

# Autistic adults have a better quality of life in Québec than in France

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The quality of life of autistic individuals lies at the centre of the development and evaluation of many intervention programs. It is typically evaluated based on a person's opinion of different aspects of life, such as health, perceived quality of interpersonal relationships, academic background, and work experience. Individual quality of life therefore varies according to personal aspirations and concerns and is also influenced by norms and social expectations. To this day, little is known about autistic individuals' quality of life in Québec. An interdisciplinary research team expert in neuropsychology, sociology, psychiatry, and other collaborators are working to fill that knowledge gap (Courcy et al., 2017). This article summarizes results from a first research paper recently published by this team, in the Autism journal.

## Quality of life in autistic adults: divergent results

Questionnaires used to determine quality of life usually do not measure certain aspects that are considered important to autistic adults, which lead to mixed results regarding their true quality of life. In collaboration with autistic adults, McConachie and colleagues (2018) developed a questionnaire measuring quality of life specifically for autistic adults. This questionnaire addresses aspects that are not included in other quality of life questionnaires, such as sensory difficulties, camouflage, or barriers to accessing health services. The study summarized within this article measured quality of life in 427 francophone autistic adults, using

Specifically, Quebecer participants reported having a significantly better quality of life compared to French participants.

1. <https://research.ncl.ac.uk/neurodisability/leafletsandmeasures/autismqualityoflifemeasure/asqolfrench/>



**Main References:**

Hong, J., Bishop-Fitzpatrick, L., Smith, L., Greenberg, J., & Mallick, M. (2016). Factors associated with subjective quality of life of adults with autism spectrum disorder: Self-Report versus maternal reports. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 46(4), 1368-1378. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-015-2678-0>

McConachie, H., Mason, D., Parr, J. R., Garland, D., Wilson, C., & Rodgers, J. (2018). Enhancing the validity of a quality of life measure for autistic people. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 48(5), 1596-1611. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-017-3402-z>

**Original Article:**

Caron, V., Jeanneret, N., Giroux, M., Guerrero, L., Ouimet, M., Forgeot d'Arc, B., Soulières, I., & Courcy, I. (2021). Socio-cultural context and autistics' quality of life: A comparison between Québec and France. *Autism, Advance online publication*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13623613211035229>



McConachie and colleagues' questionnaire (French version<sup>1</sup>).

**Better quality of life in France or Quebec?**

Given that quality of life can vary depending on the physical and social environment surrounding a person's birth and upbringing, researchers wanted to know whether quality of life was different in French and Quebecer participants. Results indicate that different sociocultural contexts may in fact play a role in autistic adults' quality of life. Specifically, Quebecer participants reported having a significantly better quality of life compared to French participants.

**Can something explain autistic adults' quality of life in this study?**

First off, **stigma**, such as experiencing verbal or physical abuse, or cybervictimization because of being autistic, was an important determinant of one's quality of life. For participants living in Quebec, stigma was the most important factor in determining quality of life. Having more pronounced autistic traits also led to a worse quality of life, although this was only true for participants

living in France. This difference may show that Quebec has a more sensitized and accepting population regarding autism. Other characteristics can also predict a better quality of life for French participants: being a man, having a job, and being more educated. Psychiatric and health characteristics also impact quality of life in autistic adults. Namely, having an anxiety disorder predicted lower quality of life in Quebecers, whereas the same was true in France for mood disorders (ex.: depression).

**Quality of life of autistic adults: what did we learn?**

A takeaway from this study is the importance of considering social aspects to understand quality of life in autistic adults. It also sheds light on the necessity to continue efforts in developing interventions and social policies which can address stigma directed toward autistic individuals. Moreover, although many determinants for quality of life were identified in this study, there are still more left to uncover to fully understand quality of life of autistic adults. It is crucial to pursue more collaborative work with autistic adults, documenting factors that have a direct influence on their quality of life so that, ultimately, service providers can be better informed.

