

16 June 2009  
For immediate release



Media  
Release

## More needs to be done to find autism cause

Alarming new figures that show a dramatic increase in the rate of autism in children highlight the need to identify the cause of the disorder, according to Swinburne autism expert associate professor David Austin.

Recently researchers from Cambridge University announced staggeringly high autism prevalence rates for British school children, concluding that as many as 1 in 64 are affected by the disorder.

Austin, director of the Swinburne Autism Bio-Research Initiative (SABRI), is deeply concerned by this figure, believing that the increasing rate of autism is the result of environmental factors.

"The growing prevalence of autism strongly suggests that an environmental trigger is at play," he said. "It is essential that the research effort into identifying this trigger, or triggers, is intensified as a matter of urgency."

"Various environmental factors have been proposed to play a role in autism including mobile phone exposure, accumulated low-level mercury exposure and poor early infant nutrition.

"While this research needs to be explored further, the current lack of understanding of autism means that we are in no position to be close-minded about this often devastating childhood disorder."

Prior to the Cambridge University research, the global autism rate was thought to be around one in 160.

Some in the field have attributed the significant increase to improvements in autism diagnosis, but the researchers from SABRI believe that this explanation is too simplistic.

"While it is true that the detection of autism has improved, it is not enough to explain the huge number of children who are now affected by the disorder," Austin said.

"Seventy years ago this disorder did not even exist. In the 1980s one in 1000 children were considered autistic and in 2009 this number has surged to one in 64.

"It is therefore vital that we support research that aims to understand the fundamental biological mechanisms of autism in order to identify cause, as well as effective treatments and preventative measures."

'Innovations in Autism', a special edition of The Electronic Journal of Applied Psychology was published today, June 16. It can be viewed at <http://ojs.lib.swin.edu.au/index.php/ejap>.

**ENDS**

**Media Contact: Crystal Ladiges +61 3 9214 5064 or [cladiges@swin.edu.au](mailto:cladiges@swin.edu.au)**