering its engagement through specialist content, knowledge sharing, support and guidance. Areas of particular interest include (but are by no means limited to) careers & employment, health & wellbeing, women's health, burnout, marginalisation, resource and support expertise.

In return you'll receive deep peer-to-peer connection, engaging conversations and an active role in supporting the community's ongoing development.

As we build a global and equitable community, we're committed to ensuring diverse geographical and demographic representation from the start. This will help us lay strong, inclusive foundations for the future.

To register your interest in this initial phase please complete this form and we'll be in touch soon.



*It can be a scary, lonely and debilitating time, **I would love if there was a community hub to meet with** and chat with neurodivergent adults to help combat the sense of aloneness.*



THANK YOU

KINDNESS IS A STRENGTH



Endless gratitude to every single person who has helped us (this is a 'we' thing) 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 and have shared deeply personal experiences, unconditionally.

Extra big thank you's to Tiff, Amber, Kelly, Sher & special shout out to Parul for helping to drive many voices in support.

CONNECT WITH ME

Neurokindness.com | ADHD, Autism & OCD Coaching

Neurokindness Club | A journal of AuDHD & OCD on Substack

Nick Dean | LinkedIn

BEFORE YOU GO...

Please read the final pages that follow. A few more voices that need to be heard to complete the picture.



It sucks. It comes in waves.
I have hope, **but fuck is this hard.**



VOICES: A FEW MORE

A lack of recognition 🗨️ A life of **inner turmoil** 🗨️ I am unable to function or afraid to appear weak/incompetent 🗨️ After doing it alone for so long. It's **hard to admit** you need help 🗨️ It's been harder to get **reasonable adjustments** 🗨️ At times mental health, neurodivergence, and the modern life, all mixed together, felt like a complex math equation that's **unsolvable** 🗨️ Awareness and understanding would have completely transformed my life 🗨️ So much of what creates a **strain** on nd folks is invisible. I'm not lazy or **disinterested**, i want to do my best 🗨️ Before I understood about my ND I constantly felt like I was failing 🗨️ It's a vicious and **painful painful** cycle 🗨️ Bring sad and alone and **afraid to leave** my house is horrible 🗨️ I just don't care anymore. I sleep maybe 4 hours 🗨️ I can't eat, speak, or concentrate 🗨️ I feel excessive amount of **guilt and shame** 🗨️ I do not feel like I exist inside my own body right now 🗨️ So frustrating and shameful. Constantly feel **ashamed** 🗨️ **Education** around ND should start at childhood 🗨️ Feel like I'm living in a parallel universe. Feeling **embarrassment** talking about why you've fell behind out of fear you'll be **mocked**, or seen as just lazy 🗨️ Finding other autistic people really **helped me** 🗨️ Finding others that share similar struggles and thought processes has saved my life 🗨️ For me it was due to **excessive workload** and was extremely gradual overall 🗨️ I wish there was more understanding of the isolation 🗨️ Going through **adversity** makes you stronger 🗨️ I have a pattern of taking on too many things, Feeling **exhausted** and overwhelmed, and then cancelling/**giving things up**, then taking on more again! 🗨️ Having a child who is probably neurodivergent is a real eye opener Having the perspective of my **neurotype** changes everything. It removes the shame and confusion and allows me to focus on clarifying my needs for **optimal wellbeing** and learn ways to **align my life** in honor of those needs 🗨️ Up and downs can swing quickly and generally running or exercising gets me **feeling better**. I lived so much of my life not understanding what was **"wrong"** with me and why I seemed to struggle with so many things that my peers did not 🗨️ I am in a place of positive well-being because **I stim all day** 🗨️ I am still figuring this out. I don't know what is me anymore 🗨️ I believe my autism partially developed for me due to **intense trauma** 🗨️ **Discrimination** impacts us very badly and many of us want to leave society or die 🗨️ Not being identified as autistic much earlier in my life and being treated only for **mental health** issues probably contributed to issues worsening 🗨️ I don't like that you class my ND as a mental health **problem**. I'm not mentally unwell 🗨️ I don't want my life anymore is the end result of the discrimination and **bullying** 🗨️ I ended up diagnosed with **chronic pain** condition fibromyalgia following a particularly stressful job 🗨️ I feel able to speak up and advocate for others, but not myself 🗨️ I feel **inferior** compared to others and it affects my **self esteem** 🗨️ I feel judged for 'having no respect for time' - I try my hardest and I'm sure it's from ADHD, but it is a sign of **disrespect** in neurotypical minds 🗨️ I feel like I started my adult life a decade after everyone else, because it took me so long to find a **language** for my own experience and needs 🗨️ I feel like my entire life I have been **treading water**, only just managing to stay afloat 🗨️ I feel neurodiversity and chronic pain is **interlinked** 🗨️ Daily diet and exercise is v important, I do think junk food (**UPF**) is very unknown as to the impact on our mental health 🗨️ We're now in a society where people share everything in public, but I'm built with **guardrails** and prefer to respect my own privacy 🗨️ I find there is such a **huge gap** between what is provided or understood as supporting ND at work, in the health system, and with mental health supports in particular 🗨️ There is a saying, **"Love is care in action"** 🗨️ I had the biggest "difficulties" when I was at **school** 🗨️ I have always had a difficult time fitting into a group. I don't read **emotional cues** and struggle to connect 🗨️ **At 70** it's so late for me but I hope to communicate with younger people and help them if I can 🗨️ I have had **no life** 🗨️ I have known that I am both neurodivergent and have **problems** with mental and physical health since very early on in life 🗨️ My mental health has shaped my life and **identity** in ways that I don't think I will ever be able to understand or even fully unpack 🗨️ I have lost friendships and feel **disconnected** from my friends and family due to having to **limit social** interactions 🗨️ I have struggled with depression and anxiety from as far back as I can remember 🗨️ I am probably suffering unhealed **childhood trauma**. I've been depressed and anxious most of my life, although I **fake optimism** and happiness most of the time.

