

GARC EVIDENCE SERIES

GLOBAL AUTISM RESEARCH GUIDE 2026

- 50 Essential Studies • 12 Evidence Lenses • Research Priorities
- Landmark and Recent Evidence Across the International Autism Field

WHY THIS GUIDE MATTERS

A curated global evidence map for researchers, practitioners, institutions and decision-makers: a trusted starting point for seeing foundational evidence, emerging directions, underrepresented populations and high-value research gaps.



2026

50

SELECTED STUDIES

12

EVIDENCE LENSES

2010-2026

PUBLICATION SPAN

GLOBAL

INTERNATIONAL SCOPE

WHY THIS GUIDE MATTERS

A stronger starting point for global autism research

Autism research is extensive, fast-moving and unevenly distributed across countries, age groups and research questions. GARC created this guide to make the field easier to navigate without reducing it to a single country, intervention model or discipline.

1 in 127 WHO global estimate for 2021 A global reference point - not a substitute for country-specific surveillance.	50 essential studies Landmark and recent research selected for orientation, evidence tracking and agenda building.	2010–2026 publication span A deliberate mix of foundational papers and current evidence.	GLOBAL research lens Research from multiple world regions plus international evidence syntheses and consortia.
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- 1

REDUCES SEARCH FRICTION Gives researchers and partners a credible entry point before they move into deeper database searching.
- 2

CONNECTS OLD + NEW EVIDENCE Places field-shaping papers beside current 2024–2026 research so changes in direction become visible.
- 3

EXPOSES GAPS Highlights underrepresented regions, adults, aging, minimally speaking people, gender-sensitive research and real-world outcomes.
- 4

SUPPORTS BETTER PROJECTS Helps teams move from “interesting topic” to stronger questions, comparators, methods, outcomes and replication opportunities.
- 5

BUILDS COLLABORATION INTELLIGENCE Shows recurring authors, journals, research networks and themes that can inform partnership and expert mapping.

Context source: [World Health Organization - Autism fact sheet \(17 September 2025\)](#) • WHO estimates that about 1 in 127 people worldwide had autism in 2021; prevalence varies substantially across studies and many low- and middle-income countries still lack robust estimates.

ABOUT THE GUIDE

What this guide is - and what it is not

The GARC Global Autism Research Guide 2026 is a curated international research-navigation resource. It is designed to orient readers to influential evidence, emerging directions and research gaps across the autism field while preserving a clear distinction between evidence summaries and clinical or policy recommendations.

THIS GUIDE IS A curated evidence map; a reading and orientation tool; a research-development resource; a foundation for evidence briefs, partnership mapping and future GARC research agendas.	THIS GUIDE IS NOT A systematic review; a clinical guideline; a diagnostic tool; a treatment recommendation; a replacement for reading the original study, guideline or local regulatory requirement.
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Selection principles

- **Scientific influence:** Papers that shaped how the field thinks about prevalence, genetics, diagnosis, intervention, communication, health or outcomes.
- **Evidence strength:** Systematic reviews, meta-analyses, randomized trials, large cohorts and major consortia are emphasized where available.
- **International breadth:** The selection deliberately reaches beyond a single country and includes global syntheses and studies from varied systems.
- **Lifespan coverage:** Children remain prominent in the literature, but the guide intentionally includes adults, aging, employment, health and quality of life.
- **Community relevance:** Priority-setting and participatory research are included because useful research is not defined by methods alone.
- **Recency:** Recent 2024–2026 publications are included where they add a meaningful new signal rather than simply being new.

Editorial discipline. The guide avoids ranking studies as “best,” does not infer treatment superiority from one study, and flags where evidence quality, generalisability or implementation context matters.

HOW TO USE IT

From reading to research action

1 SCAN Start with the theme that matches your question.	2 READ Use "Why it matters" to understand the paper's contribution in plain research language.	3 VERIFY Open the DOI and review the original paper, methods, limitations and population before application.	4 CONNECT Use the GARC research signal to identify a gap, replication idea, implementation question or partner theme.	5 BUILD Add the paper to the evidence library, Zotero collection or project bibliography and link it to a live research question.
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The 12 evidence lenses

01 Global landscape & epidemiology 4 selected studies	02 Equity, representation & research priorities 5 selected studies	03 Genetics & biological architecture 5 selected studies
04 Screening, diagnosis & familial likelihood 3 selected studies	05 Early intervention & developmental supports 11 selected studies	06 Communication & minimally speaking people 3 selected studies
07 Girls, women & gender-diverse autistic people 5 selected studies	08 Mental health & suicide prevention 2 selected studies	09 Physical health, mortality & aging 3 selected studies
10 Quality of life & lived outcomes 5 selected studies	11 Transition, participation & employment 4 selected studies	12 Global strategy & research systems Strategic reference set

Card anatomy

01	Study title Authors Journal Year EVIDENCE TYPE • REGION Why it matters: concise interpretation of the contribution. GARC RESEARCH SIGNAL how the paper can inform future research, replication or implementation questions.
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What becomes visible across the 50 studies

1

GLOBAL DATA ARE IMPROVING - BUT UNEVEN

Population estimates and burden models are stronger than before, yet direct surveillance remains thin in many low- and middle-income countries.

2

HETEROGENEITY IS A CENTRAL FACT, NOT NOISE

Genetic architecture, developmental trajectories, support needs and outcomes vary widely; broad labels should not substitute for careful phenotyping.

3

EARLY SUPPORT RESEARCH IS MOVING TOWARD IMPLEMENTATION

The question is increasingly not only whether an intervention can work, but for whom, at what intensity, through which delivery model, and in which system.

