

Background

Some alternative treatments wrongly suggest that routine childhood vaccines cause autism resulting in vaccine scepticism and false claims about curing autism^{1, 2}. Many individuals with autism use alternative treatments³ but there is limited understanding of lived experiences with these treatments.

Study aim

To explore the experiences of vaccine-related and alternative treatments of autistic individuals.




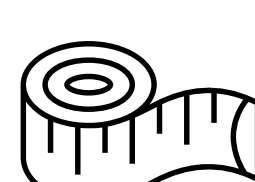
Methods

Thematic analysis^{4, 5} of 13 semi-structured interviews with adults with autism (n = 3), parents of autistic children (n = 5) and parents of autistic adults (n = 5).

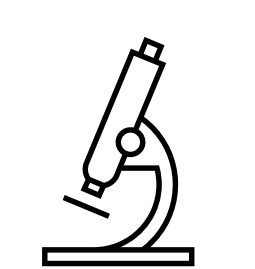
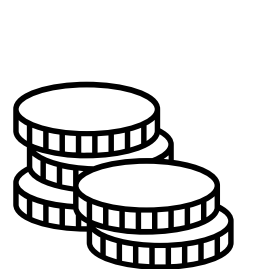
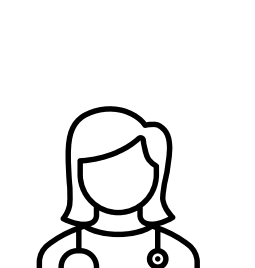
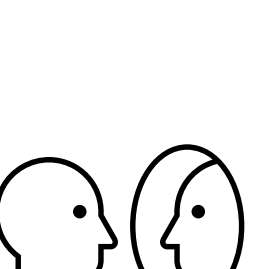
Results

Five main themes were identified, shown here →

Positive

-  Less intense / easy to implement
-  Personal attention and holistic approach
-  Physical health and general well-being
-  Focus on individual needs and preferences

Negative

-  Lack of scientific evidence
-  Tiring and expensive
-  False claims about curing autism and vaccine-related risks
-  Potential delay in accessing mainstream care
-  Reinforcing stigma and hindering acceptance of autism

Recommendations

Clearer guidelines, highlight harmful aspects.
Collaborative care services

1. Reasons for choosing alternative treatments

"I think homeopathy is a better way to give medicine, especially to young children"

"I thought I'll try anything they can come up with, just to get things a bit calmer at home."

2. The content of vaccine-related treatments

"She's said 'Yes, it is said that autism can be cured, but I'm not a big fan of it myself (...) I don't want to say I can cure your son's autism."

3. Experiences with alternative care

"Really a holistic approach."

"She really took her time and it feels more like you are being listened to, in my opinion."

"I am convinced that [curing autism] is not possible and I think that you wrongfully give parents hope."

4. Outcomes of the vaccine-related treatment

"It could have been cured, and we didn't succeed (...) and then you keep fighting it all your life."

"They helped him to get more peace in his mind"

"I think I can say that I have childhood traumas from that"

5. Future directions for treatment autism

"More collaboration."

"[More] time, attention and, in the case of autism, fixed points of contact."

References

- ¹ Dubé, E., et al. (2013). *Human Vaccines & Immunotherapeutics*, 9(8), 1763–1773.
² Höfer, J., et al. (2017). *Autism*, 21(4), 387–402.
³ Jonkman, K.M., et al. (2022). *Research in Autism Spectrum Disorders*, 98, Article 102046.
⁴ Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101.
⁵ Byrne, D. (2022). *Quality & Quantity*, 56, 1391–1412.

Find full paper here →



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