

Life Satisfaction in Autism



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Definition

Life satisfaction refers to the subjective appraisal of one's satisfaction with their overall life circumstances. This concept may be conceptualized broadly, as individuals may vary in the relative weight of various life factors (e.g., family, friends, school, self) on their life satisfaction. Life satisfaction may also be domain-specific, such that individuals may be asked to provide a rating of their satisfaction within specific areas. Further, life satisfaction may be distinguished from objective indicators of functioning, such as quality of life. The study of life satisfaction arose from the field of positive psychology, which emphasizes the scientific study of human flourishing; this emphasis on positive indicators of functioning is particularly important within the field of disability (see Schalock 2004 for a detailed discussion). Research with youth has demonstrated that focusing assessment on disordered symptomatology alone neglects important aspects of functioning, and optimal mental health assessment includes indicators of positive aspects of functioning (Greenspoon and Saklofske 2001; Suldo and Shaffer 2008).

Several life satisfaction measures have been validated for use with children and adolescents, including the Students' Life Satisfaction Scale, which is a brief measure that assesses youth's overall life satisfaction on a Likert scale (Huebner 1991). To obtain domain-specific ratings, the Brief Multidimensional Students' Life Satisfaction Scale may be used (BMSLSS; Huebner 1994). This measure assesses satisfaction in various domains (e.g., friends, family, neighborhood, school, self) on a Likert scale. Both measures require that individuals have the ability to comprehend short sentences and select a response on the Likert scale.

Research has recently begun to seek the perspective of children and adolescents with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) regarding life satisfaction. McDougall et al. (2012) surveyed 400 children and adolescents with chronic conditions, 35 of whom were diagnosed with ASD. Participants completed global and domain-specific measures of life satisfaction, and the results indicated that youth with chronic conditions reported high levels of life satisfaction. On the BMSLSS, participants' mean score corresponded with the response options indicating that youth were "mostly satisfied" or "pleased" with their lives. Further, youth responses were highly correlated with parental estimates of their children's life satisfaction; this level of agreement was consistent with that obtained in studies assessing caregiver-youth agreement within typically developing

populations (Dew and Huebner 1994; Gilman and Huebner 1997). In a study primarily assessing quality of life, Egilson et al. (2017) administered the psychological well-being scale of the KIDSCREEN-27 with 96 youth with ASD. This subscale asks participants to rate their satisfaction with and enjoyment of their lives. When compared to peers without ASD, those with ASD reported lower levels of satisfaction. Consistent with previous research, Franke et al. (2019) administered the BMSLSS with 46 adolescents with ASD and their caregivers, and the results indicated that youth reported high levels of life satisfaction across domains. However, they reported significantly lower levels of family, friend, self, and overall life satisfaction than did a typically developing comparison group. Within this study, youth's self-reported levels of life satisfaction correlated with self-reports of self-efficacy, self-awareness, persistence, school support, family coherence, peer support, emotion regulation, empathy, optimism, and gratitude. While there is limited research directly assessing life satisfaction in individuals with ASD, the implications of the current body of work suggest that youth with ASD view their life as satisfying. However, this level of life satisfaction may be slightly below that of youth without ASD.

See Also

- ▶ [Friendship Satisfaction in Children with ASD](#)
- ▶ [Personal Perspectives on Autism](#)
- ▶ [Quality of Life for Transition-Age Youth with ASD](#)

References and Reading

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