4

COMMUNICATION RESEARCH IS BROADENING

Minimally speaking people and AAC research are shifting attention from speech alone toward multimodal communication, participation and autonomy.

5

LIFESPAN OUTCOMES ARE STILL UNDERDEVELOPED

Adults, aging, employment, physical health, mortality and long-term quality of life remain less mature evidence areas than childhood research.

6

COMMUNITY PRIORITIES MATTER

Participatory work increasingly challenges research agendas that are scientifically sophisticated but disconnected from day-to-day priorities.

01 GLOBAL LANDSCAPE & EPIDEMIOLOGY

How common is autism, how is it measured, and where are the largest evidence gaps?

4 selected studies

01 Autism spectrum disorder

Lord C, Brugha TS, Charman T, et al. | Nature Reviews Disease Primers | 2020

STATE-OF-FIELD PRIMER • International

WHY IT MATTERS A comprehensive synthesis of epidemiology, mechanisms, diagnosis, management and quality of life, useful as an orientation paper for the modern field.

GARC RESEARCH SIGNAL Use as a high-level map of what is established, what remains uncertain, and how major research domains connect.

SOURCE [doi:10.1038/s41572-019-0138-4](https://doi.org/10.1038/s41572-019-0138-4)

02 Global prevalence of autism: A systematic review update

Zeidan J, Fombonne E, Scorah J, et al. | Autism Research | 2022

SYSTEMATIC REVIEW • Global

WHY IT MATTERS Synthesised 99 prevalence estimates from 71 studies published since 2012 and highlighted wide variation across settings and methods.

GARC RESEARCH SIGNAL Prevalence cannot be interpreted without understanding case-finding, diagnostic practice, service capacity and local context.

SOURCE [doi:10.1002/aur.2696](https://doi.org/10.1002/aur.2696)

03

The global epidemiology and health burden of the autism spectrum: findings from the Global Burden of Disease Study 2021

GBD 2021 Autism Spectrum Collaborators | The Lancet Psychiatry | 2025

GLOBAL BURDEN MODELLING • Global

WHY IT MATTERS Estimated 61.8 million autistic people globally in 2021 and quantified non-fatal health burden across age, sex and world regions.

GARC RESEARCH SIGNAL Global planning needs better epidemiological coverage, especially where direct population data remain sparse.

SOURCE [doi:10.1016/S2215-0366\(24\)00363-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2215-0366(24)00363-8)

04

Prevalence of autism spectrum disorders in a total population sample

Kim YS, Leventhal BL, Koh YJ, et al. | American Journal of Psychiatry | 2011

POPULATION-BASED STUDY • South Korea

WHY IT MATTERS A total-population school-age study that identified many children outside existing clinical and special-education systems.

GARC RESEARCH SIGNAL How a system looks for autism can materially change who is identified and the prevalence that is observed.

SOURCE [doi:10.1176/appi.ajp.2011.10101532](https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.ajp.2011.10101532)

02 EQUITY, REPRESENTATION & RESEARCH PRIORITIES

Whose experiences shape the evidence base - and whose priorities are still underrepresented?

5 selected studies

05 Autism spectrum disorder in sub-Saharan Africa: A comprehensive scoping review

Franz L, Chambers N, von Isenburg M, de Vries PJ | Autism Research | 2017

SCOPING REVIEW • Sub-Saharan Africa

WHY IT MATTERS Mapped the evidence base in sub-Saharan Africa and documented major gaps in epidemiology, early intervention, school-based research and adult studies.

GARC RESEARCH SIGNAL Global autism science requires intentional investment in underrepresented populations and locally valid methods.

SOURCE [doi:10.1002/aur.1766](https://doi.org/10.1002/aur.1766)

06 What should autism research focus upon? Community views and priorities from the United Kingdom

Pellicano E, Dinsmore A, Charman T | Autism | 2014

PRIORITY-SETTING STUDY • United Kingdom

WHY IT MATTERS Found a mismatch between parts of the research funding landscape and the priorities expressed by autistic people, families and practitioners.

GARC RESEARCH SIGNAL Research agendas are stronger when lived experience influences priority setting, outcomes and study design.

SOURCE [doi:10.1177/1362361314529627](https://doi.org/10.1177/1362361314529627)

07

Autism community priorities in diverse low-resource settings: A country-wide scoping exercise in India

Dey I, Chakrabarty S, Nandi R, et al. | Autism | 2024

COMMUNITY PRIORITY-SETTING STUDY • India / Global South

WHY IT MATTERS A country-wide exercise that brought autistic people and families into priority setting in a low-resource context, broadening a literature historically dominated by high-income settings.

GARC RESEARCH SIGNAL Local research agendas should be co-designed with communities and should include daily living, communication, services and support priorities that may differ across settings.

SOURCE [doi:10.1177/13623613231154067](https://doi.org/10.1177/13623613231154067)

08

'We have so much to offer': Community members' perspectives on autism research

Haar T, Brownlow C, Hall G, et al. | Autism | 2025

COMMUNITY-ENGAGED QUALITATIVE STUDY • Australia / United Kingdom

WHY IT MATTERS Captured how community members experience autism research and what they want from future research relationships, including stronger inclusion and clearer real-world value.

GARC RESEARCH SIGNAL GARC can improve relevance and trust by building lived-experience participation into agenda setting, study design, dissemination and evaluation.

SOURCE [doi:10.1177/13623613241248713](https://doi.org/10.1177/13623613241248713)

09

Inequities in Community-Engaged Autism Research: Community Member Perspectives

Verdecias-Pellum N, Silverman C, Yudell M, Carroll-Scott A | Progress in Community Health Partnerships | 2025

COMMUNITY-ENGAGED RESEARCH STUDY • United States

WHY IT MATTERS Examined barriers, benefits and gaps in community-engaged autism research from autistic adults, caregivers and service providers.

