



Study of Australian School Leavers with Autism (SASLA)

Longitudinal Profile 2019

A longitudinal study of post-school outcomes for young
people with and without autism, 2014 – 2021

July 2019



Business
Cooperative Research
Centres Program

autismcrc.com.au

What is the Study of Australian School Leavers with Autism?

The Study of Australian School Leavers with Autism (SASLA) is an online survey-based project, which follows autistic and non-autistic young people aged 15 to 25 years over a 2-year period.

The transition between adolescence and adulthood is an important and difficult milestone for all young people, but one that may be particularly challenging for autistic individuals.

We are interested in learning more about the rewards and challenges over this time for young people on the autism spectrum.

This snapshot provides information on the profile of the autistic 15-25 year old cohort (without a co-occurring intellectual disability) who have completed the three surveys (at Baseline, 12 months following Baseline, and 24 months following Baseline).

This is an ongoing survey, so these are only preliminary results.



I just want to help others like me and I hope my information will help others.

- Autistic respondent

Who is participating?



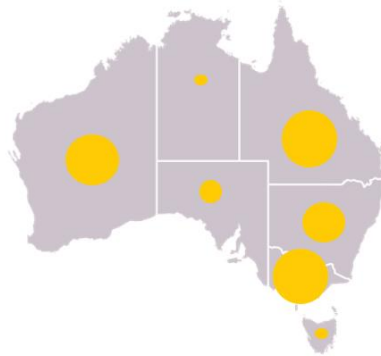
At Baseline, we had 117 autistic participants without a co-occurring intellectual disability complete the survey. Thus far, 67 of these individuals have completed Time 2 (12 months), and 64 have completed Time 3 (24 months).

Sex ratio
6 males : 4 females



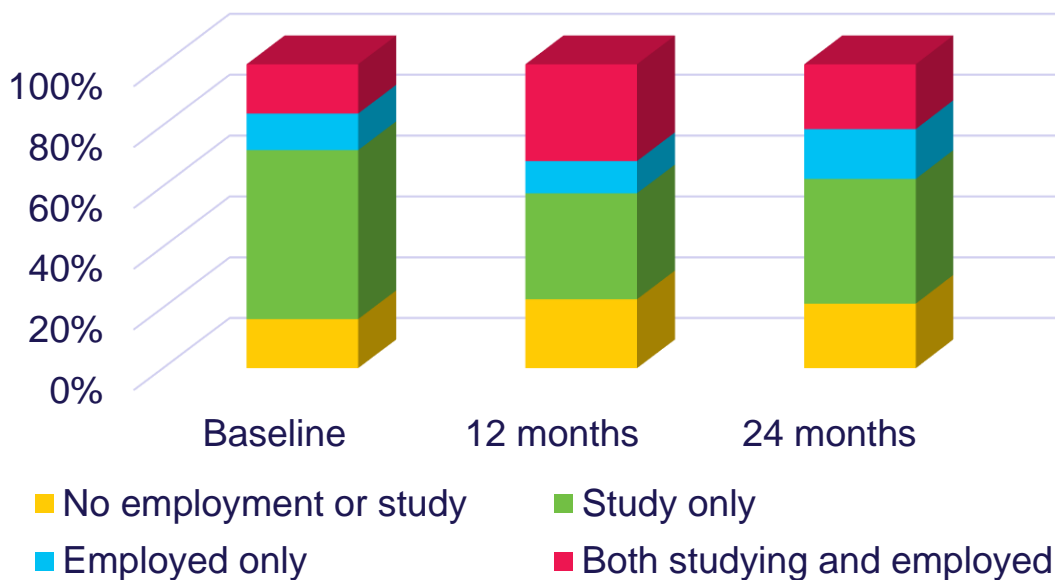
At each of the three time points, approximately 60% of respondents were male. We will have more comprehensive information on gender identity when all participants have completed the Time 3 survey.

