

Towards autism-informed early intervention in psychosis: How acceptable is the CAARMS assessment for autistic adults?



Leeds and York Partnership
NHS Foundation Trust

Funding: LYPFT Charitable Fund (fund no. 15024, approval no. CF15).

Ethical approval: granted by the Wales REC via the HRA (ref 24/WA/0026, IRAS ID 291758).

Daniel Romeu¹, Alice Eldred², James McGrath^{3,4}, Daniel Whitney⁵, Lauren Unsworth², Zuzana Drozdova², Umair Nasir², Conor Davidson²

1. University of Leeds; 2. Leeds and York Partnership NHS Foundation Trust; 3. Lived Experience Representative; 4. Leeds Beckett University; 5. Tees, Esk and Wear Valleys NHS Foundation Trust

Autistic adults found the CAARMS to be broadly acceptable, but highlighted ambiguity, cognitive burden and risks of misdiagnosis that could be reduced through simple autism-informed adjustments

Background

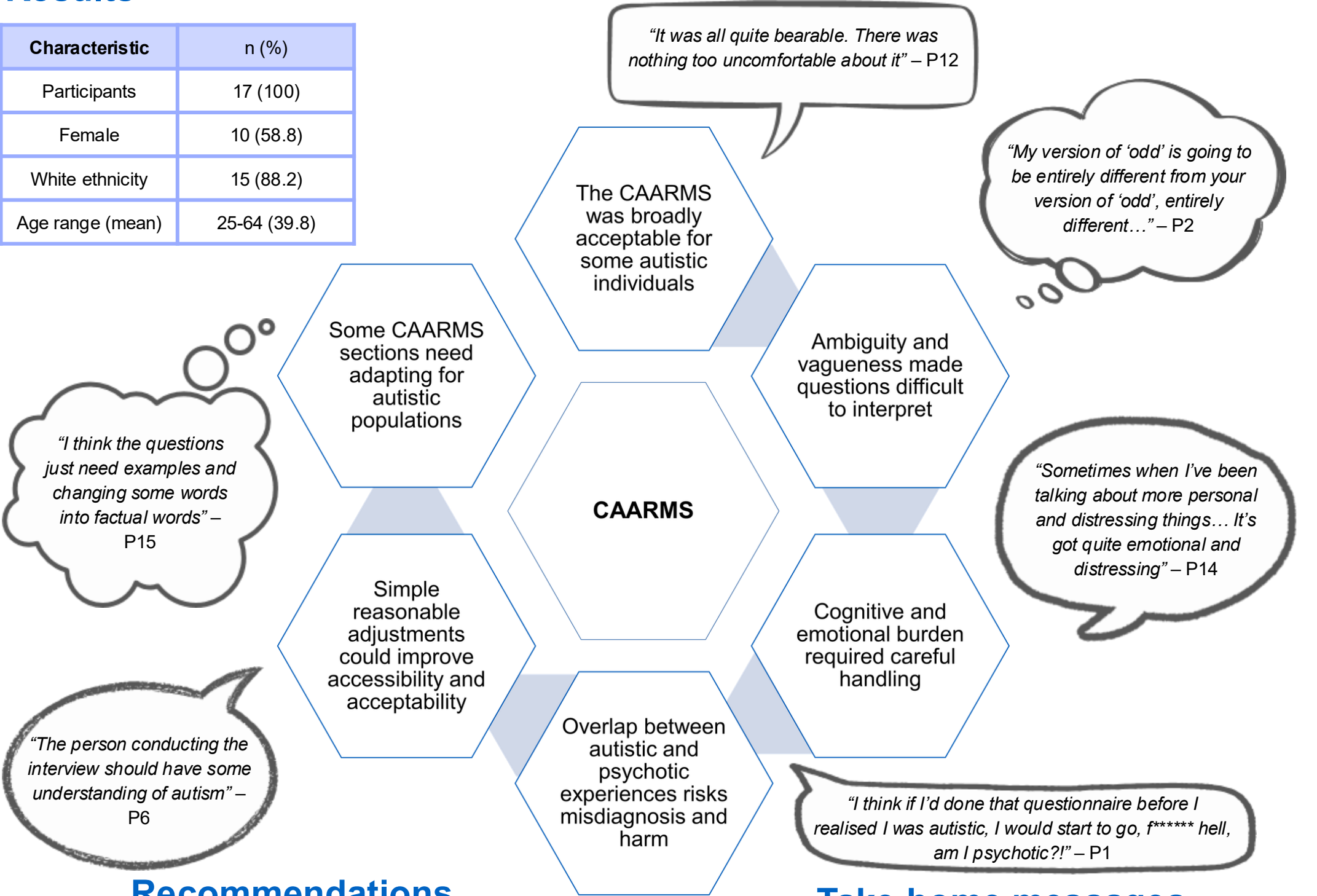
Autistic people are over-represented in psychosis services. The Comprehensive Assessment of At-Risk Mental States (CAARMS)¹ is widely used as a psychosis screening tool, but its acceptability for autistic adults has never previously been explored.

Results

Characteristic	n (%)
Participants	17 (100)
Female	10 (58.8)
White ethnicity	15 (88.2)
Age range (mean)	25-64 (39.8)

Methods

- Adults (18-65y)
- Diagnosed with autism by the Leeds Autism Diagnostic Service (LADS) in the previous 6 months
- Completed a face-to-face CAARMS assessment
- Followed by a semi-structured interview with the assessor
- Data analysis was thematic, informed by the Theoretical Framework of Acceptability (TFA)²
- A lived experience researcher (JM) was actively involved throughout the research cycle



Recommendations

Before assessment	Explain the purpose of the CAARMS Provide questions in advance Offer a written copy of questions
During assessment	Flexible pacing Offer regular breaks Clarify meaning throughout Ask about lifelong vs new experiences
Environment	Offer sensory adjustments Offer fidget toys and water
Clinician factors	Autism training Awareness of masking Explore the psychosis-autism overlap

Take home messages

- ✓ The CAARMS is broadly acceptable for some autistic individuals, but acceptability could be improved through simple reasonable adjustments
- ✓ Autistic experiences could be misinterpreted as psychotic symptoms by the patient and assessor; autism awareness and education is essential to reduce the risk of misdiagnosis and iatrogenic harm
- ✓ Future research should co-produce and validate psychosis screening tools in neurodivergent populations

References

1.Yung, A. R., Pan Yuen, H., McGorry, P. D., Phillips, L. J., Kelly, D., ... & Buckby, J. (2005). Mapping the onset of psychosis: the comprehensive assessment of at-risk mental states. Australian & New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry, 39(11-12), 964-971.

2.Sekhon, M., Cartwright, M., & Francis, J. J. (2017). Acceptability of healthcare interventions: an overview of reviews and development of a theoretical framework. BMC Health Services Research, 17(1), 88.