GARC RESEARCH SIGNAL Participation is not a single consultation step; equitable engagement requires accessible processes, trust, compensation and influence over decisions.

SOURCE [doi:10.1353/cpr.2025.a956594](https://doi.org/10.1353/cpr.2025.a956594)

THEME TAKEAWAY International relevance requires both geographic diversity and meaningful community participation.

03 GENETICS & BIOLOGICAL ARCHITECTURE

What has large-scale genetic research established about heterogeneity and risk architecture?

5 selected studies

10 The Heritability of Autism Spectrum Disorder

Sandin S, Lichtenstein P, Kuja-Halkola R, et al. | JAMA | 2017

POPULATION FAMILY STUDY • Sweden

WHY IT MATTERS Large family-data analysis estimated a strong genetic contribution to autism liability while also identifying non-shared environmental contribution.

GARC RESEARCH SIGNAL Autism risk is highly heritable at the population level, but heritability is not determinism for any individual.

SOURCE [doi:10.1001/jama.2017.12141](https://doi.org/10.1001/jama.2017.12141)

11 Most genetic risk for autism resides with common variation

Gaugler T, Klei L, Sanders SJ, et al. | Nature Genetics | 2014

GENETIC ARCHITECTURE STUDY • Sweden / international

WHY IT MATTERS Showed that common genetic variation contributes substantially to population-level autism liability, alongside rarer variants with larger individual effects.

GARC RESEARCH SIGNAL A complete genetic model must integrate common polygenic risk with rare and de novo variation.

SOURCE [doi:10.1038/ng.3039](https://doi.org/10.1038/ng.3039)

12

Identification of common genetic risk variants for autism spectrum disorder

Grove J, Ripke S, Als TD, et al. | Nature Genetics | 2019

GENOME-WIDE ASSOCIATION STUDY • International consortium

WHY IT MATTERS A large GWAS identified genome-wide significant loci and demonstrated genetic overlap with other neuropsychiatric and cognitive traits.

GARC RESEARCH SIGNAL Common-variant discovery benefits strongly from very large, harmonised international cohorts.

SOURCE [doi:10.1038/s41588-019-0344-8](https://doi.org/10.1038/s41588-019-0344-8)

13

Large-Scale Exome Sequencing Study Implicates Both Developmental and Functional Changes in the Neurobiology of Autism

Satterstrom FK, Kosmicki JA, Wang J, et al. | Cell | 2020

LARGE-SCALE EXOME SEQUENCING • International consortium

WHY IT MATTERS Analysed 35,584 samples and identified 102 autism-associated risk genes, implicating both gene regulation and neuronal communication.

GARC RESEARCH SIGNAL Rare-variant studies can connect statistical risk to biological pathways and developmental timing.

SOURCE [doi:10.1016/j.cell.2019.12.036](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cell.2019.12.036)

14

Rare coding variation provides insight into the genetic architecture and phenotypic context of autism

Fu JM, Satterstrom FK, Peng M, et al. | Nature Genetics | 2022

RARE-VARIANT ASSOCIATION STUDY • International consortium

WHY IT MATTERS Joint analysis of rare coding variants and copy-number variation in 63,237 individuals identified dozens of strongly associated genes and clarified overlap with developmental delay.

GARC RESEARCH SIGNAL Phenotype-aware genetic analysis is essential for distinguishing autism-related and broader neurodevelopmental risk.

SOURCE [doi:10.1038/s41588-022-01104-0](https://doi.org/10.1038/s41588-022-01104-0)

THEME TAKEAWAY Large-scale biology is strongest when paired with careful phenotype definition and transparent limits on individual prediction.

04 SCREENING, DIAGNOSIS & FAMILIAL LIKELIHOOD

What supports earlier identification, and how should risk be interpreted without overclaiming?

3 selected studies

15

Validation of the Modified Checklist for Autism in Toddlers, Revised With Follow-up (M-CHAT-R/F)

Robins DL, Casagrande K, Barton M, et al. | Pediatrics | 2014

SCREENING VALIDATION • United States

WHY IT MATTERS Validated a widely used two-stage toddler screener in more than 16,000 children and established a practical risk algorithm for primary care.

GARC RESEARCH SIGNAL Screening performs best when paired with structured follow-up and clear referral pathways.

SOURCE [doi:10.1542/peds.2013-1813](https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2013-1813)

16

Evaluation of the Diagnostic Stability of the Early Autism Spectrum Disorder Phenotype in the General Population Starting at 12 Months

Pierce K, Gazestani VH, Bacon E, et al. | JAMA Pediatrics | 2019

PROSPECTIVE COHORT STUDY • United States

WHY IT MATTERS In 1,269 toddlers with repeated assessments, autism diagnoses became increasingly stable from the second year of life.

GARC RESEARCH SIGNAL Earlier expert assessment can be clinically meaningful when paired with longitudinal follow-up.

SOURCE [doi:10.1001/jamapediatrics.2019.0624](https://doi.org/10.1001/jamapediatrics.2019.0624)

17

Familial Recurrence of Autism: Updates From the Baby Siblings Research Consortium

Ozonoff S, Young GS, Bradshaw J, et al. | Pediatrics | 2024

MULTISITE LONGITUDINAL COHORT • Multinational

WHY IT MATTERS Across 18 sites and 1,605 infants with an older autistic sibling, the study updated prospective estimates of familial recurrence.

GARC RESEARCH SIGNAL Family history can identify a group that benefits from closer developmental surveillance without implying certainty for any child.