Location



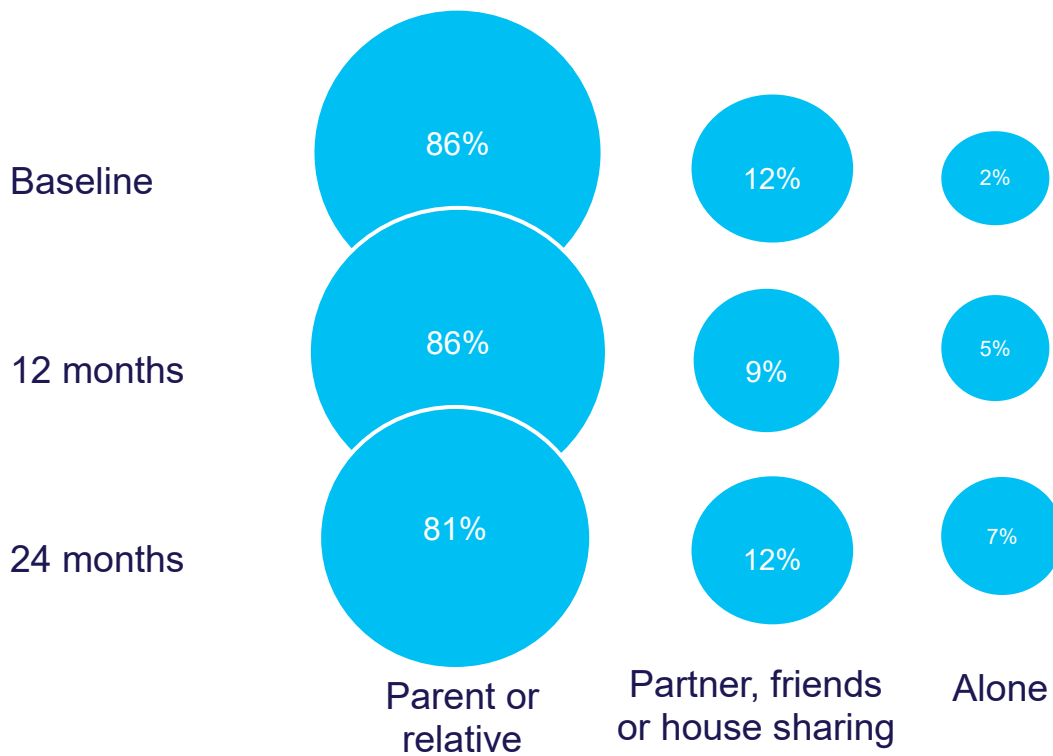
The majority of the autistic survey respondents lived in Queensland and Victoria, but there were respondents from each state and territory except for the Australian Capital Territory.

Post-high school activities



At each time point, a large proportion of respondents were engaged in study (without employment; Baseline: 56%, 12 months 34%, 24 months 39%). At the 12-month time point, the percentage studying and employed almost doubled, going from 16% at Baseline to 31% at 12 months. At the 24-month time point, those engaged in study only and employment only increased. As the study is ongoing, these patterns should be interpreted with caution.

Living situation



At each of the time points, the majority of the respondents were living with their parent/s or a family member.

When looking at respondents who had completed the items asking about living situation at both Baseline and 24 months (62 people), our preliminary analyses indicated that of those living with a parent or relative at Baseline (54 people), 87% remained living with a parent or relative two years later, suggesting 13% had changed their living situation during this period.

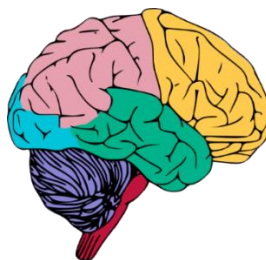
Sleep

Respondents answered questions about sleep at each of the three survey time points. Our current results indicate that at Baseline, 58% of participants reported experiencing poor sleep quality, as did 64% of participants at the 12-month time point and 61% at the 24-month time point.



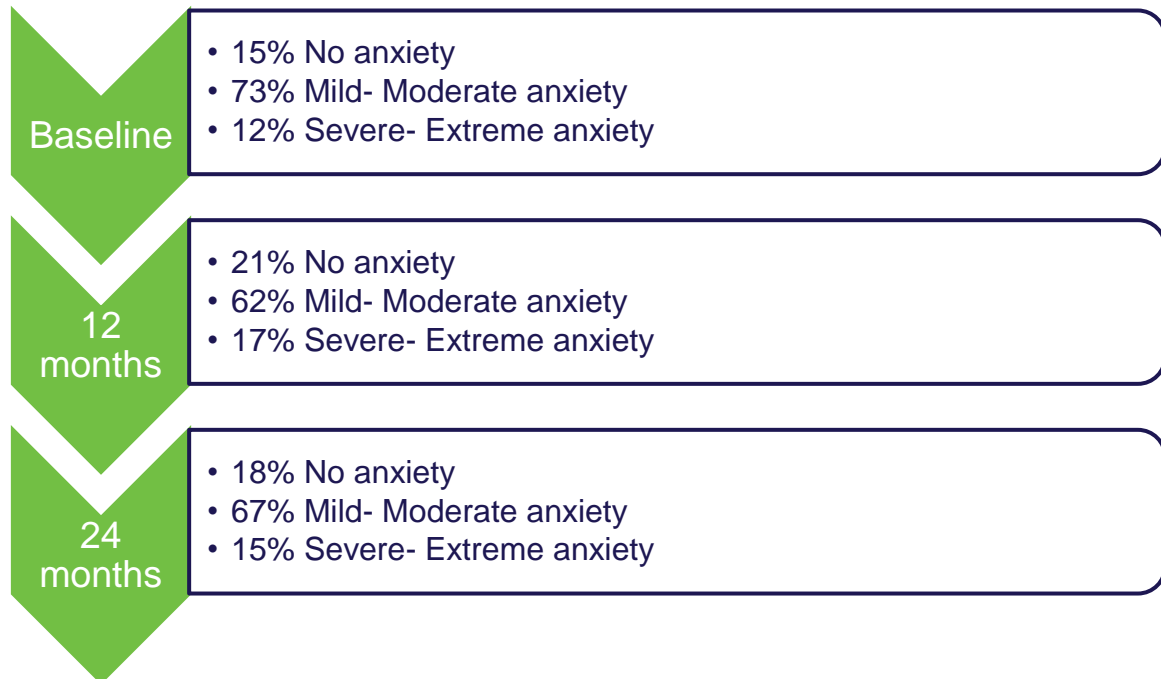
When looking at respondents who had completed the sleep items at both Baseline and 24 months (45 people), our preliminary analyses indicated that of those who reported experiencing poor sleep quality at Baseline (28 people), a striking 85% were continuing to experience poor sleep quality two years later.