VOICES: A FEW MORE

While I try hard to be here. I constantly sway between a state of **persevering** and a state of wanting to cease **my existence** because I'm so exhausted and feel so hopeless. Feels like I'm just making excuses and no-one is feel takes me seriously. They hear but they **don't listen** 🗨️ Wish there wasn't an **international stigma** for formally diagnosed folks, would help us folks receive support while still being able to emigrate if we choose to 🗨️ Speaking with other friends and **identifying** other people with adhd / neurodivergency has been **HUGELY impactful**, for piecing together my understanding of the world, self confidence etc 🗨️ OCD has actually been **worse than burnout**. I wish it was better understood and treated 🗨️ OCD has completely taken over my life at times. It affects my **relationship** terribly as I am hyperfixated and **scanning for danger** 🗨️ But realised at the same time that all my fun friends are neurospicy as well, and like one said: "the others are no fun to hang out with":) 🗨️ **The book** Burnout by Claire Plumbly has been helpful 🗨️ People think I'm **lazy or incompetent**. I've been told to just pull myself together. Lack of understanding of variations in severity of impact 🗨️ Personally I've **never** had a good experience when I've disclosed my adhd diagnosis 🗨️ Although I try not to dwell on it, I can **imagine** how **different my life** might have been if I had better support earlier on 🗨️ It has affected my ability to maintain a job, manage friendships, social interactions, navigate **romantic relationships** and maintain healthy family relationships 🗨️ Reading Burnout and understanding the **stress cycle** and more about how the **brain works** has increased my confidence navigating the ups and downs of my brain.

