

Bowden, Samantha L.J. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0000-6736-2098> and Miller, Paul K. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5611-1354> (2023) An occupational perspective on the lived experience of menstruation for autistic adults. In: Royal College of Occupational Therapists Annual Conference 2023, 14-15 June 2023, Online. (Unpublished)

Downloaded from: <https://insight.cumbria.ac.uk/id/eprint/6941/>

Usage of any items from the University of Cumbria's institutional repository 'Insight' must conform to the following fair usage guidelines.

Any item and its associated metadata held in the University of Cumbria's institutional repository Insight (unless stated otherwise on the metadata record) may be copied, displayed or performed, and stored in line with the JISC fair dealing guidelines (available [here](#)) for educational and not-for-profit activities

provided that

- the authors, title and full bibliographic details of the item are cited clearly when any part of the work is referred to verbally or in the written form
 - a hyperlink/URL to the original Insight record of that item is included in any citations of the work
- the content is not changed in any way
- all files required for usage of the item are kept together with the main item file.

You may not

- sell any part of an item
- refer to any part of an item without citation
- amend any item or contextualise it in a way that will impugn the creator's reputation
- remove or alter the copyright statement on an item.

The full policy can be found [here](#).

Alternatively contact the University of Cumbria Repository Editor by emailing insight@cumbria.ac.uk.

An Occupational Perspective on The Lived Experience of Menstruation for Autistic Adults

Samantha L.J. Bowden^{1,2} & Paul K. Miller²

¹Lancashire and South Cumbria NHS Foundation Trust, UK; ²Institute of Health, University of Cumbria, UK.

Introduction
It would be uncontroversial to observe that menstruation impacts upon individuals' ability to engage in everyday occupations, not least those around self-care, productivity and leisure (Brown and Lalor, 2020). Limited research has, however, explored the occupational consequences of menstruation for autistic persons, despite extant medical literature indicating that autism poses unique challenges in this respect (Jeffery, Kayani and Garden, 2013). Given this, the research reported herein qualitatively explores detailed verbal accounts provided by autistic individuals relating to their long-wave experiences of menstruation, and further investigates whether the Occupational Perspective of Health Framework (OPHF) can aid in understanding the influence of menstruation on the lives of autistic individuals from an occupational perspective.

Method
With full ethical approval from the first author's institutional agency at the time of request, a purposive sample of autistic adults with experience of menstruation (N=6) was recruited to sit for detailed semi-structured interviews online via the medium of MS Teams. All interviews were transcribed in full, with key redactions made at the point of transcription to protect participant identity (i.e., proper names, places and exact dates). Transcripts were then scrutinised and analysed using the formal approach outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). Pseudonyms in direct quotes below are used to protect individual identities.

Thematic Analysis and Key Evidence
Elle: "Obviously not every single neurotypical, but as a general rule they haven't got a clue. They do not understand how much more intense and how much more of an impact [menstruation] has, more on autistics because they don't live it, they don't get it at all. We are often just dismissed as exaggerating. And attention seeking and pity seeking, but no, this is actually this bad."
Fran: "When I have sort of sensory overload I get quite anxious. So then I start breathing really fast. My heart goes fast, my hands feel all sweaty and clammy. Yeah, so it sounds like quite a sort of severe reaction to like having to change a pad but for me that's just the reality."