Mental Health



Respondents answered questions about their mental health at each of the three time points. Many of those in our sample reported experiencing challenges with their mental health, which is consistent with other studies in this field, highlighting difficulties for autistic individuals regarding mental health.

Anxiety



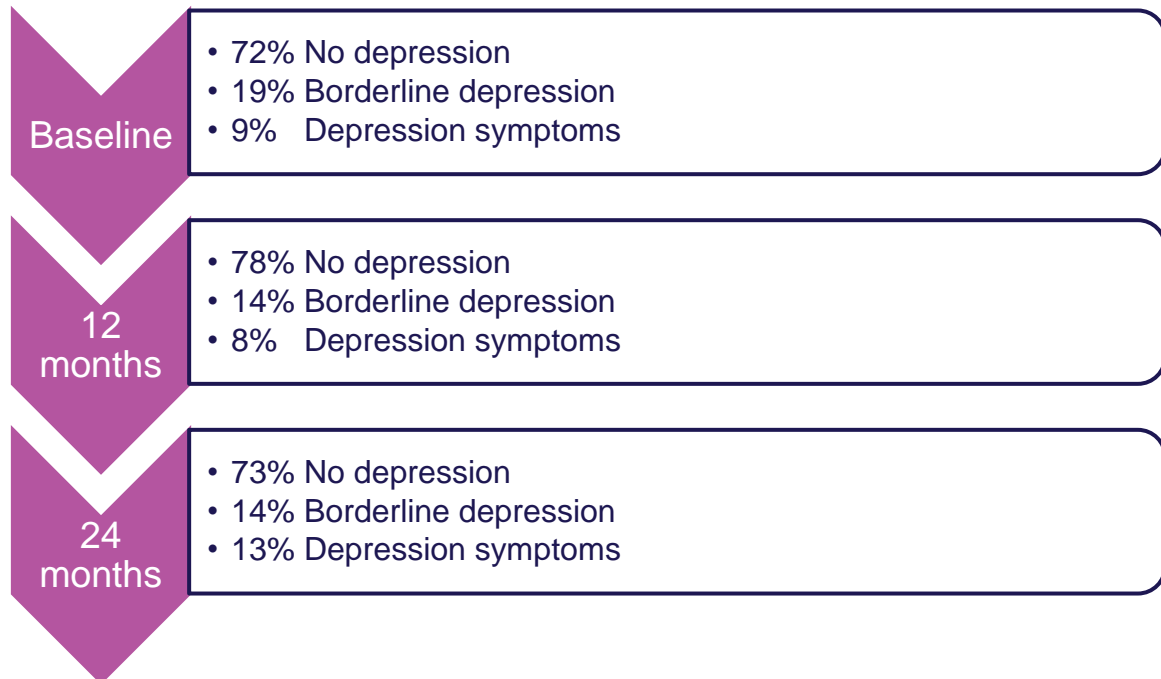
One of these areas was anxiety, which was measured using a standard anxiety scale. This revealed a large proportion of respondents were experiencing mild to moderate anxiety across at each of the three time points.

When looking at respondents who had completed the anxiety scale at both Baseline and 24 months, our preliminary analyses indicated that of those who reported experiencing severe to extreme anxiety at Baseline (10 people), 40% were continuing to experience this significant level of anxiety two years later.

This test was wonderful, really made me feel less alone.

