

Examining the Impact of Diagnostic Timing on Quality of Life in Autistic Individuals

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Background
Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) can be reliably diagnosed as early as 2 years of age¹. Early autism diagnosis enables earlier access to supports and interventions, which are linked to better developmental outcomes, such as improved cognitive development and reduced symptom severity^{2,3}.

However, little research has explored the relationship between earlier autism diagnosis and a patient’s long-term quality of life (QoL).

Research Question
Does age of diagnosis independently impact quality of life in children with autism?

Objective
To examine the relationship between age of autism diagnosis and health-related quality of life using survey-based measures, including the KINDL-R , Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL), and the Social Communication Questionnaire (SCQ).

Methods


Participants


- Children with a primary diagnosis of Autism, ages 6-18. (N=441, 345 Male, 96 Female)
- Data collected as part of Province of Ontario Neurodevelopmental Disorders (POND) Network.


Measurements


- QoL was measured using the KINDL-R
- Autism trait severity via SCQ
- Behavioural and emotional problems using CBCL.
- Demographic data (age, sex, SES) were collected via standardized intake forms.


Covariates

Age 

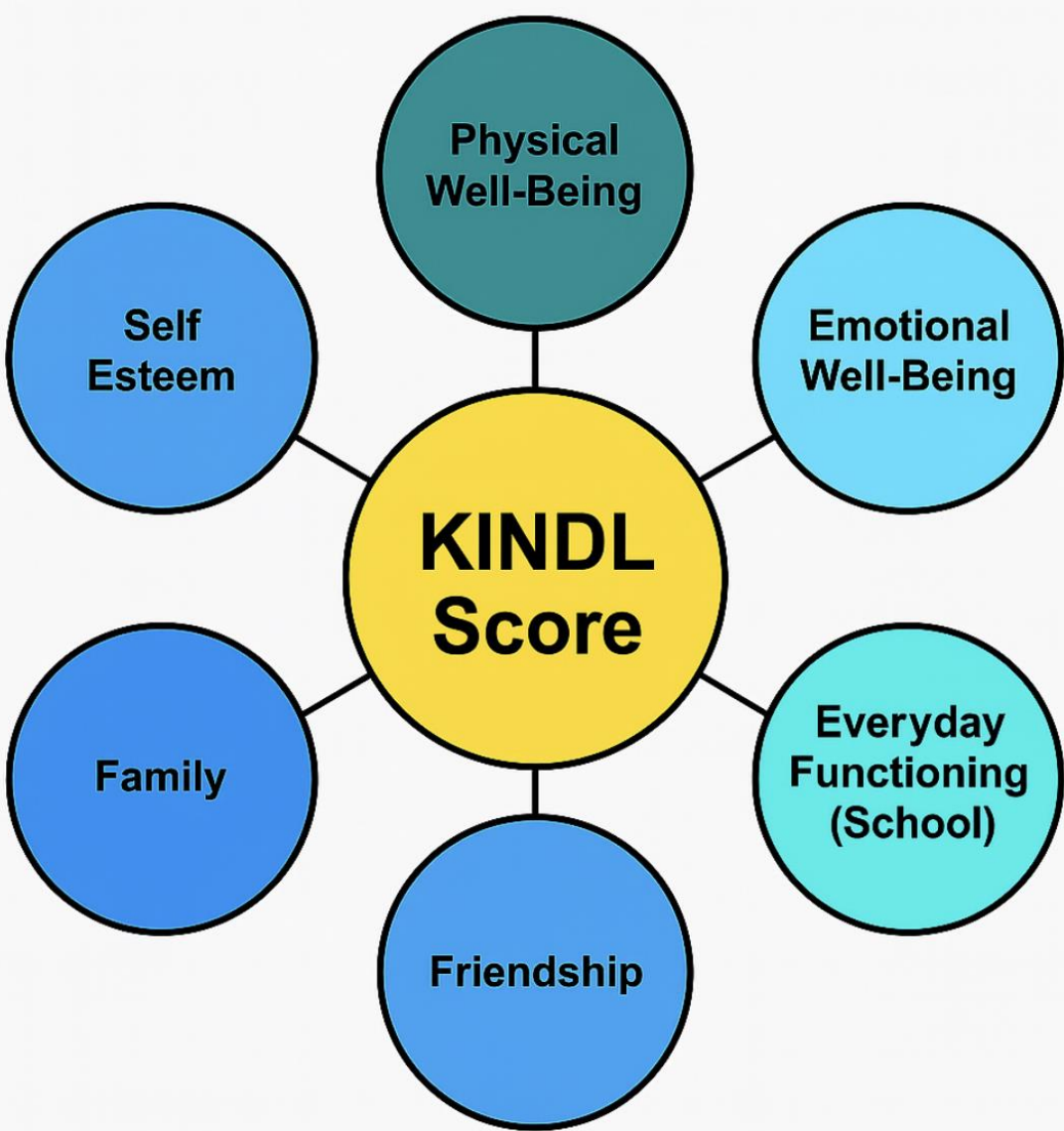
Sex 

SES 

CBCL 

SCQ 

Primary Outcome



KINDL-R (QoL Measure)

