

Supplemental Materials

A - topic guide: exit interviews

Be sure to assure participants that they can take their time during the interview, for example to think about their answer before responding whenever they need to.

“Now I’d like to move on to discuss a little about your initial decision to take part in the STRATA study. Thinking back to the beginning of your time on the study, and the time leading up to this...”:

1. ...please tell me a bit about why you decided to take part in the STRATA study?

Possible prompts:

- Which factors were important in your decision?
- Were you considering any other options for anxiety treatment?
- Was there anything that concerned you when deciding whether or not to take part?

I’d like to now ask about your experiences of taking part in the STRATA study:

2. More than 8/10 participants carry on to the end of the study, and you’re one of them. Thank you. Looking back, please tell me a bit about what motivated you to keep taking part until the end?

Possible prompts:

- Why did you keep taking part in the study for the whole year?
- (If discontinued) what motivated you to continue with the study after stopping the study medication?
- Have you noticed changes in your mental health being in the study? / How did you notice these? / What do you think about these changes – were they expected, how did they impact you?
- (If noting a benefit) - to what extent do you think this benefit is due to the medication or taking part in the study more generally?
- What was it like taking the study medication? / What’s it been like not knowing which medication you’re taking? / How do you feel about the uncertainty?
- (If for example the participant considered discontinuing but did not) – in (x month/time period) we discussed that you might consider stopping the study medication – what made you want to continue?
- Do you think being autistic made it easier or more difficult to cope with not knowing which medication you were taking?

3. Overall, did taking part in the study meet your expectations / was it different to how you might have expected?

Possible prompts:

- How do you feel now about your decision to have taken part in the STRATA study?
- Would you make the same decision again and/or recommend it to friends?
- Is there anything you wish you'd known before you started the study?
- What did the study team do well / what would make it better?

*B – topic guide: during trial interviews***Part A. Introduction and consent**

- Thanks, introduce self (not part of study team/not clinical), ask how participant would prefer to be addressed, re-state aim **Aim:** to understand what autistic adults think about the STRATA study, why they chose to take part or not, and if they did take part what they thought of it
- Reiterate recording of interview with permission, data confidentiality (unless cause for concern), anonymisation and right to stop at any point, or not answer particular questions, without giving a reason
- Ask if they have any questions
- If not completed e-consent (they should have), ideally get them to complete econsent while you have them on the call. If not possible, go through consent form (record verbal consent to each question if remote contact and ensure written/e-consent is subsequently provided)

Part B. Decision about taking part in the STRATA study**First, I'd like to ask about your decision about taking part in the STRATA study**

- When first hear about STRATA study?
 - *From whom? Initial thoughts?*
 - What did you have to do to sign up?
 - *Probe views on this process – questions asked, ease of completion, time involved etc*
 - Decide to take part in the study or not?
 - *Why? At what point? What/who helped you decide? [Tap into experiences of anxiety/meds] Was there anything you were concerned about? Were these concerns addressed (and when/by whom)? Was there anything that you particularly liked?*
- If declined:** *Establish if it was something about this study in particular or taking part in a research study in general that led to decline decision*

- What do you understand by the study?
 - *What trying to find out? Make sense why it was being done? Probe: specific aspects eg why randomised, placebo, blinding]*
- Remember what told about sertraline? (*Possible risk/benefits? Knew before? Thoughts?*) Have you taken anything similar before?
- How easy/difficult was it to understand the info given about the study (written & verbal)?
 - *Anything not understand/could be improved on?*
- Had enough information about the study or would you have liked more?
 - *Looked for info elsewhere else? (Explore what/where – online, friends and family etc)*
- Any other aspects of the STRATA study that you were uncertain or concerned about before you started? *Did you have any questions/thoughts on randomisation, placebo & blinding? Did it make sense to you why the treatment was randomised/placebo/blinded [if not covered above]?*

(If declined to participate go to Part D. Concluding thoughts)

Part C. Experience of taking part in the study

I'd like to now ask about your experiences of taking part in the STRATA study

- Thoughts on how the study is being conducted e.g., how study team are communicating with you (remote vs f2f), what is discussed, how frequently? *Anything the study team could do to improve any aspects of it?*
- Views on having to complete questionnaires as part of the study? *If stopped meds are they still doing questionnaires? If completed some - ask about content, ease of completion?*
- Currently taking the medication as part of the study? (see below)

If currently taking meds:

- What's it been like taking the medication? Have you changed your dosage?
- Easy or hard to remember taking the capsule every day? Missed any? What do if so?