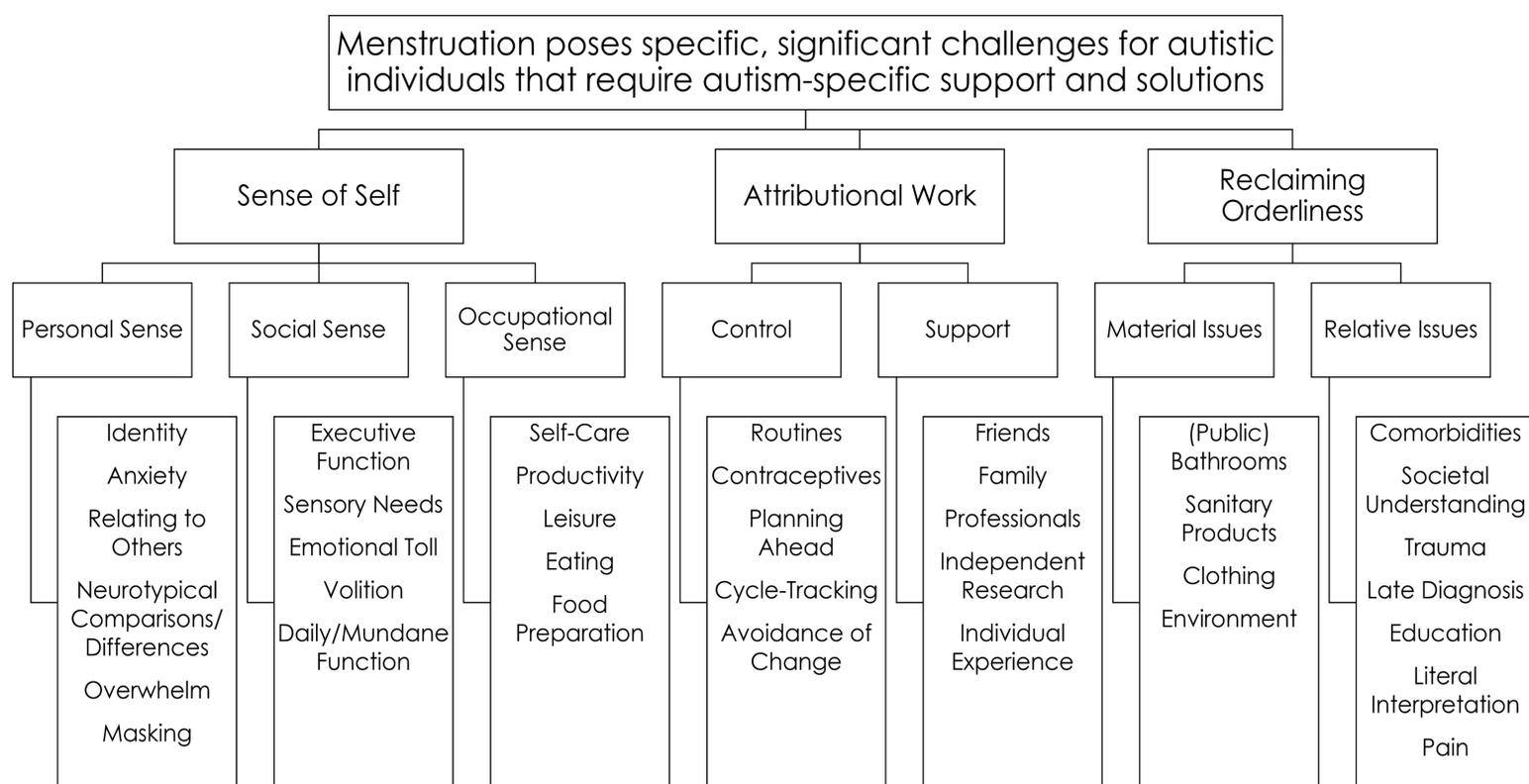


Figure 1: Thematic Analysis

To Do	Occupations of self-care, productivity and leisure
To Be	True selves when masking symptoms
To Become	Occupational beings due to long-term medication and need to plan
To Belong	In a predominantly inaccessible and anxiety inducing society

Commentary: There are unmet needs and a lack of understanding about an experience directly relevant to occupational therapy and occupational science. To be an effective profession, the impact of this need on occupational engagement, participation and deprivation must be considered.

Conclusions
Menstruation poses significant barriers to participating in occupations of self-care, productivity and leisure for autistic adults, and the OPHF provides a lens through which the implications of menstruation on occupational participation can be understood.

References
Braun, V, Clarke, V (2006) 'Using thematic analysis in psychology'. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2) pp.77–101.
Brown, T. And Lalor, A. (2017) 'Occupational Performance and Core Occupations: Self-Care, Productivity, Leisure, Play, Education, Sleep and Social Participation', 'In Brown. T, Bourke-Taylor. H, Isbel. S And Cordier. R (Ed.) *Occupational Therapy in Australia*. Sydney: Routledge, pp.227-243.
Jeffery, E., Kayani, S. and Garden, A. (2013). 'Management of menstrual problems in adolescents with learning and physical disabilities.' *The Obstetrician and Gynaecologist*, 15, pp.106–112.

