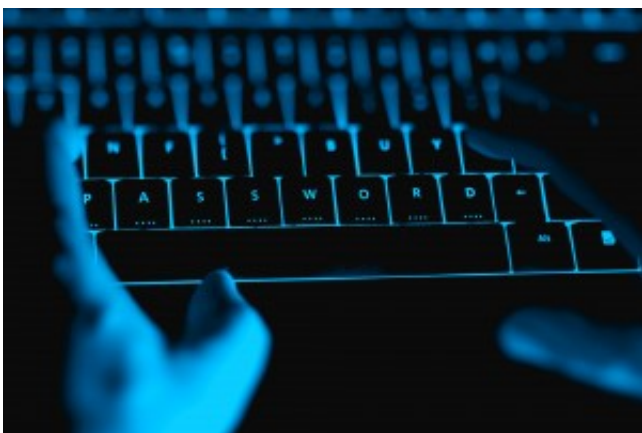


New study to investigate links between cybercrime and autistic traits

April 3 2017, by Andy Dunne



Our new study, launched today, will assess the links between autistic-like traits and cybercrime. Credit: University of Bath

A new project between the University's Centre for Applied Autism Research, the charity Research Autism and the cybercrime unit of the National Crime Agency (NCA) - launched today (Monday 3 April) - will examine the links between cybercrime and autistic-like personality traits.

While autism and higher autistic-like traits appear to be more prevalent among cyber criminals than for other types of crime, this link remains unproven. This [project](#) aims to cover all aspects of [cybercrime](#) – which could involve coding and malware, as well as activities carried out over the 'dark web' where some of the real challenges lie, the researchers

suggest.

In addition to providing important information on the nature and size of this issue and the degree to which autistic-like traits are represented in cybercrime offenders, the project will look to identify the risk factors that could lead to cybercrime activity, and consider what preventative measures could be taken.

By investigating whether there is a link between autistic-like traits, computer-related skills and cybercrime, the team behind the new project hope to understand more about the motivations and characteristics of people likely to commit cybercrime and how they became involved in offending. They hope that this can feed into the national cybercrime Prevent response.

Specifically the team want to understand more about the motivating factors that influence people to conduct cybercrime. It is thought that the challenge and sense of accomplishment that might come with cybercrime could be a motivating factor for certain people, and there is a growing concern that this might outweigh the consequences in some people's minds.

The research is being carried out by Katy-Louise Payne, Dr Ailsa Russell, Dr Katie Maras and Professor Mark Brosnan from the Centre for Applied Autism Research at the University of Bath.

Professor Mark Brosnan explained: "A growing perception among law enforcement agencies suggests that a significant number of people arrested in connection with cybercrime may be on the autism spectrum. But whilst media coverage has helped to shape public perceptions about this issue there has, to date, been little in the way of systematic research to really unpick this idea.

"Through our project we will explore whether autistic traits are actually associated with computer-related abilities and cybercrime. Whatever the conclusion, our findings will have important implications for better understanding why people do - and indeed do not - engage in cybercrime."

Richard Mills of Research Autism added: "We are not setting out to prove there is a link between cybercrime and autism. There is already a connection between [autism](#) and cybercrime in the public's mind, but our research will identify whether there is any truth in the association with [autistic traits](#)."

Richard Jones, Head of the NCA's National Cybercrime Unit Prevent team said: "Understanding the profile of cybercriminals and the possible intervention points that can stop offending will help inform our delivery of cybercrime Prevent activity. We are very pleased to be associated with this project that will have international implications."

Through this work the researchers also hope to highlight how highly computer-literate people might help prevent cybercrime for businesses, industries and governments concerned about cybercrime.

The project will involve interviewing people convicted of cybercrime and those served with 'cease and desist' orders. The research team behind this new study will also conduct a large-scale survey across the general population.

Provided by University of Bath

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