

# Autistic women portrayed on Instagram - *A Dutch Autism empowering project*

## #FANN #actuallyautistic #letsputafaceonthatASD

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### Introduction

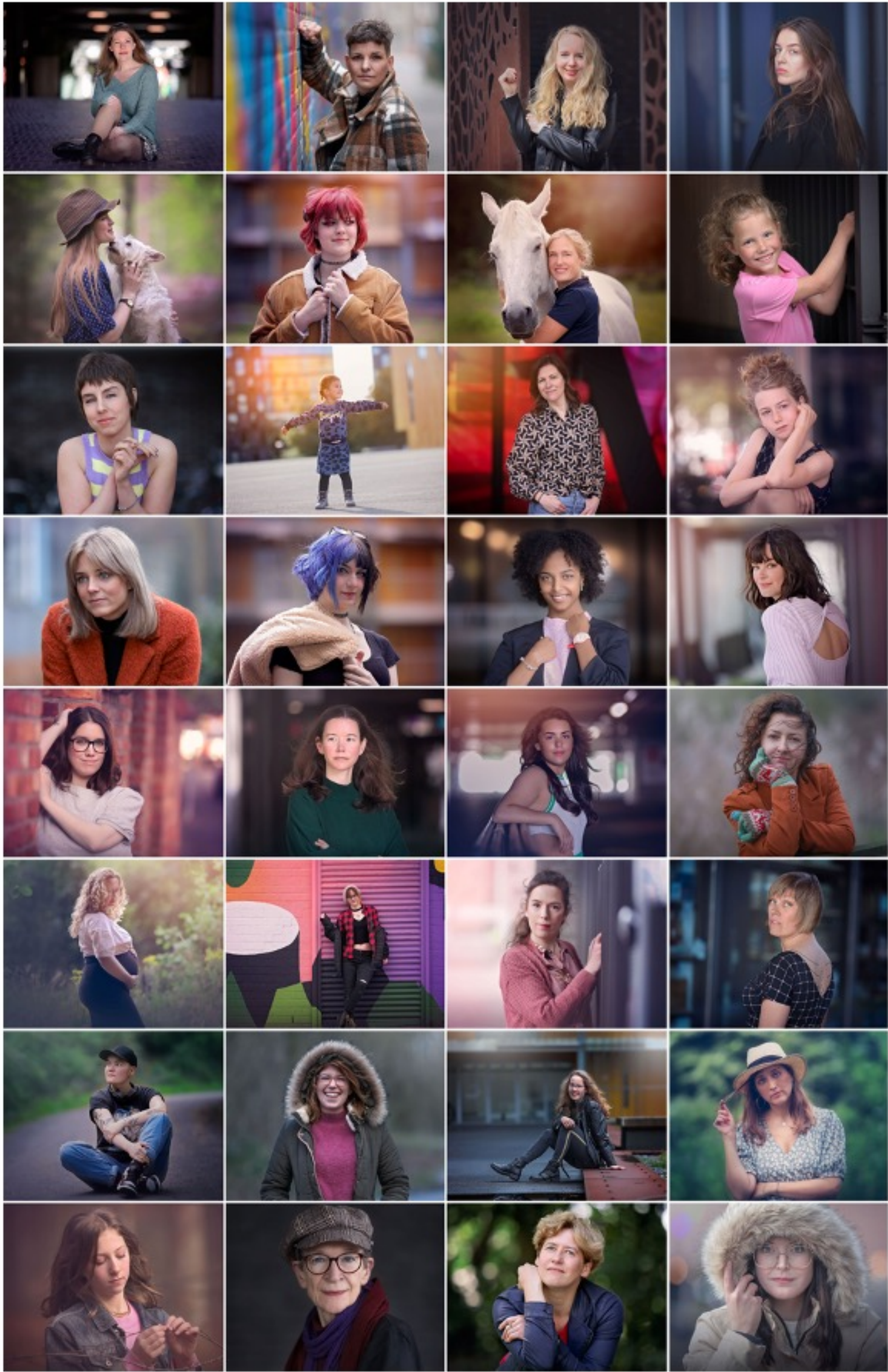
- **FANN:** Female Autism Network of the Netherlands tries to change times for autistic girls and women, by sharing their **honest and open stories** in an easy-accessible way, via **Instagram**. Their photos are accompanied by interviews, often portraying a perspective of personal recovery.
- **Personal recovery:** a deeply personal, unique process of changing one’s attitudes, values, feelings, goals, skills and/or roles ... a way of living a satisfying, hopeful and contributing life even with the limitations caused by illness’ (Anthony, 1993).
- **CHIME:** 5 major recovery processes involved in recovery from mental health, i.e., **C**onnectedness, **H**ope and optimism about the future, **I**dentify, **M**eaning in life, and **E**mpowerment (Leamy et al., 2011).

**Aim:** Get an understanding of how females cope with autism.

### Results

- **They have mutual** (spontaneously shared)  
Love for animals: 42% women, 83% girls  
Hobbies: 37% creative, 23% music, 19% writing, 14% nature & 14% sports
- **Negative impact of autism**  
58% sensory overload & 49% being overtired
- **Women with later autism diagnosis:** not knowing their ASD diagnosis led to physical & mental problems, & identity loss
- **Having autism:** 35% said it led to more perseverance
- **Their tips for autistic peers:** (1) 65% said stay true to yourself, (2) 16% said dare to ask for help
- **Instagram followers:** react overwhelmingly supportive

Instagram @FANN\_autisme



### Methods

#### Participants

43 autistic females

- n = 12 girls ( $M_{age} = 12.24$ ,  $SD = 4.20$  years)
- n = 31 women ( $M_{age} = 36$ ,  $SD = 9.28$  years;  $M_{age\ of\ ASD\ diagnosis} = 30.95$ ,  $SD = 10.45$ ; 33% romantic relation; 21% with children)

Photographs were taken by a female autistic photographer (author MS).

#### Measures

- **Interviews:** 4 questions answered in writing  
(1) Describe yourself briefly  
(2) Describe the impact of autism on your life  
(3) What are you proud of in your life?  
(4) What kind of tips do you have for autistic peers?

- **Analysis:** Qualitative content analysis

### Conclusions

- **The negative impact of female autism** was often characterized by sensory problems & being overtired.
- **CHIME:** the Instagram posts give other autistic females a way to experience connectedness, hope and optimism about the future, and gives them examples of an autistic identity, different meanings in life, and empowerment. They show a way to personal recovery, showcasing their troubles but also their perseverance and staying true to themselves.

#### References

Anthony, W. A. (1993). Recovery from mental illness: The guiding vision of the mental health service system in the 1990s. *Psychosocial Rehabilitation Journal*, 16(4), 11–23.

Leamy, M., Bird, V., Le Boutillier, C., Williams, J., & Slade, M. (2011). Conceptual framework for personal recovery in mental health: systematic review and narrative synthesis. *The British Journal of Psychiatry*, 199(6), 445-452.

