**Participant Information Leaflet:**

**Study title:***Therapists’ experiences of the decision to broach unnamed autism in psychotherapy.*

**Introduction**

Thank you for considering taking part in this study. My name is Helen Forbes and I’m a student on the MSc Psychotherapy and Counselling programme at the University of Warwick. I would like to invite you to participate in my research into the experience of working with potentially autistic clients in therapy when that autism hasn’t been named by the client, or diagnostic status is unknown.

Before taking part it’s important that you are clear about what taking part will involve, why the research is being undertaken, and what the potential risks or benefits might be. Have a read of the below and, if anything is unclear or you’d like further information, please contact me using the email address given below.

**What is the study about?**

Psychiatric studies confirm that autistic people have a significantly higher risk of mental and physical health comorbidities, and a lower life expectancy. Guidance issued to medical professionals in the UK advises to hold the potential of autism in mind when working with people, in order that they may understand and better accommodate their needs and differences.

In therapy there is the additional risk of the double-empathy problem, whereby therapeutic work can fail through fundamental differences of expression and experience resulting from the combination of an autistic person with a neurotypical person.

In the UK, psychotherapy doesn’t have a diagnostic remit as a profession and therefore there is a lack of research or training around how to recognise whether someone may be neurodivergent or autistic, and what to do when we do identify this potential in our client work. This study seeks to fill this gap in the research literature, by exploring the experience of the decision-making process around broaching perceived difference in neurotype, specifically autism, in therapeutic encounters and the associated experience in the client work following the decision.

This study is only concerned with psychotherapeutic work with adults.

**What would taking part involve?**

If you’re interested in taking part please contact helen.r.forbes@warwick.ac.uk with brief information about your interest. Please share your preferred communication format (call, email, videochat) for an initial conversation and I will arrange to recontact you for screening, and to give you an opportunity to ask any questions.

Participants will be interviewed via Microsoft Teams (either audio or video). If you have accessibility needs around the format of the interview please make me aware in your initial contact.

Before being interviewed via an audio/video call you will be sent a link to join the session at our agreed appointment time. Regardless of the interview medium, the interview will be recorded on Microsoft Teams.

The final study will be submitted during 2025. Following award of the MSc it is intended to seek publication in peer-review journals as a means of disseminating the findings.

**What are the possible benefits of taking part in the study?**

The hope is that taking part will further highlight the area and promote open discussion about the topic. Sharing your experience will directly contribute to increasing understanding of this area. It may lead to future wider research which can improve the training and experience of psychotherapists, and clients.

**What are the possible disadvantages of taking part?**

As with any reflexive process there is a chance that revisiting your experiences may bring with it challenging or difficult memories and emotions. Space will be given as part of the interview to reflect on what arises. If you find you are left with difficult feelings to process we would invite you to draw on your usual therapeutic support resources (e.g. personal therapist, or clinical supervisor), or contact me for signposting to alternative services.

**Costs** There are no expected costs associated with participating.

**Confidentiality**

Data collection will take the form of semi-structured interviews recorded on MS Teams. Recordings will be stored in a password protected area of the University of Warwick OneDrive, and will be deleted after transcription.

You will be assigned a pseudonym ahead of our interview and are advised to enter this pseudonym as your name when joining the Teams meeting link, so that your name never appears in recorded material.

Research data will be anonymised and pseudonymised as soon as possible after collection. All direct and indirect identifiers will be given a participant number and removed from the research data. Your identity will be safeguarded by separately storing this securely. Pseudonymised and anonymised data will be held for 2 years after approval of the research project at the exam board and then destroyed in line with University Data Retention Policy. You are entitled to withdraw your data in accordance with the guidance below.

Interview recordings will not be shared with anyone, but pseudonymised transcripts may be reviewed by the research supervisor or external examiner. Direct quotations of sections of pseudonymised transcript may be quoted in the final research as evidence.  Data gathered during research may be disseminated not only in a report but also in different forms for academic or other subsequent publications and meetings, albeit not in an identifiable form, unless previously agreed to, and subject to limitations imposed by legislation or any applicable bodies, ethical, regulatory, or otherwise.

Following the interview, I will recontact you within 14 days (date to be agreed at the end of our interview) to verify your ongoing consent for inclusion in the study. You will have until the end of March 2025 to exercise your right to withdraw from the study, after which your data will form part of the analysis for the research. It may not be possible to separate data that has already been incorporated in the study as it will have been anonymised. As such it will be non-identifiable. If you withdraw from the study we will use the minimum identifiable information possible, to safeguard your rights, and will keep the data secure in line with the University’s Information and Data Compliance policies.

For further information, please refer to the University of Warwick Research Privacy Notice which is available here: https://warwick.ac.uk/services/idc/dataprotection/privacynotices/researchprivacynotice or by contacting the Information and Data Compliance Team at GDPR@warwick.ac.uk.

**What will happen to the study results?**

The results will form my MSc research dissertation. The results may be published in journals or used for presentations at conferences.

**Who is reviewing supervising the study and their contact details/ethics commission statement.**

Dr Jo Molle is the research supervisor for this study. jo.molle@warwick.ac.uk

**If the participant wishes to make a complaint?**

Jane Prewett – Head of Research Governance

Research & Impact Services

University House

University of Warwick

Coventry

CV4 8UW

Email: researchgovernance@warwick.ac.uk

Tel: 024 76 522746

If you wish to raise a complaint about how we have handled your personal data, you can contact our Data Protection Officer (Information and Data Director) who will investigate the matter: DPO@warwick.ac.uk.

If you are not satisfied with our response or believe we are processing your personal data in a way that is not lawful you can complain to the Information Commissioner’s Office (ICO).

**Thank you for reading this leaflet, and considering your participation in this study.**