SOURCE [doi:10.1542/peds.2023-065297](https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2023-065297)

THEME TAKEAWAY Earlier identification is valuable only when it connects to appropriate assessment, support and longitudinal follow-up.

05 EARLY INTERVENTION & DEVELOPMENTAL SUPPORTS

Which intervention models shaped the field, and what do recent trials say about implementation, intensity and family-mediated delivery?

11 selected studies

18 Randomized, Controlled Trial of an Intervention for Toddlers With Autism: The Early Start Denver Model

Dawson G, Rogers S, Munson J, et al. | Pediatrics | 2010

RANDOMIZED CONTROLLED TRIAL • United States

WHY IT MATTERS A landmark early RCT of a comprehensive developmental-behavioural intervention that reported gains in cognitive and adaptive outcomes.

GARC RESEARCH SIGNAL Early intervention evidence should be judged by meaningful developmental outcomes, not only symptom measures.

SOURCE [doi:10.1542/peds.2009-0958](https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2009-0958)

19 Naturalistic Developmental Behavioral Interventions: Empirically Validated Treatments for Autism Spectrum Disorder

Schreibman L, Dawson G, Stahmer AC, et al. | Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders | 2015

CONSENSUS / CONCEPTUAL SYNTHESIS • International expert group

WHY IT MATTERS Defined the NDBI family of interventions that integrates developmental science with behavioural learning principles in natural contexts.

GARC RESEARCH SIGNAL Clear intervention taxonomy improves research comparability, implementation and decision-making.

SOURCE [doi:10.1007/s10803-015-2407-8](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-015-2407-8)

20

Parent-mediated social communication therapy for young children with autism (PACT): long-term follow-up of a randomised controlled trial

Pickles A, Le Couteur A, Leadbitter K, et al. | The Lancet | 2016

LONG-TERM RCT FOLLOW-UP • United Kingdom

WHY IT MATTERS Long-term follow-up of PACT provided evidence that a parent-mediated social-communication intervention can have durable effects.

GARC RESEARCH SIGNAL Long follow-up periods are critical for understanding whether early treatment effects persist beyond the intervention window.

SOURCE [doi:10.1016/S0140-6736\(16\)31229-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(16)31229-6)

21

Project AIM: Autism intervention meta-analysis for studies of young children

Sandbank M, Bottema-Beutel K, Crowley S, et al. | Psychological Bulletin | 2020

SYSTEMATIC REVIEW & META-ANALYSIS • International evidence base

WHY IT MATTERS Synthesised 130 independent samples and showed that estimated effects vary by intervention type, outcome type and study-quality restrictions.

GARC RESEARCH SIGNAL Intervention claims should be interpreted through design quality, measurement distance and risk of bias.

SOURCE [doi:10.1037/bul0000215](https://doi.org/10.1037/bul0000215)

22

Autism intervention meta-analysis of early childhood studies (Project AIM): updated systematic review and secondary analysis

Sandbank M, Bottema-Beutel K, Crowley LaPoint S, et al. | BMJ | 2023

UPDATED SYSTEMATIC REVIEW & META-ANALYSIS • International evidence base

WHY IT MATTERS Updated the evidence base to 252 studies and 13,304 participants, with effects stratified by risk of bias and outcome domain.

GARC RESEARCH SIGNAL Small average effects can still matter, but confidence depends on study design, outcome selection and generalisation.

SOURCE [doi:10.1136/bmj-2023-076733](https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj-2023-076733)

23

Randomized, controlled trial of a mixed Early Start Denver Model for toddlers and preschoolers with autism

Yang Y, Wang H, Xu H, et al. | Autism Research | 2023

RANDOMIZED CONTROLLED TRIAL • China

WHY IT MATTERS A large Chinese trial compared a mixed ESDM programme with mixed discrete-trial teaching in 249 young autistic children.

GARC RESEARCH SIGNAL Cross-cultural intervention research is necessary before assuming that effectiveness and delivery models transfer across systems.

SOURCE [doi:10.1002/aur.3006](https://doi.org/10.1002/aur.3006)

24

Complex, low-intensity, individualised naturalistic developmental behavioural intervention in toddlers and pre-schoolers with autism spectrum disorder: The A-FFIP trial

Freitag CM, Kirchner M, Sauer LD, et al. | Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry | 2025

MULTICENTRE RANDOMIZED CONTROLLED TRIAL • Germany

WHY IT MATTERS A multicentre, observer-blind phase III trial tested a manualised low-intensity NDBI against early intervention as usual over one year.

GARC RESEARCH SIGNAL Effectiveness, intensity and implementation should be studied together; scalable models need rigorous trials in real service systems.

SOURCE [doi:10.1111/jcpp.14162](https://doi.org/10.1111/jcpp.14162)

25

Parent-mediated Interventions Based on the NDBI for Children With ASD: A Systematic Review of Randomized Controlled Trials

Song Y, Kong X, Fu W, Song F | Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders | 2026

SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF RANDOMIZED TRIALS • China-led / international evidence

WHY IT MATTERS Synthesised randomized evidence for parent-mediated NDBI models, a delivery approach with particular relevance where specialist intensity is constrained.

GARC RESEARCH SIGNAL Future trials should report caregiver training fidelity, family burden, generalisation and culturally responsive implementation - not only child outcomes.

SOURCE [doi:10.1007/s10803-025-06791-2](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-025-06791-2)

26

Clinically Significant Outcomes of Early Intensive Behavioral Intervention for Children With Autism Spectrum Disorders: An Individual Participant Data Meta-Analysis

Eldevik S, Strømngren B, Eikeseth S, et al. | Autism Research | 2026

INDIVIDUAL PARTICIPANT DATA META-ANALYSIS • Norway-led / international evidence

WHY IT MATTERS Combined participant-level data from 15 studies to examine clinically meaningful change in adaptive behavior, intellectual functioning and autism severity, while noting serious risk-of-bias limitations.

