Data from the 2007 and 2014 surveys were combined to generate a larger sample for analysis for autism. Estimates based on the combined dataset are more robust than estimates based on the 2007 or the 2014 samples separately. 31 potential cases were identified in the combined phase two samples, which is small for subgroup analysis and means caution with interpretation is required. Had all participants completed a phase two interview (see above), we estimate that about 120 cases might have been identified in the sample as a whole.

Using the combined sample the prevalence of ASD was estimated to be around 0.8%. Survey estimates are always subject to sampling error. Given this, we estimate that if all adults in the population had been tested, the proportion identified with ASD would probably be between 0.5% and 1.3%.

In January 2012, a further report was published. This report presented a new estimate of the prevalence of autism among adults aged 18 years and over. This was derived using data from the 2007 Adult Psychiatric Morbidity Survey (APMS 2007) in combination with data from a new study of the prevalence of autism among adults with learning disabilities, who are a key group to study because they could not take part in the APMS 2007 and have been found to have an increased risk of autism.

The study was based on adults with learning disabilities living in private households and communal care establishments in Leicestershire, Lambeth and Sheffield. The study comprised a relatively small sample with limited geographical coverage and did not include other institutional populations, such as prisons; the strength of the national level conclusions about the learning disabled population is limited by this. However, sensitivity analysis showed that the figures for overall national prevalence of autism were relatively insensitive to any inaccuracies caused by these limitations. This study does however include people in communal care establishments and people with learning disabilities, two non-mutually exclusive populations which were not covered by the APMS 2007.

The study demonstrates that autism is common among people with a learning disability and, in taking these into account, at 1.1 per cent nationally is slightly higher than the previous estimate of 1.0 per cent in the APMS 2007. Sensitivity analysis showed that the estimates for national prevalence produced by this study were relatively insensitive to inaccuracies caused by the limitations.

1 In this report, the terms autism and ASD are used interchangeably