Reading your article made me aware that **I am not the only one** experiencing difficulties with what is called "Neurodivergence". I only just now discovered this term. It seems that I am living a **never-ending obsession** which keeps me from being able to sit down and simply relax. This frequently ends up as a burnout 🗨️ Restructuring is needed within society on the **policy level** in order to make a difference. Self reflection (in retirement) has brought me to this juncture 🗨️ Shame, feeling failed in life 🗨️ Speaking with my family, I was told as a child that I was **"too smart"** to have ADHD. It is hard to adjust and not follow the same traits when you've had to find your own way to meet the **expectations** in all education and employment 🗨️ I've felt like **a failure** in every aspect of my life and judgement from others has contributed to this 🗨️ I was recently diagnosed ADHD I find it **hard to process** that I have had this for most of my life 🗨️ I have heard many people say that it's **"trendy"** so I feel like I am "playing the ADHD card" a lot even though now I have a formal, medical diagnosis 🗨️ I will keep **clinging on** to the life I have built, and if some days I am only still here **out of spite** at least the next day has a chance of being something more positive 🗨️ My mental health has been poor for as long **as I can remember**, both due to my diagnosed **anxiety** conditions (particularly OCD), and the challenges of living as a neurodivergent person in a world which is designed for **neurotypical** individuals 🗨️ As an adult, the situation has improved after I have been able to be more open about the challenges I face, and finding an excellent therapist and friends who are also neurodivergent 🗨️ My mental health impacted my **entire life**. My neurodivergence affected how I was able to develop socially and throughout school I was **alone** socially because i was so **"different"**. It was only when I found my peers that I really began to develop socially and fit it 🗨️ My mental health is my top priority in life outside of **sobriety** 🗨️ My needs are as a result of a stroke which I feel are very relevant 🗨️ My neurodivergence **is not** the cause of mental health challenges, it is the **expectation to perform** in the same way as neuro normative peers that is the issue 🗨️ **Navigating** identification and diagnosis of neurodivergence at 50 has been incredibly challenging. I don't know where to start, how to know where to start, etc. It is **overwhelming** 🗨️ What we really want to know is how to use **our gifts** for the best possible outcomes. As long as we keep the conversation around **victimhood**, we will continue to identify as victims 🗨️ Social awareness and social stigma are a thing, and most people **don't value** autonomy like neurodivergent individuals do 🗨️ We just happen to be in one of those **transformative** time periods. Unlike history books however, we can't just turn the pages and find the answers 🗨️ My current biggest **struggle** related to my ADHD is that I only take my **meds** on work days to avoid building a tolerance, which works, but then I can never get it together on the weekends to complete tasks 🗨️ Currently I operate as a **tightly strung** violin string just about ok but at risk of **breaking**.