- Autistic respondent

Depression

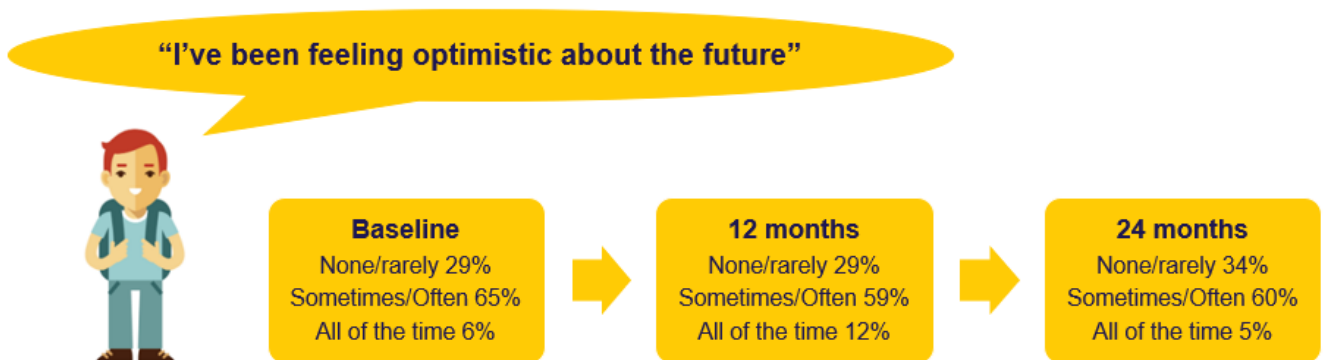


Another of the areas was depression. Respondents completed a standard depression scale, which revealed that while the majority were not experiencing symptoms of depression, at each time point 20-30% were indeed experiencing symptoms indicating borderline depression or depression.

When looking at respondents who had completed the depression scale at both Baseline and 24 months (49 people), our preliminary analyses indicated that of those who reported experiencing depression symptoms at Baseline (4 people), 50% were continuing to experience these symptoms two years later.

Wellbeing

Participants also answered questions about their wellbeing. Here is a summary of their responses to two of the questions about wellbeing. At each time point approximately 30% of respondents had not been feeling optimistic about the future, and approximately 30% had not been feeling confident.



Where to next?

This report represents just some of our sample. Many are still to complete the survey at the 12-month and 24-month time points.

Over the next two years the SASLA team will focus on the 12- and 24-month follow-ups with people who completed the first survey at Baseline, and will examine changes that occur across the two year period of data collection for each participant.

We are particularly interested in challenges faced by autistic individuals during this time, so that we can inform supports for this underserved population of transition aged youth.

My autism is fairly high functioning and also I camouflage a lot - although less so since getting the diagnosis.

- Autistic respondent

Copyright and disclaimer

The information contained in this report has been published by the Autism CRC to assist public knowledge and discussion to improve the outcomes for people with autism through end-user driven research. To this end, Autism CRC grants permission for the general use of any or all of this information provided due acknowledgement is given to its source. Copyright in this report and all the information it contains vests in Autism CRC. You should seek independent professional, technical or legal (as required) advice before acting on any opinion, advice or information contained in this report. Autism CRC makes no warranties or assurances with respect to this report. Autism CRC and all persons associated with it exclude all liability (including liability for negligence) in relation to any opinion, advice or information contained in this report or for any consequences arising from the use of such opinion, advice or information.

Map by FreeVectorMaps.com <http://freevectormaps.com>, and sleep icons from Vecteezy.com

ISBN: 978-0-9953736-9-3

Citation: Flower, R. L., Haschek, A., Lawson, L. P., & Richdale, A. L. (2019). *Study of Australian School Leavers with Autism (SASLA): Longitudinal Profile 2019*. Melbourne, Victoria: La Trobe University.

Copies of this report can be downloaded from the Autism CRC website autismcrc.com.au.

Acknowledgements

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 Centre Program. The authors would like to acknowledge the research participants who dedicated their time to the project. We further acknowledge Dr Mirko Uljarevic and Dr Ru Ying Cai for project establishment and data collection, and members of the Autism CRC Program 3 team who contributed to project content and recruitment. Staff and non-staff in kind support, including recruitment, was also provided by Autism CRC and Other participants ([here](#)), other autism associations, a Victorian Secondary School, and many other individuals.

The Cooperative Research Centre for Living with Autism (Autism CRC)

The Cooperative Research Centre for Living with Autism (Autism CRC) is the world's first national, cooperative research effort focused on autism. Taking a whole-of-life approach to autism focusing on diagnosis, education and adult life, Autism CRC researchers are working with end-users to provide evidence-based outcomes which can be translated into practical solutions for governments, service providers, education and health professionals, families and people on the autism spectrum.



AutismCRC

Autism CRC

The University of Queensland
Long Pocket Precinct
Level 3, Foxtail Building
80 Meiers Road
Indooroopilly QLD 4068

T +61 7 3377 0600

E info@autismcrc.com.au

W autismcrc.com.au



@autismcrc



Australian Government
Department of Industry,
Innovation and Science

Business
Cooperative Research
Centres Program