GARC RESEARCH SIGNAL GARC should distinguish statistical change from clinically meaningful change and report evidence certainty alongside effect estimates.

SOURCE [doi:10.1002/aur.70169](https://doi.org/10.1002/aur.70169)

27

Comparative efficacy of family mediated intervention versus early intensive behavioural intervention on symptom domains in children with autism spectrum disorder: A randomized controlled trial

Ranjan R, Jain M, Sinha M, et al. | Asian Journal of Psychiatry | 2024

RANDOMIZED NON-INFERIORITY TRIAL • India

WHY IT MATTERS Compared a family-mediated intervention with EIBI in 50 children and reported non-inferiority on the study's primary symptom outcome at six months.

GARC RESEARCH SIGNAL Family-mediated delivery is a high-value research direction for settings where workforce, cost and access limit intensive specialist services.

SOURCE [doi:10.1016/j.ajp.2024.104052](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ajp.2024.104052)

28

Feasibility and acceptability of a caregiver-mediated early support program, delivered online, for infants at elevated familial likelihood for autism: A feasibility randomized controlled trial

Meera SS, Srikar M, Raju R, et al. | Autism Research | 2024

FEASIBILITY RANDOMIZED CONTROLLED TRIAL • India

WHY IT MATTERS Tested online delivery of a manualised caregiver-mediated early support programme in 36 infants at elevated familial likelihood for autism.

GARC RESEARCH SIGNAL Digital and task-shared early support models should first establish feasibility, acceptability and fidelity before making effectiveness claims.

SOURCE [doi:10.1002/aur.3217](https://doi.org/10.1002/aur.3217)

THEME TAKEAWAY Intervention evidence is increasingly about fit, fidelity, delivery systems, burden, equity and generalisation - not a single universal model.

06

COMMUNICATION & MINIMALLY SPEAKING PEOPLE

How is the field moving from speech-only outcomes toward multimodal communication and individualized support?

3 selected studies

29

Communication Interventions for Minimally Verbal Children With Autism: A Sequential Multiple Assignment Randomized Trial

Kasari C, Kaiser A, Goods K, et al. | Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry | 2014

ADAPTIVE RANDOMIZED TRIAL • United States

WHY IT MATTERS Tested an adaptive communication intervention and the addition of a speech-generating device for minimally verbal school-age children.

GARC RESEARCH SIGNAL AAC and speech-generating technology should be studied as part of responsive, individualised communication support.

SOURCE [doi:10.1016/j.jaac.2014.01.019](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jaac.2014.01.019)

30

The Effect of Naturalistic Developmental Behavioral Interventions and Aided AAC on the Language Development of Children on the Autism Spectrum with Minimal Speech: A Systematic Review and Meta-analysis

Pope L, Light J, Laubscher E | Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders | 2025

SYSTEMATIC REVIEW & META-ANALYSIS • International evidence base

WHY IT MATTERS Reviewed 29 studies and found that NDBI approaches supported language development, with larger aggregate effects when aided AAC was included.

GARC RESEARCH SIGNAL Communication research should test AAC as a core support option and measure broader communicative functions, autonomy and participation.

SOURCE [doi:10.1007/s10803-024-06382-7](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-024-06382-7)

31

Motor-Communication Skill Link in Minimally Speaking Children on the Autism Spectrum from the U.S. and India

Suswaram S, Muller K | Autism Research | 2025

CROSS-NATIONAL OBSERVATIONAL STUDY • United States / India

WHY IT MATTERS Studied 67 minimally speaking children and linked motor skill profiles with communication, highlighting the value of looking beyond speech alone.

GARC RESEARCH SIGNAL GARC research with minimally speaking people should use multidomain assessment and avoid treating communication as an isolated variable.

SOURCE [doi:10.1002/aur.70033](https://doi.org/10.1002/aur.70033)

THEME TAKEAWAY Communication research should include multimodal expression and outcomes beyond requesting or spoken-word counts.

07

GIRLS, WOMEN & GENDER-DIVERSE AUTISTIC PEOPLE

What does research on sex, gender, camouflaging and identity reveal about recognition and hidden support needs?

5 selected studies

32

What Is the Male-to-Female Ratio in Autism Spectrum Disorder? A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis

Loomes R, Hull L, Mandy WPL | Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry | 2017

SYSTEMATIC REVIEW & META-ANALYSIS • International

WHY IT MATTERS Re-examined the commonly cited sex ratio and showed that ascertainment methods influence the apparent male-to-female difference.

GARC RESEARCH SIGNAL Research and services need detection strategies that reduce under-identification of autistic girls and women.

SOURCE [doi:10.1016/j.jaac.2017.03.013](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jaac.2017.03.013)

33

“Putting on My Best Normal”: Social Camouflaging in Adults with Autism Spectrum Conditions

Hull L, Petrides KV, Allison C, et al. | Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders | 2017

QUALITATIVE STUDY • United Kingdom

WHY IT MATTERS Explored why autistic adults camouflage, how they do it, and the personal costs associated with masking and compensation.

GARC RESEARCH SIGNAL Observable behaviour alone may underestimate support needs and internal strain.

SOURCE [doi:10.1007/s10803-017-3166-5](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-017-3166-5)

34

Sex Differences and Parent-Teacher Discrepancies in Reports of Autism Traits: Evidence for Camouflaging in a School Setting

Putnam OC, McFayden TC, Harrop C | Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders | 2025

SECONDARY COHORT ANALYSIS • United States

WHY IT MATTERS In a sex-matched sample of 388 autistic youth, parent-teacher differences in reported traits were examined as a window into possible school-based camouflaging.

