

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

## #FANN #actuallyautistic #letsputafaceonthatASD

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## Introduction

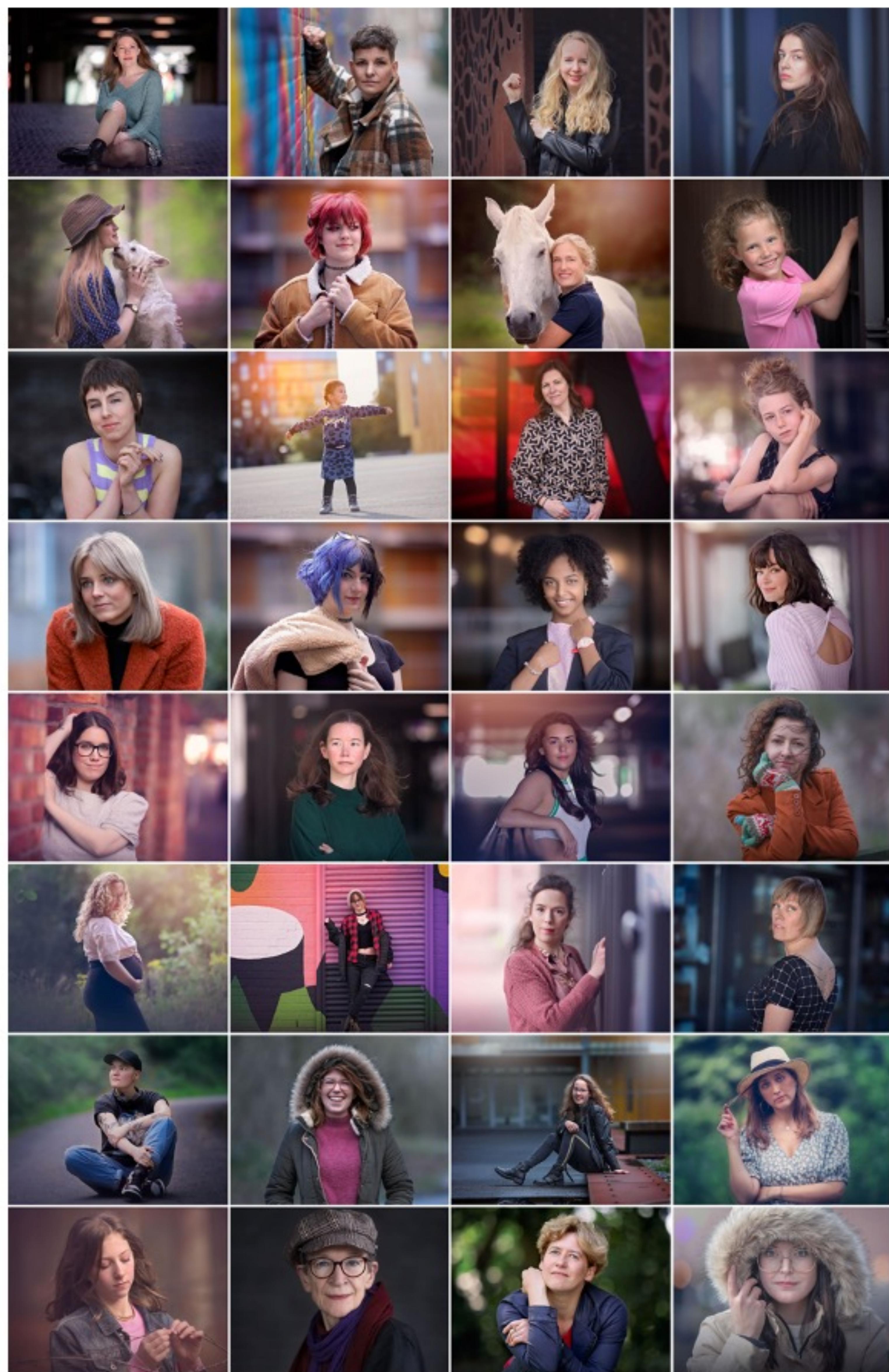
- **FANN:** Female Autism Network of the Netherlands tries to change times for autistic girls and women, by sharing their **honest and open stories** in an easy-accessible way, via **Instagram**. Their photos are accompanied by interviews, often portraying a perspective of personal recovery.
- **Personal 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., **Connectedness, Hope and optimism about the future, Identity, Meaning in life, and Empowerment** (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.

