Autism Traits and Well-Being in Adults Receiving a Diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder.

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Introduction

- Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a neurodevelopmental disorder that is typically diagnosed in childhood.
- However some individuals do not receive a diagnosis until adulthood.
- Research has suggested that young adults with ASD have lower well-being than typically developing peers.
- Little is know whether well-being changes across the lifespan or if it is impacted by receiving a diagnosis ASD.
- This study investigates stability of ASD traits post diagnosis and whether late diagnosis affects well-being.

Hypotheses

- Autism Quotient (AQ) scores will remain stable over time.
- Associations between AQ scores and age will be explored
- Late adult diagnoses of ASD will be associated with lower self-rated well-being scores.
- Age will be associated with lower well-being and sleep quality

Methods

- Participants: 36 individuals diagnosed with ASD in adulthood. Aged between 18-63 (Mean age 33) when first diagnosed. One participant was removed as an outlier.
- 27 Male; 9 female
- Followed up between 4-80 months after diagnosis.

Table 1: Age and follow-up information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean Age</th>
<th>Range</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Initial assessment</td>
<td>33.03 (10.83)</td>
<td>18 - 63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow Up</td>
<td>36.08 (10.27)</td>
<td>19 - 65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow up time in months</td>
<td>35.61 (22.94)</td>
<td>4 - 80</td>
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</tbody>
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- **Self-report Measures:**
  - ASD measures: Autism-Spectrum Quotient (AQ). Taken at baseline and follow up.
  - Well-being measures: Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale (WEMWBS), World Health Organisation Quality Of Life (WHOQol). Taken at follow up only.
  - Sleep measures: Pittsburgh Sleep Quality Index (PSQI) Taken at follow up only.

Results: Gender differences

- No significant difference in AQ scores.
- No significant differences in WEMWBS
- No significant difference in PSQI
- No significant differences in WHOQoL

Results: Change between baseline and follow-up AQ

- No significant difference in AQ scores between the two time points. ASD traits remained stable.

Results: Correlations with Age

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Age at First Assessment</th>
<th>Age at Follow-up</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AQ</td>
<td>r = .345, p = .039*</td>
<td>r = .354, p = .034*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WEMWBS</td>
<td>r = -.457, p = .005**</td>
<td>r = -.490, p = .002*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WHOQol</td>
<td>r = -.357, p = .038*</td>
<td>r = -.378, p = .028*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSQI</td>
<td>r = .218, p = .274</td>
<td>r = .274, p = .167</td>
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*p<.05, **p<.01

Results

- AQ showed a significant positive correlation with both age at first assessment and age at current study.
- Both well-being measures were correlated negatively with age at both time points

Conclusion

- ASD traits are positively correlated with age in late-diagnosed individuals.
- Well-being does not change post-diagnosis
- Late diagnosis appears to be having a detrimental effect on individuals’ well-being.
- No significant associations between sleep quality and age were observed
- No gender differences were noted
- Further questions to be explored: Do poorer AQ scores with older age reflect -
  - cognitive changes?
  - lack of intervention/support?