Effect unknown of employment services for adults with autism


Adults with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) may face challenges in employment settings due to difficulties in social functioning. Bespoke employment interventions aim to make it easier for adults with ASD to secure and maintain jobs. A Campbell systematic review finds that there is not yet enough high quality research to draw a conclusion on their effectiveness.

1.1 AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDERS

Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) refers to a range of neurological disorders that involve some degree of difficulty with communication and interpersonal relationships. Currently, 1 in 88 children are identified with ASD in the United States. Functional limitations caused by ASD continue into adulthood and can create barriers to independent living and stable long-term employment. The range of the spectrum for ASD is wide. Those at the lower functioning end often demonstrate physical limitations, may lack speech and are unable to relate socially with others. Those on the higher functioning end, however, are often able to lead relatively independent lives, even if demonstrating social awkwardness.

1.2 FOCUS ON JOB OPPORTUNITIES FOR ADULTS WITH ASD

Given the increasing number of children identified with ASD, and the number of students with ASD leaving school, attention is increasingly focused on work opportunities for adults with ASD. Adults with less severe disabilities are eight times more likely than those with more severe disabilities to be employed. Adults with ASD are among those least likely to be employed. In fact, only a small proportion of adults with ASD are employed in the USA. Studies show that adults with ASD are more likely to lose their jobs for behavioural and social reasons than their inability to perform work tasks. The chances for achieving better job outcomes can be improved by appropriately addressing the specific behaviours common among people with ASD.

1.3 ELEMENTS OF SUCCESSFUL JOB PLACEMENTS

This systematic review tries to find out whether employment services for adults with ASD are effective. There is not enough research, however, on the effects of any specific employment programs. One of the two included studies found that participants receiving employment support performed better in finding employment, holding a job, earning higher wages and working more hours per week. The second study did not report any difference between
groups in gaining or holding employment. Both studies were deemed to be of low methodological quality. It is, therefore, not possible to make firm conclusions on the effects of specific employment programs. The authors recommend that more controlled studies of these programs is needed.

Although there is a lack of research on the effect of employment programs for adults with ASD, the authors also examined relevant research literature that did not meet the inclusion criteria. Based on qualitative research and related studies, the authors discuss what could be possible elements of successful job placement for adults with ASD. These include: identifying the most appropriate work settings, providing effective on-the-job support, long-term support services for the employer and the employee, costs for support, and positive effect of employment on persons with ASD.

1.4 FACTS ABOUT THE SYSTEMATIC REVIEW

This review focused on employment interventions for adults 18 years or older with a diagnosis of ASD, and who were no longer enrolled in a school-to-work or secondary-level education programs. The review considered interventions that centered on competitive, supported or integrated employment but did not include those where the treatment groups were not in an integrated or mainstream format of employment. The review focused on one outcome, attainment of a job placement, based on specific information about the duration and/or retention of that placement. One of the two included studies looked at a program where support workers gave guidance on job searching, work preparation and employer communication. The second study looked at supported employment involving jobs located in the local community and guidance from job coaches.

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Further information

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