

# **Associations of quality of life with health-related characteristics among children with autism**

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Quality of life (QoL) refers to a person's own evaluation of positive and negative aspects of their life. Health-related quality of life (HRQoL) focuses on aspects more directly related to physical or mental health and includes physical activities, positive health behaviors (e.g. exercise), school functioning and well-being. In this study, we examined whether behavior problems, as well as aspects of mental health and physical health are associated with HRQoL in children with autism.

We used information gathered from the Autism Treatment Network (ATN) which is a network of clinics throughout North America that provide care to children with autism. ATN had information on the children (provided by their parents) at baseline (i.e. the first measurement time period) and in some cases there was information on additional assessments in subsequent years.

At baseline, lower reported HRQoL (as reported by parents) was associated with: socio-demographic (age, gender, race, socioeconomic status, family income) and insurance (i.e. whether the parent had private or public insurance) characteristics; diagnosis of autism; behavioral problems; sleep problems; seizures; gastrointestinal problems (e.g. vomiting, reflux, diarrhea, constipation, stomach pain); and mental health problems. For several characteristics, the relationship with HRQoL changed over time.

This study demonstrates that in addition to behavioral and autism-related characteristics, which have been previously studied, physical and mental health conditions are associated with HRQoL in children with autism.