

The role of fatigue and social wellbeing in depressive symptomatology young autistic adults

Amanda Richdale^{1,2}, Lauren Lawson^{1,2}, Alex Haschek^{1,2}, Susan Hayward^{1,2}, Ifrah Abdullahi^{1,2}, & Eric Morris³

¹ Cooperative Research Centre for Living with Autism Spectrum Disorders (Autism CRC)

² Olga Tennison Autism Research Centre, La Trobe University, Australia

³ Department of Psychology and Counselling, La Trobe university, Australia

The authors acknowledge the financial support of the Cooperative Research Centre for Living with Autism (Autism CRC), established and supported under the Australian Government's Cooperative Research Centres Program

Background

Keyes (1998) defines **social wellbeing** "as the appraisal of one's circumstances and functioning in society" (p. 122). Social wellbeing overlaps with an individual's emotional wellbeing. Two of Keyes' 5 social wellbeing factors include:

- 1. Social integration (SI):** Feeling part of society.
- 2. Social contribution (SC):** Feeling what one does is valued and contributes to society.
 - Lack of community involvement has been linked to poor mental health (van Lente et al., 2012) and depression (Kim et al., 2017).
 - Improved SI is related to improved subjective wellbeing (Appau et al., 2019).
 - SC is associated with happiness and extraverted behaviour (Sun et al., 2017).

Social Wellbeing has not been explored in autism.

Insomnia and fatigue:

- Are elevated in autism (Baker & Richdale, 2015).
- Affect mental health and social inclusiveness (Cho et al., 2019; McCallum et al., 2019).

Participants (baseline) $N = 113$
(48 female, $M_{age} = 18.9$ years, $SD = 2.5$)

