

Presenter: Karen Ripenburg

Session & Time: Postre II

Room/Time: GLH / 2:30-3:30

Discipline: Psychology

Faculty Mentor: Ben Rosenberg

Digital Portfolio URL:

Title: Are age at diagnosis and long-term mental health related for people with Autism Spectrum Disorder?

Abstract:

Though the exact number of individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is unknown, the CDC estimates that 1 in 31 children (3.2%) aged 8 years old have been diagnosed with ASD, and recent population studies suggest approximately 5.4 million adults may have ASD, whether diagnosed or not. People with ASD report a lower quality of life than their neurotypical peers, measuring for factors like loneliness, social anxiety, support and satisfaction with life. The timing of ASD diagnosis plays a critical role in mental health outcomes; it has been shown that early diagnosis for those with ASD prompts individuals to seek ASD-related therapies that improve their mental health and encourage greater self-understanding and acceptance. People who receive an ASD diagnosis later in life do not have access to this mental health care or other early interventions. Amongst those who are diagnosed, significant gender disparities exist because

of implicit bias, structural inequalities, and male-coded diagnostic criteria for ASD. Females are often misdiagnosed with other mental health issues or diagnosed later in life. This disparity has negative effects on women's mental health outcomes. This research studied the relationship between age of ASD diagnosis and mental health, and whether gender moderated that association. I recruited 80 people with ASD through social media, support groups and university classes, varying in ages ranging from 18 to 72. Participants answered survey questions, including the age at which they were diagnosed with ASD or â€œsuspectedâ€ they had ASD, as well as a checklist of any co-occurring psychological diagnoses they had, including depression, anxiety, substance abuse, eating disorders, self-harm, OCD, PTSD, and bipolar disorder. Additionally, participants completed The Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS), and the Generalized Self-Efficacy scale (GSE). I expect to find a statistically significant relationship between the age of ASD diagnosis and measures of mental health, with the early age of diagnosis correlating to greater mental health and a later age of diagnosis correlating to poorer mental health. I predict that gender will moderate this relationship, with age of diagnosis exhibiting a stronger relationship to mental health outcomes among women than men.