



**"Autistic Women as Mothers – The Lies and the Truth" © by Planet Autism**

**What Has Been Happening to Autistic Mothers?**

**"Four-year-old boy will be taken away from parents with learning difficulties"**

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3405217/Four-year-old-boy-taken-away-parents-learning-difficulties-social-workers-say-s-not-getting-cuddles-needs.html>

*"The parents were devoted to the boy, would never harm him, and had done nothing they should be blamed for.*

*The mother was said to show 'features of autistic thinking' and has difficulties thinking flexibly.*

*Yesterday's case, described by Sir James as 'desperately sad and worrying', is the latest in a series of deeply disputed adoptions in which children have been taken from well-meaning parents who suffer from learning disabilities."*

Yet this ruling came from [Munby](#) (president of the family division) himself, proving he doesn't abide by his own principles, and if he is taking children from autistic mothers, it's a green light for all the other judges also.

Planet Autism is acquainted with the mother in the following case, a loving and intelligent mother with Asperger's, who had her child wrongfully removed and forcibly adopted on the basis of false allegations of FII. The child was unharmed, well-cared for and not at risk. There are a variety of incorrect statements and misrepresentations in the judgment:

**B (A Child) [2015] EWCA Civ 1053** <http://www.bailii.org/ew/cases/EWCA/Civ/2015/1053.html>

Presentation to the United Nations Human Rights Committee 2015:

**"Human Right Violations Against Parents That Are Autistic, Have an Autism Spectrum Condition"**

<http://www.autismwomenmatter.org.uk/featured/human-right-violations-against-parents-that-are-autistic/>

*"Despite there being **no cogent evidence** to suggest ASC women are unable to competently mother their children, there are personal **reports from both women and practitioners** that mothers may risk being judged and misunderstood on the basis of their 'non-typical' responses or characteristics or even just preconceived misinformation about the nature of autism.*

*Parents that cannot home school and are aiming for inclusive education within the education system can find their **autistic differences and unmet disability needs in accessing the system to be wrongfully interpreted as character flaws**. Barbara Martin of Cheshire based 'Multi Sports' is an advocate that has assisted autistic parents within schools. She states "autistic ladies are focused on getting to the bottom of their child's difficulties and having the right supports put in place. They particularly cannot tolerate injustice but their intense focus can be perceived by non-autistic people as obsessive or controlling". Mothers perceived this way can often be accused wrongfully as obsessing over their child's disability to the detriment of the child identity and be labelled (without psychological reports) as Fabricating Illness in their child. Please see Case Study Three, School and Fabricating Illness.*

One mother reported that she agreed to her children being removed, under the impression that the children were being taken for 72 hours as a form of respite. She was shocked to be given a few hour's notice the following day to attend court."

### "State Kidnapping of the Children of Autistic Mothers"

<https://planetautismblog.wordpress.com/2016/01/22/state-kidnapping-of-the-children-of-autistic-mothers/>

"Autistic traits in a parent, mean they may communicate in an atypical way, not show the deference professionals expect and are vulnerable to being misunderstood."

"When an autistic parent is in court, especially if they are undiagnosed, they face a system which despite the law, does not proactively provide reasonable adjustments and is a bed of ignorance and lack of awareness of autism by those in power. This leaves the parent highly vulnerable to being misinterpreted."

### "Autism: A Hidden Pool of Undiagnosed Mothers With Condition Emerging"

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2016/dec/26/autism-hidden-pool-of-undiagnosed-mothers-with-condition-emerging>

"Autistic women are, however, still likely to remain undiagnosed. A survey by the National Autistic Society found that 42% of females have been misdiagnosed, compared with 30% of males, while twice as many women were undiagnosed compared with men (10% compared with 5%). But experts are warning that these mothers risk having their children forcibly adopted in the fight to get them diagnosed and supported, *as social workers misinterpret the parent's autistic traits as indicating potential harm to the child.*