VOICES: A FEW MORE

Sharing it makes you **extremely vulnerable**, and often for no reward – only risk 🗨️ Significant improvement in mental health and acceptance of myself since finding a **friendship group** of diagnosed ND (now ex) colleagues 🗨️ **Social isolation** exacerbates everything... when I try and speak up for myself **no one listens**. I mean, they don't listen to understand, nor do they treat me with respect 🗨️ Sometimes no amount of rest/talking/meds seem to work. Also, when you have a **young family** you have no choice but to keep putting **one foot** in front of the other 🗨️ State of constant flux, forced to work as hard as possible to earn enough that I can survive the inevitable burnout. **Economic hostage** 🗨️ Strive to keep going, with only **morbid curiosity**, to see what happens next 🗨️ Support is very useful, having lack of it has made things harder to cope with 🗨️ It's **very hard** to separate out what is causing what, therefore who to go to for help and support, which supplements and / or **medications** might help etc 🗨️ It's difficult to be told to **have a bath** or a nice tea when in the midst of a meltdown 🗨️ The impact on my ability to perform to the levels I want to is often devastating for me 🗨️ Permanent **fight or flight** which was exhausting and then **complete withdrawal** from everything, including what felt like reality 🗨️ The physical effects such as hair loss have been huge. And the emotional toll of feeling **injustice** has been almost too much to handle at points 🗨️ The world is still created for **neuro typicals**, who are expected to work, be **parents**, be social and in reality it's impossible to do all of that especially if you are battling with your brain to fit into this expectation 🗨️ Autistic people have strengths that are **useful in society**. They shouldn't be **forced to act** like other people. They should be treasured 🗨️ There's an assumption you can do it all, until you can't. Society doesn't **recognise** the need for breaks, some of which need to be a couple of months long to **recover** before we can go again in a world that doesn't want to make adjustments 🗨️ There's **less awareness** in Australia on what ND means. Most expect it's autism, few understand adhd. The balance of support isn't there and the adhders are **left out** in the cold 🗨️ Since being medicated by experiences of burnout and **copng mechanisms** have drastically reduced and my overall mental health has been much better 🗨️ They've been abused by **bad faith actors** consistently 🗨️ This is rather new to me and I am still on a **journey of discovery**. I have always wondered "Is it just me?" So knowing it is not is very helpful We are scratching the surface of **workplace understanding**. A better **long-term** goal is role specialisation around neurodivergence, but this requires an 🗨️ awareness of strengths, not weaknesses 🗨️ With ADHD it feels like I am **unable to rest**, my head feels constantly on the go. This causes me **great stress** and pain. It's hard to express difficulties with ADHD as it's become "trendy" to say you have it 🗨️ Without ample time off, **I won't** fully recover from burnout. 🗨️ Burnout causes lapse in judgment, lack in critical thinking, constant overwhelm, lack of **creative problem** solving 🗨️ Without it I would have missed meeting a lot of **lovely people**. I probably had lived a boring life :) 🗨️ I'm **sick of hearing** "just go to bed earlier & don't drink a coffee" to somehow fix my insomnia 🗨️ I often feel like two different people. Organised, calm and confident to most people, but on the **other hand** I am worried I'm **not good enough** 🗨️ I feel that ND individuals are more keenly aware of and impacted by the **systemic failings** of our current societal model and as a result more in need of escapism to numb themselves 🗨️ **Geographic isolation** doesn't help and poor acknowledgement of mental health locally is a hindrance 🗨️ I struggled as a child, through adolescence and was **incorrectly diagnosed** 🗨️ I think it's important to recognise the impact of **trauma** on neurodivergence 🗨️ Stigma / not understanding / agreeing is not only from outside, but inside, which makes it even more **isolating** and difficult 🗨️ I think people just need to be **educated** on possible signs to recognise in others. I'm a huge believer in instilling the belief that individual's can deal with something, **encouraging agency** and confidence 🗨️ Sometimes it's worth remembering that **life is tough** for everybody – ND or not. I think there is a lot of shame in not being able to put your mind foggy into words and actions. I thought I had **chronic** anxiety and that there was something wrong with me that **couldn't be fixed**. Now I understand more about neurodivergence and how it **impacts people** and that my struggles are more to do with that than anything else, I can lead a better life 🗨️ I lived as **"not myself"** for decades. When I finally did start to **crack**, there was no appropriate support in the mainstream mental health system.

