

research snapshot

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What Types of Activities Do Young Adults With Autism Spectrum Disorders Do After High School?

What is this research about?

Many adults with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) have trouble finding employment. Little is known about the work experiences of people with ASD as they transition to adulthood. This research explored activities of young adults who had recently left high school, including their work experiences. The researchers wanted to know if the type employment or day activity differed for people with ASD who had an intellectual disability compared to those who did not have an intellectual disability. They also wanted to know about what was related to different types of employment or day activities.

What did the researchers do?

Through surveys, this study explored the employment and day activities of 66 young adults with ASD in the United States, who had recently left high school.

What did the researchers find?

Post high school activities generally clustered around five categories:

1. Individuals with ASD and intellectual disability involved in sheltered workshops or day activity centers (56%). This group had the highest levels of ASD symptoms and problem behaviours, and the lowest levels of independence.
2. Adults with ASD, most of whom had no intellectual disability working on a college or university degree (14%). The majority of this group was

What you need to know:

It is difficult for young adults with ASD to gain employment, particularly full time work. Programs are needed to support individuals with and without an intellectual disability in their transition to adulthood to ensure that they have the skills required to succeed in a meaningful workplace environment. It is also important to ensure that supports are in place in the post secondary environment to ensure continues success.

also working part time.

3. A similar sized group of young adults employed in the community part time, with supports (12%).
4. Individuals doing less than 10 hours of structured day time activities per week (12%). The individuals with no regular daytime activities seemed to fall somewhere in the middle in terms of symptoms, behaviours and independence. Individuals with ASD and no intellectual disability were more likely to have no (or few) day activities compared to those with an intellectual disability.
5. People with employment in the community or in school without any supports, who were not working full time (4%). These young adults in post-secondary activities without any supports had fewer symptoms and more independence than adults who did require supports.

How can you use this research?



ASD
Mental Health

This is the first study to focus on how a person with ASD's behaviours, intellectual functioning, and symptom characteristics relate to their employment and day activities. Employment rates were low, with none working full time. Individuals with ASD struggled to find structured day activities, and may be 'falling through the cracks' after high school. The kinds of employment often reported were basic service tasks. Thus, more work needs to be done to expand employability skills before the transition to post-secondary education.

It is important to examine whether an individual, their family, and community supports, are prepared for a transition from the secondary school environment. It is critical that supports be in place to support the range of possible outcomes for people with ASD.

About the Researchers

Julie Lounds Taylor and Marsha Mailick Seltzer are researchers in ASD and Developmental Disabilities. Dr. Lounds Taylor is an assistant professor of paediatrics and special education at the Vanerbilt Kennedy Center. Dr. Mailick Seltzer is a professor of social work and the director of the Waisman Center at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

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Autism, Employment, Day Activities, Independence

This research summary was written by Suzanne Robinson for the Chair in Autism Spectrum Disorders Treatment and Care Research. This research summary, along with other summaries, can be found on our [blog](#) and at asdmentalhealth.ca/research-summaries

About the Chair

The Chair in Autism Spectrum Disorders Treatment and Care Research is dedicated to studying ways to improve the mental health and well-being of people with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) and their families in Canada.

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For more information, visit the Chair in Autism Spectrum Disorders Treatment and Care Research website at asdmentalhealth.ca

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