*"Their own autism, often undiagnosed, means they put professionals' backs up and can be accused of causing or fabricating their children's condition," said Gould.*"

Parliament have known about the issue of autism families being wrongfully targeted since at least 2003: <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld200203/ldhansrd/v0030205/text/30205-10.htm> (start at **5 Feb 2003 : Column 300** and see particularly **Column 316**). In fact, research evidences that autism families have been being wrongly targeted and discriminated against since at least **1991!** <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1793147/pdf/archdischo0649-0033.pdf>

### [What Does the Research on the Parenting of Autistic Mothers Actually Show?](#)

Although the next article is not specifically about autistic mothers, but about mothers of autistic children generally, some autistic mothers may be undiagnosed and unaware of their autism (*autistic females present differently to males also, meaning they may be erroneously viewed as having some traits but not autism itself*) and clearly there were mothers with autistic traits and depression, who were all found to parent well:

### "Should scientists study mothers of children with autism?"

<https://spectrumnews.org/opinion/columnists/should-scientists-study-mothers-of-children-with-autism/>

"What we found, however, was that women are highly attentive to their infants' coos and babbles whether or not their older child has autism. **Even women who have features of autism (but not autism itself) or who are depressed respond typically to their infants.** So, whatever minor differences in language emerge in these infants do not stem from differences in mother-child communication."

2016 research on autistic mothers, by A. L. Pohl, S. K. Crockford, C. Allison and S. Baron-Cohen, Autism Research Centre, University of Cambridge article presented at the International Society for Autism Research (INSAR) 2016:

### **"Positive and Negative Experiences of Mothers with Autism"**

<https://insar.confex.com/insar/2016/webprogram/Paper22166.html>

*"Disturbingly, approximately 1 in 5 mothers of a child with autism, regardless of maternal diagnosis, were assessed by social services; of those, 1 in 6 had their child compulsorily placed for adoption. Finally, rates of allegations and investigations of suspected fabricated illness amongst children with autism and their siblings were two orders of magnitude higher than the known incidence the UK.*

Those figures are absolutely staggering. So already, mothers of autistic children are being targeted. And when the mother is autistic herself, this exacerbates the discrimination still further:

*"Communicating with professionals about their child was stressful for mothers with autism. Mothers with autism were more likely to report feeling misunderstood by professionals ( $X^2=18.356$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), greater anxiety ( $X^2=32.751$ ,  $p<0.001$ ) and selective mutism ( $X^2=39.679$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), and not knowing which details were appropriate to share with professionals ( $X^2=36.752$ ,  $p<0.001$ ).*

*Allegations of fabricated illness, and high rates of surveillance by social services suggest there may be discrimination towards mothers with autism."*

The Cambridge University blog about the above research by Professor Simon Baron-Cohen, Alexa Pohl et al: <http://www.psychiatry.cam.ac.uk/blog/2015/12/15/phd-student-gi/>

In fact, autistic women often make **great** parents. They are usually dedicated to finding the best support for their children and resolving their child's difficulties:

### **"Parents on the autism continuum: Links with parenting efficacy"**

[http://media.wix.com/ugd/58c8f1\\_08fce0b6a90f4f10baefd1b02e4f73e2.pdf](http://media.wix.com/ugd/58c8f1_08fce0b6a90f4f10baefd1b02e4f73e2.pdf) (original here: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rasd.2016.02.007>)

*"Group 1 consisted of 109 parents (29 fathers and 80 mothers) with ASD clinically diagnosed in both parent and child. These parents all had a clinically-confirmed ASD diagnosis and at least one child who also had been diagnosed with ASD*

*Mothers in Group 1 did not have low parenting efficacy relative to other groups, despite being comparable in AQ scores to their male counterparts. Our experience is that mothers of children with ASD are often more accepting of the personal impact of ASD, are frequently highly active in pursuing resources and support for their child ("The Complete Guide to Asperger's Syndrome" Attwood, 2007), and more open to studying and developing their skills as parents (based on the couple/family literature, this is generally more characteristic of females than males even in non-clinic families). Mothers' attention to detail, logical thinking, and persistence, combined with a tendency to approach rather than avoid family problems, may increase the chances of parenting successes and therefore build a stronger sense of parenting efficacy."*