VOICES: A FEW MORE

I wish I wasn't ND? I don't really know what to say. To the **outside world** I "look fine" but I spend most of my life exhausted and miserable ☹️ **I wish** I'd known about my neurodivergence earlier and I'm glad I know it now. I'd really like to **make it better** for the next generation of nd human ☹️ I wish there had been a way to get diagnosed as a female in the **1950's**. I probably would have understood myself better ☹️ **I worry** that I'll end up destitute and alone because of how much I struggle ☹️ I would just like to say that even though being neurodivergent has had a **negative impact** on my mental health that's because **society isn't designed** for ND people. I don't want to change my brain and not be ND ☹️ I'm fortunate that I am an extroverted person who **doesn't embarrass** easily. This means that when I mispronunciate words, or muddle phrases/facts, I have developed **coping mechanisms** to build these mistakes into my communication ☹️ **I'm lucky** because I had money so i could afford to take time out. **Lord knows** what would have happened if I hadn't had the money to pay for private therapy and self-care ☹️ I'm still here and I'm **proud** of how far I've come considering the challenges. I'm sure its always been a thing but now people jump on the bandwagon and **dilute authenticity** of others ☹️ I just don't want anyone else to feel the way I've felt. **I just want** everybody to feel ok I've always known I was somewhat **differently wired** to those around me. But it's only been in the last few years that there has been the information there to show me why. Knowing why helps, it gives you hope, **information** that shows you how to deal with things, and that you're **not alone**. And that last one is massively important ☹️ I've always thought I was **emotionally intelligent**, but not understanding myself through an autism lens meant that I was a **conundrum** to myself. Now I often feel like there's a gap where my authentic personality should be! ☹️ If 20% are ND and 80% are NT, and the world is **mostly designed** / dictated by NT, I feel there's **hope for humanity** by naturally, progressively and organically strengthen our influence ☹️ If I could live my life again I would **so wish** it would never get as bad as that because it is a time when I felt completely **lost and confused** and it'd so much more live life to the fullest and enjoy life instead ☹️ If I had been aware earlier of being ND I could have sought and found **support from peers** ☹️ If I had known I was neurodiverse I might not have struggled so much **impulsive and risky** behaviours as a teenager, overspending and **over eating** as an adult ☹️ Thinking I am broken and will never fit in or be good enough especially at school and work. I have had several other '**breakdowns**', and I need to be very careful to go for a walk or rest with a book when **I am struggling** ☹️ I find it impossible to find anyone who I can **genuinely** express my real feelings to, without being accused of insensitivity or unprofessional behaviour. It is exhausting ☹️ **I finally feel heard** ☹️ Isolation and withdrawal from society ☹️ It can be very **hard to unpick** what belongs to what - what's ADHD, what's trauma, what's depression, what's burnout, what's **perimenopause** ☹️ It does feel as if there is not much left outside of **negative impact**. It feels like being in a state if constantly needing to actively manage ND/MH to avoid burnout ☹️ A state of **hypervigilance** almost ☹️ It has affected every aspect of my life, from my parents undiagnosed neurodivergence, to my own health issues and **comorbid conditions** EDS, Epilepsy, MCAS, IBS etc ☹️ I don't think I would have had **anxiety** without the adhd, or the trauma experience that led to PTSD without adhd. All three led to burnout, **low self belief** and moving backward in what was once a high flying career. Having said all of that I wouldn't trade any of it for my **wonderfully dynamic** and unique adhd brain which I guess is **the gift** of adhd optimism ☹️ It has impacted my studies, having to pivot and having to deal with a mix of wanting to do something but being **multitalented** and unable to choose or focus. Feeling like your soul is not **capitalism shaped** and battling nihilistic thoughts because why everything? **Seeing patterns** in politics and in people but having to keep quiet ☹️ Being honest and being told honesty is wanted but discovering that they didn't didn't mean **real honesty**, just surface level honesty and platitudes ☹️ It has provided a reason for me to **embrace** personal actions to change my life ☹️ Be more in control and be more **empowered** ☹️ It makes me feel inferior or like a failure sometimes it makes me feel like a bad person. It makes the **difficulties** with my autism and dyspraxia worse. I get more **sensory overload**. It puts a strain on relationships, if you're a parent you have to keep going, there is no other option and that's when **work** has to give because some other commitments and **responsibilities** are not optional.

