

Title: Self-Reported Increases in Cognitive Problems Among Middle and Older Age Autistic Adults

Authors: Claire B. Klein¹, Goldie A. McQuaid², Rebecca A. Charlton³, Laura G. Klinger¹, Gregory L. Wallace⁴

Abstract: Incidence rates of early-onset dementia are 2.6 times higher in autism spectrum disorder (ASD) compared to the general population (Vivanti et al., 2021), but symptom presentation remains unexplored in autistic adults. In the present study, 210 autistic middle-aged and older adults (mean age=55.63, range=42-81 years; 58% female) were recruited through SPARK Research Match as part of a follow-up study (see Charlton et al., 2022). Participants completed self-ratings of the AD8 (Galvin et al., 2005). Aims included 1) Describe the prevalence and profiles of cognitive problems on the AD8 and 2) Examine age and sex differences in self-reported cognitive problems. T-tests and chi square tests were used to test for age and sex differences in screening status and item-level responses. 30% of autistic middle-aged and older adults screened positive for likely cognitive impairment. The most commonly endorsed symptoms were less interest in hobbies (30.8%), daily problems with thinking and/or memory (30.5%), judgement problems (22.9%), and trouble remembering appointments (20.4%). Less commonly endorsed symptoms included trouble learning (13%), repeating things (12%), trouble handling complicated finances (11.9%), and forgetting correct month or year (7.4%). No significant differences in age or sex were present between groups screening positive/negative for likely cognitive impairment, or in AD8 item-level responses. Monitoring changes in daily activities and functioning may aid early diagnosis and treatment planning for autistic adults at risk for developing MCI/dementia. Further research is required to understand predictors of dementia risk, how dementia symptoms may be related to autism features, and dementia's cascading effects in ASD.

Affiliations:

¹The University of North Carolina TEACCH Autism Program, USA

²George Mason University, USA

³Goldsmiths, University of London, UK

⁴The George Washington University, USA

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