

Examining the experience of adults receiving an Autism Spectrum Diagnosis and their later well-being.

Rebecca A Charlton ^a, Francesca G. Happé ^b, Patricia Abbott ^c.

^a Dept. of Psychology, Goldsmiths University of London; ^b SGDP, King's College London; ^c Autism Diagnostic Research Centre, Southampton.

Background

- Little is known about Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) across adulthood.
- More adults are receiving a first diagnosis of ASD but the impact of this is unknown.
- High rates of mood disorders and low well-being are reported by autistic adults.
- Autistic adults report poor sleep quality.

Aims

- To follow-up adults diagnosed with ASD, to examine whether:
 - Receiving a diagnosis was a positive event,
 - ASD traits were associated with quality of life & mental well-being,
 - ASD individuals would report lower quality of life & mental well-being and poorer sleep quality than age matched controls.

Method

Participants

- 44 adults (males n=28; females=16) who received a first diagnosis of ASD 4-80 months previously (mean=32 months).
- 40 age and sex matched controls (males n=28; females n=12)

	ASD	Controls	Statistics
Age (mean, sd)	35.35 (10.70)	35.78 (12.03)	t=.175, p=.861
Range	19-65	20-66	
Sex (Male/Female)	63.6%, 36.4%	70%, 30%	X ² =.382, p=.537
AQ scores	34.15	15.00	t=-11.57, p<.001

Measures

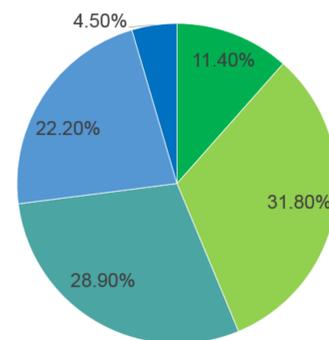
- **Impact of receiving a diagnosis:** Rating of impact on a 5-point scale
- **Self-report Autism traits:** Autism Quotient (AQ).
- **Quality of Life & Well-being:** World Health Organization Quality of Life scale (WHOQoL); Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS) .
- **Sleep:** Pittsburgh Sleep Quality Index (PSQI).

Results

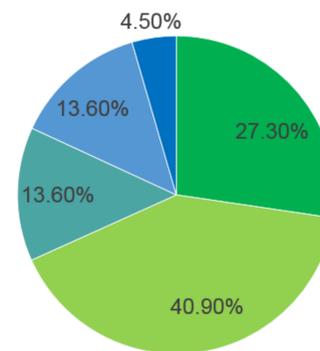
Impact of Receiving a diagnosis

- Impact of receiving a diagnosis rated according to making things better (green shades) to no better (blue shades).

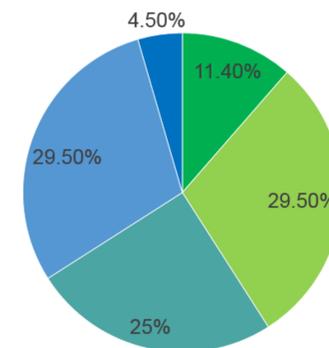
Receiving a diagnosis has generally made things better



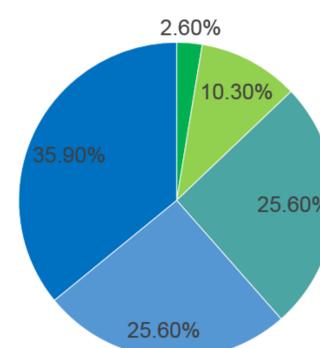
Having a diagnosis has helped me understand myself



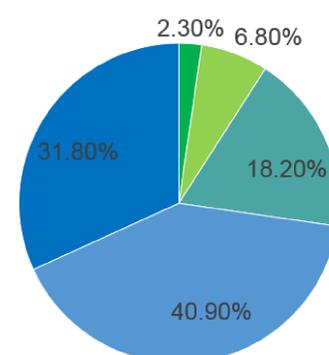
Having a diagnosis has helped friends & relative understand me



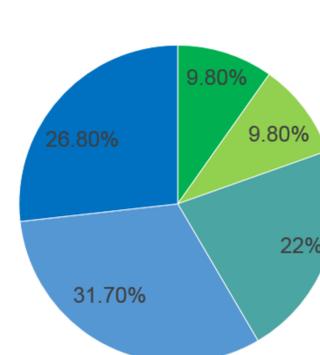
Having a diagnosis has helped work colleagues understand me



I know what support I can receive due to my diagnosis



I am receiving the help I expected post-diagnosis



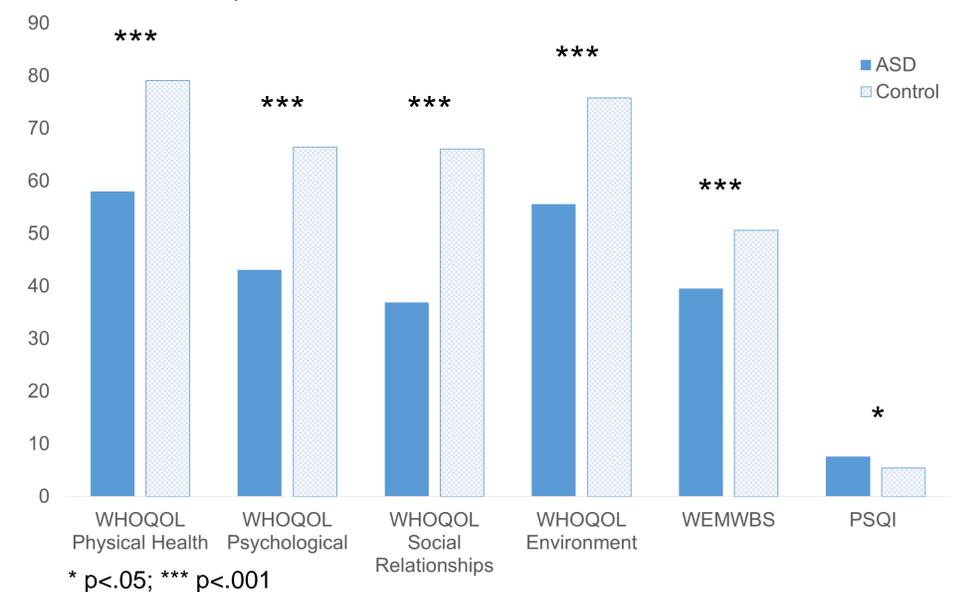
■ Extremely ■ Very Much ■ Moderately ■ A Little ■ Not a lot

Correlations between ASD traits, well-being and sleep

- In the whole sample: Higher ASD traits were associated with poorer quality of life, well-being and sleep (all p-values <.002).
- For the ASD group: Higher ASD traits were associated with poorer Mental Well-being (r=-.319, p=.035) & sleep (r=.301, p=.053).
- AQ scores did not correlate significantly with WHOQOL subscales. [For the Control group: AQ scores correlated significantly with the WEMWBS (r=-.358, p=.023) and WHOQOL Environment scores (r=-.317, p=.046)].

Group differences

- ASD individuals demonstrated poorer well-being and sleep on all measures, compared to controls.



Discussion

- For most adults receiving an ASD diagnosis was positive. However, post-diagnosis support and access to services was not satisfactory.
- Higher self-reported ASD traits were associated with poorer quality of life, well-being and sleep.
- In ASD individuals, higher ASD traits was strongly associated with poorer mental well-being.
- ASD adults are at risk of poor quality of life and mental well-being after receiving a diagnosis .

Funding: Goldsmiths College Research Fund (PI: Charlton); Experimental Psychology Society (PI: Charlton).