- What's it been like not knowing which med you're taking? Views on this changed over the study? How do you feel about the uncertainty? Is this affected by your autism?
- Inkling as to what med you think you're taking (sertraline or placebo)? Why? What hope taking? If placebo, how do you feel about that?
- Noticed any changes since taking the capsules? Anxiety, routines, sensory issues, communication/social interaction. *How noticed them? As expected or not? What do you think about these changes, how do they impact you?*
- Do you think you've had any side effects? How have they affected you?

If started but then stopped - when stop and why? Process of deciding.

Difficult/easy decision? How make you feel? Put you off Sertraline/medication/taking part in trials?

If not yet started – what are your thoughts about taking it?

- Have you done anything else to improve your anxiety since being in the study?
 - *What? Why? Perceived difference?*
- Do you think anything else has affected your anxiety since being in the study?
 - What do you hope your anxiety will be like by the end of the study? *Any specific examples of where you'd like to be/what that would look like?*
 - How do you feel now about your decision to have taken part in the STRATA study?
 - *Make same decision again or recommend it to friends? Why?*
- Have you thought about the end of the study? *How you might feel? Do you think you will take Sertraline after the study?*
- Is there anything you wish you'd known before you started the study?

Part D. Concluding thoughts

- Is there anything that we have not talked about that you would like to raise?

- Thank them for their time, reiterate confidentiality. We will send a report of the results to participants when the study is finished.
- Emphasise that this interview is separate to their usual safety checks and info from today will not feed back to normal research team. Local researchers will contact them as usual. IF ANY CONCERNS ABOUT PARTICIPANT ASK IF WE SHOULD INFORM STUDY TEAM.