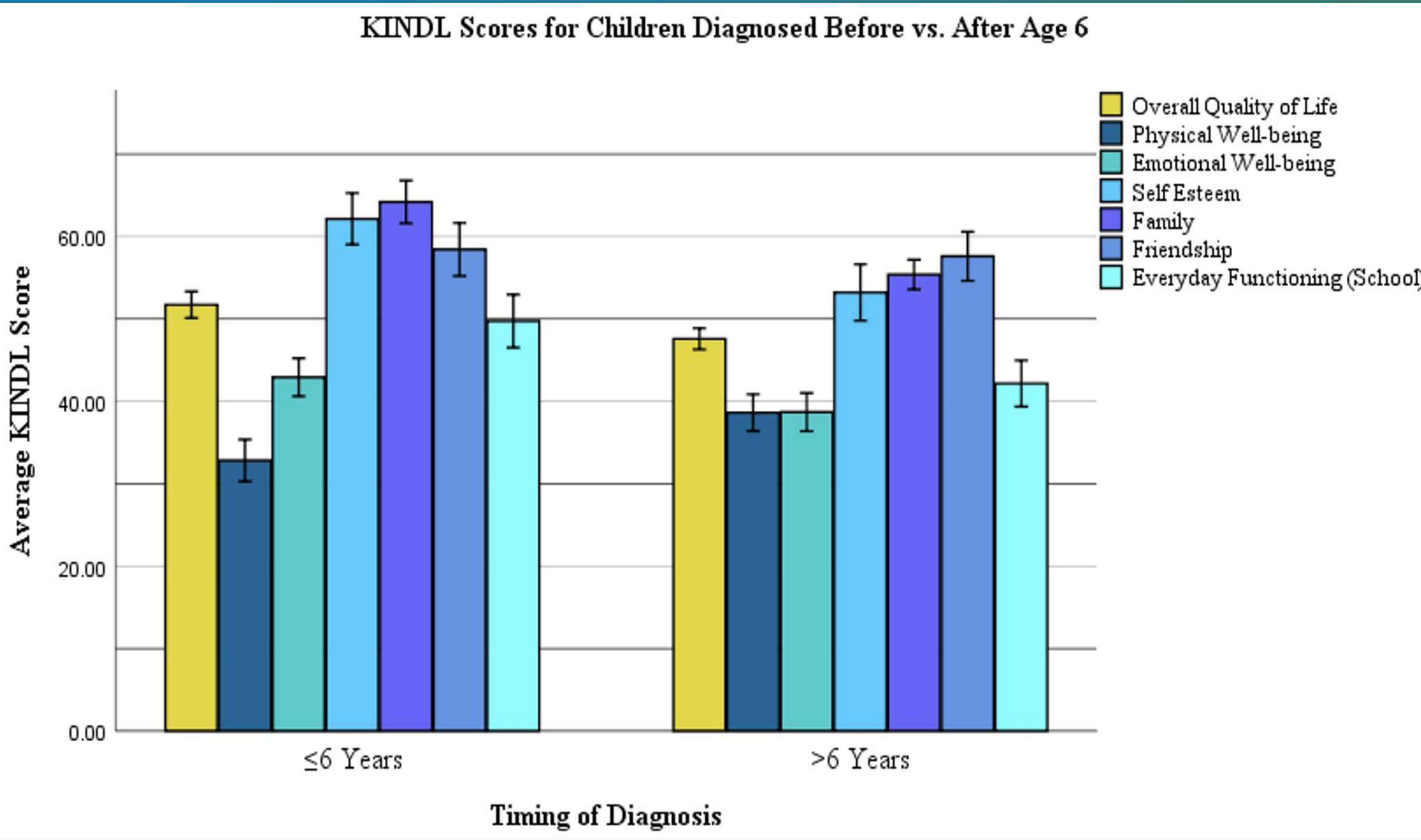
Analysis

Analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was used to compare KINDL-R scores between children diagnosed before vs. after age 6, adjusting for sex, SES, current age, autism severity (SCQ), and internalizing symptoms (CBCL).

Earlier autism diagnosis is associated with higher quality of life in children, with particular improvements in self-esteem and daily functioning.

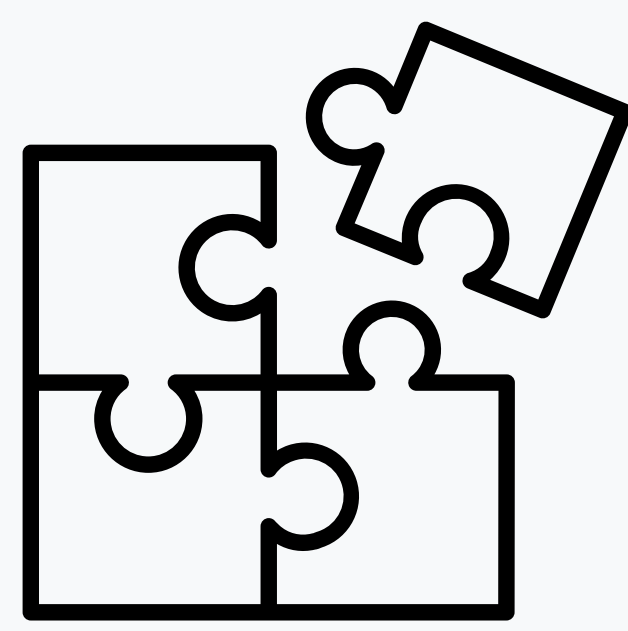
Key Results

- Age of diagnosis was independently associated with QoL, even when accounting for current age and internalizing symptoms (CBCL).
- Children diagnosed before age 6 reported **overall higher quality of life**.
- The subscales of **Self-Esteem** and **Everyday Functioning** were most affected, with earlier-diagnosed children scoring significantly higher on both.



Relevance to Holland Bloorview Clients and Families

- Children diagnosed later in life may be at higher risk for lower quality of life and *may benefit from targeted monitoring and support*.
- Findings suggest a need for additional supports for those diagnosed later.



Next Steps

- Longitudinal tracking of how QoL changes throughout late adolescence and transition to early adulthood.
- Comparison study of Late vs Early diagnosed patients, focused on different interventions/service access.
- Qualitative research into experiences of late diagnosed individuals.

References

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