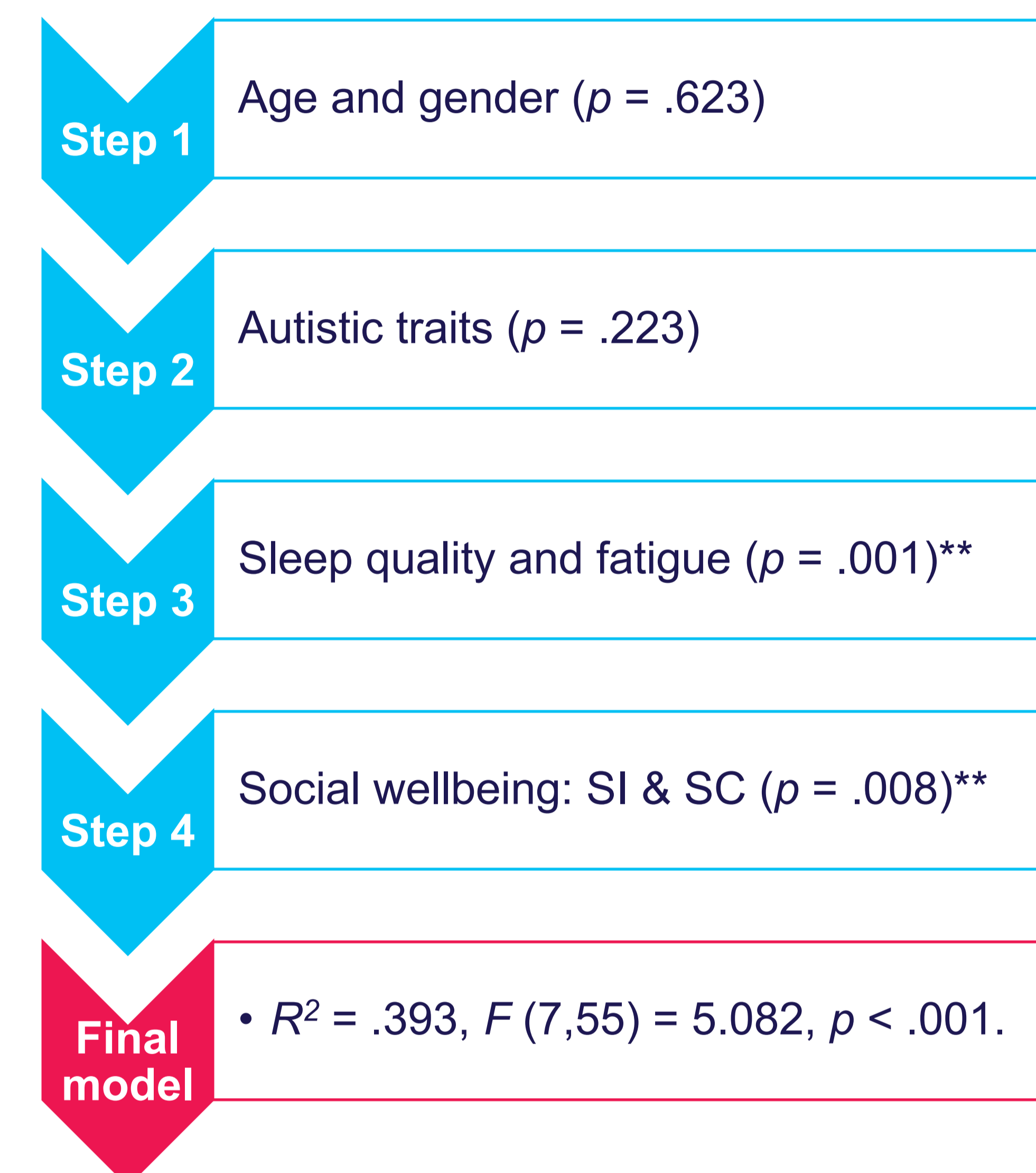


Method

- Autistic individuals aged 15-25 years from the Study of Australian School Leavers with Autism (SASLA) online survey.
- We examined:
 - ✓ Age and sex.
 - ✓ Autistic traits (AQ-short, Hoekstra et al., 2011).
 - ✓ Sleep quality (PSQI, Buysse et al., 1989).
 - ✓ fatigue (FFS, Gradisar et al., 2007).
 - ✓ Social well-being (SI & SC, Keyes, 1998).
- as predictors of depressive symptomatology (HADS-D, Zigmund & Snaith, 1983).
- A 2000 bootstrapped, hierarchical regression was conducted predicting depressive symptomatology in this cross-sectional dataset.

Results

Figure 1: Regression Model



The final model accounted for 39% of variance in depression scores

Unique predictors in the final model:

- 1. Fatigue** 95% BCa CI [.137, .453] ($p = .003$)
- 2. Social contribution** 95% BCa CI [-.725, -.095] ($p = .014$)

Discussion

- Depressive symptoms are significantly related to:
 - ✓ Fatigue
 - ✓ Lack of sense of community contribution
- Poor sleep quality can lead to fatigue, which can be further exacerbated by daily stressors, and loneliness and lack of social supports can lead to a loss of community connectedness and sense of contribution.
- Our results present new avenues for exploring prevention and intervention supports for depression in autism.
- Improving sleep and fatigue, and the sense that one can make a positive community contribution may protect against poor mental health.

References

- Appau, S. et al. (2019). Social integration and subjective wellbeing. *Applied Economics*, 51, 1748-61.
- Baker, E.M., & Richdale, A.L. (2015). Sleep patterns in adults with a diagnosis of high-functioning Autism Spectrum Disorder. *Sleep*, 38, 1765-74
- Cho, J.H.-J. (2019). Associations of objective versus subjective social isolation with sleep disturbance, depression, and fatigue in community-dwelling older adults. *Aging & Mental Health*, 23, 1130-38.
- Hoekstra R.A. et al.(2011). The Construction and validation of an abridged version of the Autism-Spectrum Quotient (AQ-Short). *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 41, 589-96.
- Keyes, C.L.M. (1998). Social well-being. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 61(2), 121-140.
- Van Lente, E. et al. (2012). Measuring population mental health and social well-being. *International Journal of Public Health*, 57(2), 421-30.
- Kim, J.-H. et al. (2017). Effects of social integration on depressive symptoms in Korea: analysis from the Korean Longitudinal Study of Aging (2006-12). *Australian Health Review*, 41, 222-30.
- McCallum S.M. et al. (2019). Associations of fatigue and sleep disturbance with nine common mental disorders. *Journal of Psychosomatic Research*, 123, 109727.
- Sun, J. et al. (2017). The pleasure of making a difference: perceived social contribution explains the relation between extraverted behavior and positive affect. *Emotion*, 17, 794-810.
- Van Lente, E. et al. (2012). Measuring population mental health and population wellbeing. *International Journal of Public Health*, 57, 421-30

Objective: To examine the role of social wellbeing in predicting depression in young autistic adults after accounting for sleep and fatigue which are known to be linked to depression.

For more information

Professor Amanda Richdale | Phone: +61 (0)3 9479 1742 | Email: arichdale@latrobe.edu.au

   autismcrc.com.au
[@autismcrc](https://www.instagram.com/autismcrc)