### **"Adults and children with Asperger syndrome: Exploring adult attachment style, marital satisfaction and satisfaction with parenthood"**

[http://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/58c8f1\\_1b2dafb4b0174fc3832933b063e2b25d.pdf](http://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/58c8f1_1b2dafb4b0174fc3832933b063e2b25d.pdf) (original here: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rasd.2010.06.001>)

"Nor did the presence of a child with AS in the family elevate the prevalence of insecure adult romantic attachment in our study in contrast to Kissgen et al.'s (2009) findings for AAI reminiscences of parental attachment in households with children with a different disability (ADHD). Indeed, we found that even respondents in Group 2 (with both a spouse and a child with an AS diagnosis) were as overwhelmingly securely attached as control parents of similar age, gender and family size in without ASD anywhere in the family. ...the positive qualities (e.g., loyalty, intelligence) that high-functioning spouses with AS may often bring into marriage (Attwood, 2007) may conceivably compensate for difficulties in such a way that internal working models and spousal interaction patterns are not disrupted in ways that might diminish the neuro-typical spouse's adult attachment security over time.

Somewhat surprisingly, *global satisfaction with marriage remained equally high irrespective of the presence versus absence of an AS diagnosis anywhere in the family* and was likewise uninfluenced by spouses' attachment security. Thoughts of divorce were higher if the respondent had an insecure attachment style, but this was as true in the non-clinic control group as in families with AS and, indeed, there was no difference among any of the four diagnostic groups on this

variable, nor did total marital quality show significant main effects or interactions due either to attachment security or the presence versus absence of an AS family member when these two potential predictors were considered in conjunction with one another. In other words, *marital satisfaction seemed relatively robust against influences of AS in self, spouse or child* in this admittedly atypical sample of unpaid volunteer families living with AS who had remained married long enough to be rearing a child aged 3–18.

Equally surprisingly, *for parenthood satisfaction, results showed that parental AS diagnosis (either in the self or the spouse) did not significantly diminish the satisfactions and pleasures that respondents derived from their parenting roles.* Nor did the security of respondent's adult attachment style."

When the child is autistic it is even more beneficial to the child, for the mother to be autistic herself:

### **"Human Right Violations Against Parents That Are Autistic, Have an Autism Spectrum Condition"**

<http://www.autismwomenmatter.org.uk/featured/human-right-violations-against-parents-that-are-autistic/> (original here: [http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CCPR/Shared%20Documents/GBR/INT\\_CCPR\\_CSS\\_GBR\\_20656\\_E.pdf](http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CCPR/Shared%20Documents/GBR/INT_CCPR_CSS_GBR_20656_E.pdf))

"Sarah Hendrickx in her book 'Women and Girls with Autism Spectrum Disorder' reiterates this point in context of family life. "*Women with autism who had a child with autism spoke of a special bond with that child and of having the intuition to know what their child needed* even when it was different to what all the books and advice stated". Sarah elaborates on the positive benefits of shared neurotype (child and parent being autistic) "the heritability of autism can be a blessing for some girls growing up with autism in families where similar characteristics may be inherent in parents".

### **"Multiple and Intersecting Forms of Discrimination Against Autistic Women"**

<http://www.australianautismalliance.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Autistic-Women.pdf>

### **What if an Autistic Parent Does Need Support to Parent Adequately?**

Of course some autistic parents may need support to adequately parent, just some like non-autistic parents might.

