

Study highlights experiences of adults diagnosed with autism

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New research led by psychologists at Edge Hill University has placed a spotlight on the quality of life and mental health issues experienced by adults diagnosed with autism.

Dr. Liam Cross and Dr. Gray Atherton have worked with partners on a new study that explores the link between the age that an autistic adult is diagnosed and the impact it has on their life.

According to experts, a significant proportion of autistic adults today were not diagnosed until later in life, a group often referred to as the "lost generation."

This latest study, published by the *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, explores how chronological age, age of diagnosis and gender can affect the mental health of adults diagnosed with [autism](#).

The findings revealed that autistic adults had lower quality of life outcomes and higher autistic trait levels which related to age of diagnosis and indicated that while adults were empowered by their new diagnosis, they still require specialized supports.

Dr. Cross and Dr. Atherton, who are both senior lecturers in Psychology, collaborated with Edge Hill MSc Psychology (Conversion) student Emma Edisbury and Dr. Andrea Piovesan of Università Iuav di Venezia, on the study.

Dr. Cross said: "As the interviews in the study revealed, receiving an autism diagnosis in adulthood can be highly emotional. In those circumstances, a person often feels a need to revisit who they are, how they explain themselves to other people, and how they rewrite their own story.

"Almost every participant in the study highlighted the importance of therapy and difficulty in receiving treatment. Perhaps there needs to be a realization that adults receiving late diagnoses of autism will be dealing with the consequences of years of trauma, of feeling misunderstood, without knowing why."

Dr. Atherton added: "In many cases, receiving a formal diagnosis can finally help everything to 'make sense' in a person's life. A diagnosis can give adults a chance to reclaim portions of their history in which they were misunderstood and creating support for this specific portion of the autistic population is vital, if they are to experience the same gains in quality of life as they age."

This work will hopefully serve as a catalyst for future research aiming to improve post-diagnosis supports available to autistic adults. It also underlines the importance of individuals receiving a timely [diagnosis](#), particularly as it relates to identity and self-acceptance.

More information: Gray Atherton et al, Autism Through the Ages: A Mixed Methods Approach to Understanding How Age and Age of Diagnosis Affect Quality of Life, *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders* (2021). DOI: [10.1007/s10803-021-05235-x](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-021-05235-x)

Provided by Edge Hill University

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