GARC RESEARCH SIGNAL Assessment can miss context-dependent presentations; multi-informant designs are especially important in research on girls and young people.

SOURCE [doi:10.1007/s10803-024-06498-w](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-024-06498-w)

35

A "Round, Bruising Sort of Pain": Autistic Girls' Social Camouflaging in Inclusive High School Settings

Goscicki BL, Scoggins ME, Herrera Espinosa G, Hodapp RM | Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders | 2026

MIXED-METHODS SCHOOL STUDY • United States

WHY IT MATTERS Examined where, why and at what cost autistic girls camouflage in inclusive high-school settings, based on reports from 31 adolescents.

GARC RESEARCH SIGNAL School-based research should measure the hidden effort and costs of adaptation, not only outward participation or academic placement.

SOURCE [doi:10.1007/s10803-024-06716-5](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-024-06716-5)

36

Camouflaging and identity development among autistic female and gender-diverse youth: A qualitative exploration

Drapalik KN, Magin DJ, Rinaldi ML, Christodulu KV | Autism | 2025

QUALITATIVE STUDY • United States

WHY IT MATTERS Explored how camouflaging interacts with identity development in autistic female and gender-diverse youth during adolescence.

GARC RESEARCH SIGNAL Gender-sensitive research should examine identity, stigma, authenticity and mental health alongside diagnostic presentation.

SOURCE [doi:10.1177/13623613251345855](https://doi.org/10.1177/13623613251345855)

THEME TAKEAWAY Context-dependent presentation and camouflaging can obscure need; better measurement should account for sex, gender, setting and lived experience.

08 MENTAL HEALTH & SUICIDE PREVENTION

Why must mental health be treated as a central lifespan research priority?

2 selected studies

37 Prevalence of co-occurring mental health diagnoses in the autism population: a systematic review and meta-analysis

Lai MC, Kassee C, Besney R, et al. | The Lancet Psychiatry | 2019

SYSTEMATIC REVIEW & META-ANALYSIS • International

WHY IT MATTERS Pooled 96 studies and quantified the high frequency of co-occurring ADHD, anxiety, sleep, depressive and other mental health conditions.

GARC RESEARCH SIGNAL Mental health assessment should be treated as a core part of autism research and support across the lifespan.

SOURCE [doi:10.1016/S2215-0366\(19\)30289-5](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2215-0366(19)30289-5)

38 A systematic review and meta-analysis of suicidality in autistic and possibly autistic people without co-occurring intellectual disability

Newell V, Phillips L, Jones C, et al. | Molecular Autism | 2023

SYSTEMATIC REVIEW & META-ANALYSIS • International

WHY IT MATTERS Synthesised 36 studies including more than 48,000 participants and found high pooled prevalence of suicidal thoughts, plans and behaviours.

GARC RESEARCH SIGNAL Suicide prevention, validated assessment and inclusive mental-health research are urgent priorities.

SOURCE [doi:10.1186/s13229-023-00544-7](https://doi.org/10.1186/s13229-023-00544-7)

09 PHYSICAL HEALTH, MORTALITY & AGING

What does the evidence show about health inequality, mortality and later-life research gaps?

3 selected studies

39

Premature mortality in autism spectrum disorder

Hirvikoski T, Mittendorfer-Rutz E, Boman M, et al. | British Journal of Psychiatry | 2016

NATIONAL REGISTRY COHORT • Sweden

WHY IT MATTERS A national-register study documented substantially elevated premature mortality and highlighted important cause-specific health risks.

GARC RESEARCH SIGNAL Lifespan autism research must include physical health, safety, healthcare access and preventable mortality.

SOURCE [doi:10.1192/bjp.bp.114.160192](https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.bp.114.160192)

40

The health status of adults on the autism spectrum

Croen LA, Zerbo O, Qian Y, et al. | Autism | 2015

HEALTHCARE COHORT STUDY • United States

WHY IT MATTERS Compared adult healthcare records and found a broad pattern of elevated medical and psychiatric conditions among autistic adults.

GARC RESEARCH SIGNAL Adult autism services need integrated healthcare rather than a narrow focus on developmental diagnosis alone.

SOURCE [doi:10.1177/1362361315577517](https://doi.org/10.1177/1362361315577517)

41

Aging in autism: A systematic review of cognitive, neural, and physical health findings

Dickinson A, Ryan D, Carroll JE, Lord C | Neuroscience & Biobehavioral Reviews | 2026

SYSTEMATIC REVIEW • International evidence base

WHY IT MATTERS Synthesised 56 studies on cognition, neuroimaging and physical health across autistic adulthood and aging, finding targeted vulnerabilities rather than a single pattern of accelerated aging.

GARC RESEARCH SIGNAL Aging research needs longitudinal, inclusive cohorts that include people with intellectual disability and track preventable health risks over time.

SOURCE [doi:10.1016/j.neubiorev.2026.106820](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.neubiorev.2026.106820)

THEME TAKEAWAY Health inequality and aging deserve dedicated autism cohorts, preventive-care research and lifespan data infrastructure.

10

QUALITY OF LIFE & LIVED OUTCOMES

How can research move beyond symptom change toward outcomes that autistic people and families value?

5 selected studies

42

A systematic review of quality of life of adults on the autism spectrum

Ayres M, Parr JR, Rodgers J, et al. | Autism | 2018

SYSTEMATIC REVIEW • International

WHY IT MATTERS Reviewed adult quality-of-life research and found both lower reported quality of life and limitations in available autism-relevant measurement tools.

GARC RESEARCH SIGNAL Adult research should measure outcomes that matter to autistic people, with instruments valid for diverse support needs.