They may need things explained to them in a concrete way or may need a parenting course, or ongoing support with parenting. But such things should be obvious **before** the person become a parent if they are significant enough to be a concern regarding parenting capacity, perhaps during

pregnancy check-ups and sometimes even before they start a family, if they have been accessing support services already for their autism, or their GP. The support should be organised and put in place to enable them to meet standards of adequate parenting from the beginning. So long as a child is safe (*physically and environmentally*), well-fed, kept clean and adequately clothed and the parent is able to comfort the child, all else is down to parenting-style and not for interference.

In the words of Judge Jack in *North East Lincolnshire Council v G & L* [2014] EWFC B192:

**"...the courts are not in the business of social engineering. The courts are not in the business of providing children with perfect homes."**

Or those of [Baroness Hale of Richmond JSC](#) (para 143):

**"We are all frail human beings, with our fair share of unattractive character traits, which sometimes manifest themselves in bad behaviours which may be copied by our children. But the State does not and cannot take away the children of all the people who commit crimes, who abuse alcohol or drugs, who suffer from physical or mental illnesses or disabilities, or who espouse antisocial political or religious beliefs."**

Or Hedley J in *Re L (Care: Threshold Criteria)* [2007] 1 FLR 2050, para 50:

**"Society must be willing to tolerate very diverse standards of parenting, including the eccentric, the barely adequate and the inconsistent. Children will inevitably have both very different experiences of parenting and very unequal consequences flowing from it. It means that some children will experience disadvantage and harm, while others flourish in atmospheres of loving security and emotional stability.**

**These are the consequences of our fallible humanity and it is not the provenance of the State to spare children all the consequences of defective parenting."**

A disabled human rights barrister has spoken out about the unlawful failure of courts to provide reasonable adjustments for autistic people in the courts: **"Disabled people 'denied access to justice by failure of judges on reasonable adjustments'"** <https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/disabled-people-denied-access-to-justice-by-failure-of-judges-on-reasonable-adjustments/> "John Horan said the legal profession was failing to address the discrimination faced by disabled people who rely on family and commercial courts, employment and benefits tribunals, and the criminal justice system." "...he says judges (and magistrates) are ignoring detailed guidance laid out in the [Equal Treatment Bench Book \(ETBB\)](#), which describes how they should treat disabled people." "Horan took on the case and appealed against the ruling, arguing that his client had not received a fair hearing because although the tribunal made some adjustments for Rackham, who has learning difficulties, Asperger's syndrome and anxiety, it failed to make the necessary reasonable adjustments that would have allowed him a fair hearing."

The discrimination that many autistic mothers are suffering is acute and with judges having made the statements above still autistic mothers are penalised and their children removed regardless – and even in many cases where their standards of parenting are better than those described by the above judges! So it's really important that if you are an autistic mother, you ensure that if any question arises as to your parenting abilities, you ensure you are as an autistic adult, receiving the support you need:

[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/190544/00374-2009DOM-EN.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/190544/00374-2009DOM-EN.pdf)

**"2.21 Where a parent is disabled it is important that they are receiving support to meet their own needs, and are supported in their parenting role so that they are able to fulfil their responsibilities.** Information is available on working with parents with a learning disability in *Good practice guidance on working with parents with a learning disability* (DoH and DfES, 2007) (available to download from [http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20090217020108/http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH\\_075119](http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20090217020108/http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_075119)). LSCBs should work

collaboratively with adult services to ensure that children are not put at risk of harm because of a lack of support to their parents. Where a disabled child has been subject to abuse or neglect, perpetrated by **someone\* other than a parent, the impact of such abuse on the parents needs to be acknowledged and appropriate support made available.**"

(\*bear in mind this can happen to disabled children in schools, by school employees)

**What you don't do is take away the children of autistic mothers because they don't tick your boxes, or you lack autism awareness!**

There is detailed advice available here, on what to do if you are targeted by professionals (P5-7):

**"False Accusations of MSBP/FII"**

[http://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/58c8f1\\_89e358cfff34fe181b3a98d63354860.pdf?index=true](http://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/58c8f1_89e358cfff34fe181b3a98d63354860.pdf?index=true)