C – Individual interviewee participant demographic information

Participant #	Treatment allocation	Gender	Interviewer	Timepoint	Centre #	Interview length (hours:mins)	Weeks in study at interview	Age range	Autism diagnosis in adulthood?	Intellectual disability?	Ethnicity group	Highest qualification group	Current employment status group	Discontinued (weeks into the trial/N/A)
1	Sertraline	male	Qualitative researcher	during trial	4	00:27	16	25 to 34	Yes	No	White	Bachelor's degree	Self-employed	N/A
2	Placebo	other	Qualitative researcher	during trial	4	(email)	1	25 to 34	No	No	White	Postgraduate degree (e.g. MA, MS, Med, PhD)	Part time	N/A
3	Placebo	other	Qualitative researcher	during trial	4	00:22	2	25 to 34	Yes	No	White	A Levels or equivalent	Student	N/A
4	Sertraline	male	Qualitative researcher	during trial	2	00:17	15	25 to 34	Yes	No	White	A Levels or equivalent	Full time	N/A
5	Sertraline	male	Qualitative researcher	during trial	2	00:14	13	25 to 34	Yes	No	White	GCSEs or equivalent	Full time	N/A
6	Placebo	female	Qualitative researcher	during trial	2	00:17	9	35 to 44	Yes	No	White	Postgraduate degree (e.g. MA, MS, Med, PhD)	Part time	N/A
7	Placebo	male	Qualitative researcher	during trial	2	00:29	2	45 to 54	Yes	No	White	Bachelor's degree	Full time	N/A
8	Sertraline	female	Qualitative researcher	during trial	1	00:21	25	35 to 44	Yes	No	White	GCSEs or equivalent	Self-employed	N/A
9	Sertraline	male	Qualitative researcher	during trial	1	00:22	26	25 to 34	Yes	No	White	Postgraduate degree (e.g. MA, MS, Med, PhD)	Part time	N/A
10	Placebo	male	Qualitative researcher	during trial	1	00:33	20	25 to 34	Yes	No	White	A Levels or equivalent	Unemployed	N/A
11	Placebo	female	Qualitative researcher	during trial	1	00:26	13	55 to 64	Yes	No	White	HNC/HND/SVQ etc	Part time	N/A
12	Placebo	female	Qualitative researcher	during trial	1	00:17	14	18 to 24	No	No	Non-white	A Levels or equivalent	Student	N/A
13	Placebo	female	Qualitative researcher	during trial	1	00:19	16	45 to 54	Yes	No	White	Postgraduate degree (e.g. MA, MS, Med, PhD)	Self-employed	N/A
14	Placebo	female	Qualitative researcher	during trial	1	00:17	13	45 to 54	Yes	No	White	Bachelor's degree	Self-employed	N/A
15	Sertraline	male	Qualitative researcher	during trial	1	00:33	7	45 to 54	Yes	Yes	White	None	Unable to work	N/A
18	Placebo	female	Qualitative researcher	during trial	2	00:21	12	25 to 34	Yes	No	Non-white	Postgraduate degree (e.g. MA, MS, Med, PhD)	Full time	N/A
19	Sertraline	male	Qualitative researcher	during trial	2	00:11	4	35 to 44	Yes	Yes	White	Postgraduate degree (e.g. MA, MS, Med, PhD)	Full time	Week 2
20	Sertraline	female	Qualitative researcher	during trial	3	00:24	10	18 to 24	Yes	No	White	Bachelor's degree	Part time	N/A
21	Sertraline	female	Qualitative researcher	during trial	2	00:12	5	55 to 64	Yes	No	White	Bachelor's degree	Full time	N/A
22	Placebo	male	Qualitative researcher	during trial	2	00:15	3	25 to 34	Yes	No	White	A Levels or equivalent	Unable to work	N/A
23	Sertraline	female	Qualitative researcher	during trial	3	00:33	6	55 to 64	Yes	No	White	Postgraduate degree (e.g. MA, MS, Med, PhD)	Part time	Week 3
24	Sertraline	male	Qualitative researcher	during trial	1	00:16	4	25 to 34	Yes	No	White	Postgraduate degree (e.g. MA, MS, Med, PhD)	Other	N/A
25	Placebo	female	Qualitative researcher	during trial	1	(email)	16	35 to 44	Yes	No	White	Professional degree	Full time	N/A
26	Placebo	other	Qualitative researcher	during trial	3	00:10	11	18 to 24	No	No	White	GCSEs or equivalent	Unemployed	N/A
27	Placebo	male	Qualitative researcher	during trial	1	00:16	6	25 to 34	No	Yes	Non-white	Bachelor's degree	Student	N/A