SOURCE [doi:10.1177/1362361317714988](https://doi.org/10.1177/1362361317714988)

43

Predictors of quality of life for autistic adults

Mason D, McConachie H, Garland D, et al. | Autism Research | 2018

ADULT COHORT STUDY • United Kingdom

WHY IT MATTERS In 370 autistic adults, quality of life was associated with factors including employment, support, relationships and mental health.

GARC RESEARCH SIGNAL Quality of life is shaped by social context and support systems, not only individual clinical characteristics.

SOURCE [doi:10.1002/aur.1965](https://doi.org/10.1002/aur.1965)

44

Quality of Life in Autism: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis of Patients and Caregivers

Castro K, Duarte CK, Silva E, et al. | Autism Research | 2026

SYSTEMATIC REVIEW & META-ANALYSIS • Brazil-led / international

WHY IT MATTERS A current synthesis of quality-of-life outcomes for autistic people and caregivers, including psychological, social and economic determinants.

GARC RESEARCH SIGNAL A GARC evidence programme should track both individual and caregiver outcomes and update them as new global evidence emerges.

SOURCE [doi:10.1002/aur.70348](https://doi.org/10.1002/aur.70348)

45

What Matters Most? An Exploration of Quality of Life Through the Everyday Experiences of Autistic Young People and Adults

Merrington H, Gibbs V, Haas K, et al. | Autism in Adulthood | 2025

PARTICIPATORY QUALITATIVE STUDY • Australia / United Kingdom

WHY IT MATTERS Asked autistic adolescents and adults what a good life means to them, centering everyday realities such as sensory needs, health, home, relationships, acceptance and autonomy.

GARC RESEARCH SIGNAL Quality-of-life outcomes should be defined with autistic people and should include environments, supports and self-determined goals.

SOURCE [doi:10.1089/aut.2023.0127](https://doi.org/10.1089/aut.2023.0127)

46

Autism Spectrum Disorder in adults: an integrative review about strategies for promotion and maintenance of quality of life

Laguna GGC, Rodrigues IB, Neves SES, et al. | São Paulo Medical Journal | 2025

INTEGRATIVE REVIEW • Brazil-led / international evidence

WHY IT MATTERS Reviewed strategies associated with quality of life in autistic adults and highlighted the relative scarcity of lifespan-focused evidence.

GARC RESEARCH SIGNAL GARC should treat adult life, community participation and long-term support as core research domains rather than extensions of child services.

SOURCE [doi:10.1590/1516-3180.2024.0324.R1.14042025](https://doi.org/10.1590/1516-3180.2024.0324.R1.14042025)

THEME TAKEAWAY Quality of life is an outcome in its own right and should be measured with autistic people, not defined solely by clinical change.

11 TRANSITION, PARTICIPATION & EMPLOYMENT

What helps or blocks meaningful participation in education, work and adult community life?

4 selected studies

47

Employment and post-secondary educational activities for young adults with autism spectrum disorders during the transition to adulthood

Taylor JL, Seltzer MM | Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders | 2011

TRANSITION COHORT STUDY • United States

WHY IT MATTERS Documented low rates of community employment and participation after leaving secondary school, highlighting a major transition gap.

GARC RESEARCH SIGNAL Outcomes after school should be a research endpoint in their own right, not an afterthought to childhood studies.

SOURCE [doi:10.1007/s10803-010-1070-3](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-010-1070-3)

48

Employment programmes and interventions targeting adults with autism spectrum disorder: A systematic review of the literature

Hedley D, Uljarević M, Cameron L, et al. | Autism | 2017

SYSTEMATIC REVIEW • Australia-led / international

WHY IT MATTERS Reviewed employment-focused evidence and identified major limitations in study design, measurement and participant characterisation.

GARC RESEARCH SIGNAL Vocational research needs stronger designs, employer-level outcomes and attention to individual differences.

SOURCE [doi:10.1177/1362361316661855](https://doi.org/10.1177/1362361316661855)

49

The Lived Experience of Autistic Adults in Employment: A Systematic Search and Synthesis

Thorpe D, McKinlay M, Richards J, Sang K, Stewart ME | Autism in Adulthood | 2024

SYSTEMATIC QUALITATIVE SYNTHESIS • International evidence base

WHY IT MATTERS Synthesised 34 studies prioritising autistic workers' experiences and identified barriers rooted in social demands, workplace design, knowledge and inclusion.

GARC RESEARCH SIGNAL Employment research should evaluate employer and workplace change, not only training autistic people to adapt to existing systems.

SOURCE [doi:10.1089/aut.2022.0114](https://doi.org/10.1089/aut.2022.0114)

50

Barriers and facilitators to achieving employment in mainstream settings in adults with autism spectrum disorder without intellectual developmental disorders: A scoping review

Holc S, Yailian A, Pernon E, Baghdadli A | L'Encéphale | 2025

SCOPING REVIEW • France-led / international evidence

WHY IT MATTERS Mapped factors that hinder or support mainstream employment among autistic adults without intellectual developmental disorders.

GARC RESEARCH SIGNAL Sustainable employment outcomes depend on organizational design, accommodations, manager knowledge and role fit as much as individual preparation.

SOURCE [doi:10.1016/j.encep.2024.02.012](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.encep.2024.02.012)

Global strategy & research systems

A research guide becomes strategically useful when it feeds a living institutional system rather than ending as a static PDF.



STRATEGIC REFERENCE | The Lancet Commission on the future of care and clinical research in autism

Lord C, Charman T, Havdahl A, et al. • The Lancet • 2022

The Commission frames autism research as a lifespan, personalized, evidence-based and cross-sector challenge, with explicit attention to neurodiversity, accessibility and participation.