VOICES: A FEW MORE

It turns out there's **nothing wrong** with me! 🗨️ From the outside, I look incredibly successful. Three degrees, a well paid, professional role in a large, well regarded organisation. I look very '**capable**' - I'm not. I hate myself. I'm wracked with self doubt 🗨️ **I feel happier** now I can identify it before it escalates and **self-employment** helps that significantly as I have more control 🗨️ It's certainly not a superpower. It's crippling and trying to pretend you're ok and hold everything together is **beyond exhausting**. I liken it to a **broken vase** you have super glued together it looks whole until you get closer or notice a bit has fallen off again 🗨️ It's just an **exhausting cycle**. It's just another layer to childhood challenges, abusive relationship, anxiety, perimenopause - eurgh!! 🗨️ It's made me feel **less capable** of being a worthy partner or good enough to apply for certain jobs 🗨️ It's not something that ever **goes away** - and nor can I be "fixed" ... **I've lost** education opportunities, relationships, jobs... Every single part of my life is **impacted daily** 🗨️ It's only going to get worse for the next 4 years. Thinking about leaving the country. It's put me in **debt** and behind my peers in terms of employment and finances 🗨️ It's really hard. And it's never-ending. You get a good day and then life is back. It's a **constant battle** 🗨️ People talking about this now has **really helped** me make sense of a lot of stuff that's gone before 🗨️ Decreasing stigma and increasing awareness and understanding are essential but the **bigger changes** need to be systemic Self **advocacy is damaging** to neurodivergent people it's time businesses take mental health seriously. ADHD can be really **exhausting** and affect all aspects of your life 🗨️ I will say I feel more mentally healthy now than I have in years. And my adhd **lifehacks** seem to be actually helping with Adulting 🗨️ **Lack of information** and understanding and empathy is killing us 🗨️ Late diagnosed so that was the main issue - I didn't know AuDHD was **affecting** my mental health and now I'm trying to work backwards to unpick it 🗨️ Learning about how and why my brain works the way it does has literally **saved my life**. Now Learning more about ADHD and autism helped so much. You go from a **character** flaw perspective to knowledge that you're having symptoms of a **developmental disorder**; it makes sense and is not my fault that some things feel very difficult 🗨️ Limitations on someone's ability to get help 🗨️ **Limited trust** of anyone, feeling forced to **adapt and 'fit in'**, not being heard or understood Look out for any shame-bound needs, using shame to motivate yourself, or any recurring self **shaming behavior**. Once I eliminated those I started feeling a **sense of peace** that is strong and easy to come back to. Meditation, awareness of emotions, and finding a path to **spirituality** that works for me have all been incredibly helpful. **Somatic therapy** as well, it is a whole different thing than counselling 🗨️ Looking back, it seems clear a number of people recognised I was different. Nobody said anything in a way **I understood** it, if they said anything at all 🗨️ Made me hate myself, **feel disabled**, feel less than, lost confidence, lost purpose, **lost relationships** 🗨️ Making you feel hopeless, being sensitive to others **judgements / unsolicited advice**. The feeling of when will it happen again, or is this me starting to get burnout again? panic! 🗨️ Benefit of **access to pets** - time with e.g. dogs help me 🗨️ Impact on relationship when your partner becomes your carer - how to come back from that **impact on intimacy**, and returning to feelings of desire. **Divorce** 🗨️ Forces you to prioritize, most things not possible, what can you do with the meagre amount of energy you have 🗨️ **Medication** for adhd was life changing. Mental health and physical health are very **interlinked**. One can affect the other. Both need better understanding and treatment - not as separate entities but as a whole 🗨️ **Military vet**. Issues with mental health and burnout are rampant. Stigma, **fear of repercussions**, retaliation, etc. are all barriers to seeking care 🗨️ It takes time, and for everyone it's different 🗨️ More needs to be done for AuDHD. **My brain** is one, not two **separate conditions**. The way they interact with each other is very different to managing one condition on its own 🗨️ Most of **human behavior** is dictated by emotional reaction. If I regulate my emotions, I can take care of any situation 🗨️ Sad that only diagnosed age 47 so still **relearning and reevaluating** my whole life.

TO BE CONTINUED...