

SUMMARY

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PhD dissertation topic:

Camouflage and Autistic Burnout and the Quality of Life of (Young) Adults with Autism Spectrum Conditions

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The doctoral dissertation presents theoretical and empirical considerations regarding the quality of life of (young) adults with autism spectrum conditions, focusing on camouflage and autistic burnout. The structure of the dissertation includes three theoretical chapters, a methodological section, two empirical chapters, and a chapter dedicated to discussing the results and their practical implications. The dissertation concludes with a proposal for a mobile application aimed at supporting the psychosocial functioning of individuals on the autism spectrum.

The first chapter discusses autism spectrum conditions from a temporal perspective, analyzing their characteristic symptoms from childhood through their impact on functioning in early adulthood. Additionally, the chapter examines autism from social, cultural, and health perspectives. It introduces the concept of neurodiversity, provides data on the prevalence of autism worldwide and in Poland, discusses gender differences, and highlights co-occurring disorders.

The second chapter focuses on theoretical aspects of quality of life, presenting selected concepts of this phenomenon within the context of special education. It also discusses the protective and risk factors identified from a literature review that influence the quality of life of adults with autism spectrum. The chapter concludes with an overview and characterization of support programs available for individuals on the autism spectrum in Poland.

The third chapter is dedicated to two relatively newly described phenomena: camouflage and autistic burnout. Based on limited reports, the chapter presents theoretical findings regarding both phenomena and outlines potential factors that could influence their nature and intensity. Attention is drawn to the degrading effect of masking autistic traits on quality of life, as well as burnout resulting from living in a world adapted to typically developing individuals.

The chapter also discusses preventive and mitigating interventions that may help counteract and alleviate autistic burnout.

The methodological foundations of the author's research are discussed in the fourth chapter. The study used a diagnostic survey method, employing measurement techniques. The research tools included: Autistic Burnout Severity Items (ABSI), a shortened version of the AQ Questionnaire, Camouflaging Autistic Traits Questionnaire (CAT-Q), the Quality of Life Questionnaire (QLQ), and an original survey questionnaire. As part of the validation study ($N = 250$) measuring autistic burnout, the Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-9), Generalized Anxiety Disorder Questionnaire (GAD-7), and Burnout Assessment Tool (BAT-PL) were also used. The main study, involving 166 individuals with an autism spectrum diagnosis or self-diagnosis, was preceded by pilot studies.

The fifth chapter reports on the pilot studies and the development of the Polish version of the tool for measuring autistic burnout. Statistical analyses conducted to assess the psychometric properties of the Polish version of the Autistic Burnout Severity Items revealed differences in the tool's structure compared to the original Australian version. However, the results regarding external validity (convergent and discriminant), discriminative power analysis, and reliability indices confirm the usefulness and reliability of the Polish adaptation of the scale.

The sixth chapter presents the analysis and interpretation of the results of the main study. It was found that: (1) there is a positive correlation between the age of individuals on the autism spectrum and their quality of life and camouflage levels; (2) there is a positive correlation between the intensity of autistic traits and the level of camouflage and autistic burnout; (3) there is a positive correlation between camouflage and autistic burnout; (4) there is a negative correlation between camouflage, autistic burnout, and the quality of life of young adults with autism spectrum disorders.

The dissertation concludes with an original proposal for a mobile application designed to support the psychosocial functioning of individuals on the autism spectrum. The application includes modules to help build habits and increase productivity, monitor mood and stress levels, provide sensory support, integrate with the community, and offer access to educational materials.