SOURCE [doi:10.1016/S0140-6736\(21\)01541-5](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(21)01541-5)

Recommended GARC evidence cycle

- 1 DISCOVER** Quarterly searches in PubMed, Scopus/Web of Science where available, Crossref/OpenAlex and key journals.
- 2 SCREEN** Apply scope, population, design and relevance criteria; remove duplicates and flag preprints.
- 3 CLASSIFY** Tag by theme, age, geography, methods, evidence type, population and GARC priority area.
- 4 APPRAISE** Record study design, sample, limitations, evidence certainty and transferability before summarising.
- 5 TRANSLATE** Turn validated evidence into research cards, evidence briefs, gap maps and project questions.
- 6 CONNECT** Map authors, institutions, datasets and consortia for collaboration intelligence.
- 7 UPDATE** Release quarterly Research Watch updates and an annual revised guide with version control.

EVIDENCE USE NOTE

Clinical, educational, service and policy decisions should rely on the original literature, applicable professional guidance, local context and qualified human review. This guide is for research navigation and knowledge translation.

Where GARC should monitor the field

The list below is a practical surveillance set, not a ranking and not an exhaustive index. Journal scope and indexing status can change, so current publisher and database records should always be checked.

JOURNAL / SOURCE	WHY MONITOR IT
Autism Research	Multidisciplinary autism research; official journal of INSAR.
Autism	Multidisciplinary research with strong community, social and lifespan coverage.
Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders	Broad clinical, developmental, educational and intervention research.
Molecular Autism	Genetics, biology, biomarkers and translational research.
Autism in Adulthood	Adult life, services, participation, health and lived experience.
Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry	High-impact child development and mental health research, including autism trials.
Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry	Clinical trials, mental health and developmental psychiatry.
The Lancet Psychiatry	Major epidemiology, mental health, burden and policy-relevant evidence.
Pediatrics / JAMA Pediatrics	Screening, early identification, population health and child clinical research.
Research in Autism Spectrum Disorders	Applied and clinical autism research.
Research in Developmental Disabilities	Autism and broader developmental disability research.
Augmentative and Alternative Communication	AAC methods, technology and communication support.
Nature Genetics / Cell	Large-scale genetics, neurobiology and discovery science relevant to autism.

Recommended discovery sources

PubMed • Web of Science • Scopus • Crossref • OpenAlex • Google Scholar • Cochrane Library • WHO • INSAR / Autism Research • SFARI / SPARK research updates

Priority signals for 2026–2027

01 Global surveillance & underrepresented regions

Comparable population data from Africa, South Asia, Latin America, the Middle East and other underrepresented settings; culturally valid ascertainment and service-linked surveillance.

02 Women, girls & gender-diverse people

Detection, camouflaging, differential diagnosis, mental health, late identification, identity and measurement bias.

03 Adults & aging

Longitudinal cohorts, preventive health, neurodegeneration, sensory health, independent living, caregiving and later-life service models.

04 Minimally speaking people & AAC

Communication autonomy, multimodal outcomes, generalisation, adult AAC, technology and participation.

05 Mental health & suicide prevention

Validated risk tools, crisis pathways, treatment trials and services designed with autistic people.

06 Implementation science

Which evidence-based supports can be delivered with fidelity in schools, community care, lower-resource settings and digital or task-shared models.

07 Precision & heterogeneity

Integration of genomic, developmental, behavioral and health data without assuming that one biological pathway explains all autism.

08 Quality of life & community-defined outcomes

Belonging, autonomy, wellbeing, health, family outcomes and measures co-designed with autistic people and families.

09 Employment & economic participation

Employer-level interventions, accommodations, manager practice, retention, career progression and economic outcomes.

10 Research equity & participation

Accessible recruitment, compensation, representation of intellectual disability, non-speaking participants, diverse cultures and community governance.

The 50 selected studies

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3. GBD 2021 Autism Spectrum Collaborators (2025). The global epidemiology and health burden of the autism spectrum: findings from the Global Burden of Disease Study 2021. *The Lancet Psychiatry*. [10.1016/S2215-0366\(24\)00363-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2215-0366(24)00363-8)
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Strategic & context references

- [The Lancet Commission on the future of care and clinical research in autism](#)
- [World Health Organization - Autism fact sheet, updated 17 September 2025](#)
- [CDC - Data and Statistics on Autism Spectrum Disorder \(US surveillance context\)](#)

How GARC should use this publication

PUBLIC KNOWLEDGE PRODUCT	Publish this PDF as the annual flagship orientation guide in the GARC Knowledge Centre.
MASTER EVIDENCE LIBRARY	Create a structured record for every paper: DOI, authors, institutions, region, age group, methods, sample, outcomes, limitations and GARC theme.
QUARTERLY RESEARCH WATCH	Add new high-value studies every quarter and flag changes to the 2027 edition rather than waiting for a full annual rebuild.
EVIDENCE BRIEFS	Turn clusters of studies into short products such as “AAC & Minimally Speaking People,” “Autism & Aging,” or “Global Prevalence & Data Gaps.”
RESEARCH GAP MAP	Convert recurring limitations and underrepresented populations into priority questions for the GARC Autism Research Agenda.
COLLABORATION MAP	Track recurring authors, institutions, datasets and international networks and connect them to partnership outreach.
RESEARCHER EXPERIENCE	Use searchable filters on the website so researchers can browse by theme, life stage, geography, method and evidence type.

The goal is not to collect links. The goal is to build a reusable global evidence infrastructure.

FROM EVIDENCE TO IMPACT

GARC develops research intelligence, evidence resources, collaborative research and practical knowledge products that connect global science with real-world priorities.

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