

Research shows that many autistic people, especially women, are not diagnosed with autism until they are adults. This delay means they don't get the support and care they need. One reason for this delay is that autism traits can be mistaken for other psychiatric conditions, leading to wrong diagnoses before the correct autism diagnosis is made. This study looked at how often these misdiagnoses happen and if there are differences between men and women. Using data from early 2019 from a long-term study of autistic adults in the Netherlands, this study included 1211 autistic adults. Of these, 52.6% were women and the average age was 42.3 years. Most participants were Dutch and well-educated. The results showed that 24.6% of participants reported at least one previous psychiatric diagnosis they believed was wrong. The most common misdiagnoses were personality disorders, anxiety disorders, mood disorders, chronic fatigue syndrome/burnout-related disorders, and ADHD. Women reported these misdiagnoses more often than men. About 31.7% of women and 16.7% of men reported at least one misdiagnosis. Women were especially more likely to report misdiagnoses of personality disorders, anxiety disorders, and mood disorders. Overall, 65.8% of women reported previous psychiatric diagnoses compared to 34.2% of men. Among those with prior diagnoses, the chance of misdiagnosis was similar for both men and women. This study shows that one in four autistic adults, and one in three autistic women, experienced at least one misdiagnosis before their autism was identified. These wrong diagnoses lead to long and difficult paths to getting the right diagnosis. The findings highlight the need for better training for mental health professionals to recognize autism in adults and understand the complex relationship between autism and other conditions. Future research with larger and more diverse groups is needed to confirm these findings and provide more accurate estimates of misdiagnosis rates.