



Large Autism Study Launched

By **ARIANA EUNJUNG CHA** The Washington Post

Scientists funded by the Simons Foundation Research Initiative are launching an online research initiative that aims to gather DNA and other information from 50,000 people with autism and their family members.

Although the cause of the social communication disorder is unknown and believed to be a mix of environmental and genetic factors, scientists have identified some 50 to 70 genes that may play a role in the condition. Some estimate that a total of 350 or more could be involved.

The long-term study involves researchers from more than 21 medical institutions, including Boston Children's Hospital, the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, the Kennedy Krieger Institute, and Weill Cornell Medicine.

Autism diagnoses are rising in the United States at a high pace, and a survey estimated earlier this year that one out of 45 children aged 3 to 17 have the condition.

Autism is considered to be a spectrum disorder, which means that some people are more severely affected than others.

Among the main controversies surrounding autism are its definition and methods of diagnosis, which have changed significantly over the years.

Researchers say the initiative would help accelerate an era of personalized medicine for people with the condition.

For information about the study or to sign up, go to www.sparkforautism.org.

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