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28	Placebo	male	Qualitative researcher	during trial	4	00:21	10	25 to 34	Yes	No	White	None	Part time	N/A
29	Sertraline	male	Qualitative researcher	during trial	1	(email)	11	35 to 44	Yes	No	White	None	Other	N/A
30	Sertraline	male	Qualitative researcher	during trial	3	00:29	15	35 to 44	Yes	No	White	Postgraduate degree (e.g. MA, MS, Med, PhD)	Full time	N/A
31	Placebo	female	Qualitative researcher	during trial	2	00:12	6	18 to 24	Yes	No	White	A Levels or equivalent	Student	N/A
32	Sertraline	male	Qualitative researcher	during trial	4	00:29	7	45 to 54	Yes	No	White	GCSEs or equivalent	Full time	Week 4
33	Placebo	female	Qualitative researcher	during trial	3	00:20	12	55 to 64	Yes	No	Non-white	Bachelor's degree	Full time	N/A
34	Placebo	female	Study researcher	exit interview	3	00:09	52	18 to 24	Yes	No	White	Bachelor's degree	Full time	N/A
35	Sertraline	male	Study researcher	exit interview	3	00:17	52	65 or over	Yes	No	White	GCSEs or equivalent	Full time	N/A
36	Sertraline	male	Study researcher	exit interview	3	00:07	52	18 to 24	Yes	No	White	A Levels or equivalent	Full time	N/A
37	Placebo	female	Study researcher	exit interview	4	00:06	52	25 to 34	Yes	No	White	Bachelor's degree	Full time	N/A
38	Sertraline	female	Study researcher	exit interview	4	00:08	52	35 to 44	Yes	No	Non-white	Bachelor's degree	Full time	N/A
39	Sertraline	female	Study researcher	exit interview	4	00:10	52	25 to 34	Yes	No	White	Bachelor's degree	Full time	N/A
40	Placebo	male	Study researcher	exit interview	4	00:12	52	35 to 44	Yes	No	White	Professional degree (e.g. MD, DDS, DVM)	Full time	N/A
41	Sertraline	male	Study researcher	exit interview	4	00:09	52	25 to 34	Yes	No	White	Bachelor's degree	Full time	N/A
42	Sertraline	female	Study researcher	exit interview	4	00:12	52	18 to 24	Yes	No	White	None	Full time	N/A
43	Sertraline	male	Study researcher	exit interview	2	00:09	52	45 to 54	Yes	No	White	Bachelor's degree	Full time	N/A
44	Placebo	male	Study researcher	exit interview	2	00:06	52	35 to 44	Yes	No	Non-white	Bachelor's degree	Full time	N/A
45	Sertraline	female	Study researcher	exit interview	1	00:07	52	25 to 34	Yes	No	White	Postgraduate degree (e.g. MA, MS, Med, PhD)	Full time	N/A
46	Sertraline	male	Study researcher	exit interview	1	00:09	52	45 to 54	Yes	No	White	HNC/HND/SVQ etc	Full time	N/A
47	Placebo	female	Study researcher	exit interview	1	00:13	52	25 to 34	Yes	No	White	Bachelor's degree	Full time	N/A
48	Placebo	male	Study researcher	exit interview	1	00:10	52	25 to 34	Yes	No	White	Bachelor's degree	Full time	N/A
49	Placebo	female	Study researcher	exit interview	1	00:09	52	25 to 34	No	No	White	Bachelor's degree	Full time	N/A
50	Placebo	male	Study researcher	exit interview	1	00:09	52	25 to 34	Yes	No	White	HNC/HND/SVQ etc	Full time	N/A
51	Placebo	male	Study researcher	exit interview	3	00:16	52	45 to 54	Yes	No	White	Bachelor's degree	Part time	N/A
52	Placebo	female	Study researcher	exit interview	4	00:14	52	25 to 34	Yes	No	White	A Levels or equivalent	Part time	N/A
53	Placebo	male	Study researcher	exit interview	1	00:13	52	55 to 64	Yes	No	White	Postgraduate degree (e.g. MA, MS, Med, PhD)	Retired	N/A
54	Placebo	male	Study researcher	exit interview	3	00:12	52	35 to 44	Yes	No	White	GCSEs or equivalent	Self-employed	Week 3
55	Sertraline	male	Study researcher	exit interview	3	00:14	52	18 to 24	Yes	No	White	Postgraduate degree (e.g. MA, MS, Med, PhD)	Student	N/A
56	Placebo	female	Study researcher	exit interview	3	00:10	52	18 to 24	No	No	White	A Levels or equivalent	Student	N/A
57	Sertraline	other	Study researcher	exit interview	4	00:11	52	18 to 24	Yes	No	White	A Levels or equivalent	Student	N/A

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58	Placebo	other	Study researcher	exit interview	1	00:05	52	18 to 24	Yes	No	White	A Levels or equivalent	Student	N/A
59	Placebo	female	Study researcher	exit interview	1	00:09	52	18 to 24	Yes	No	White	Bachelor's degree	Student	N/A
60	Sertraline	female	Study researcher	exit interview	3	00:16	52	45 to 54	Yes	No	White	A Levels or equivalent	Unable to work	N/A
61	Sertraline	male	Study researcher	exit interview	3	00:18	52	55 to 64	Yes	No	White	GCSEs or equivalent	Unable to work	N/A
62	Sertraline	male	Study researcher	exit interview	3	00:06	52	55 to 64	Yes	No	White	GCSEs or equivalent	Unable to work	N/A
63	Sertraline	male	Study researcher	exit interview	1	00:17	52	45 to 54	Yes	No	White	Bachelor's degree	Unable to work	N/A
64	Placebo	male	Study researcher	exit interview	1	00:17	52	35 to 44	Yes	No	Non-white	Bachelor's degree	Unemployed	N/A

**participants 16 and 17 declined participation in the trial (their interviews are analysed elsewhere; Realpe et al., in preparation)*