# Perspectives of Neurodivergent Individuals

**RESEARCH ABOUT AUTISTIC PERSEPCTIVES IN THE WORKPLACE**

| AT A GLANCE | |
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| | • Here is some research that studied and described Autistic individuals' experience with employment. |
| | • This resource is only a small portion of research that is available. |
| | • It is designed to give neurotypical and autistic individuals alike an idea of autistic individuals' experiences with employment through peer reviewed research. |

# Background

**Why this research is important and some challenges autistic individuals face with employment.**

Importance:

- Estimated 80% of autistic people are unemployed worldwide. This is higher than both other disability groups and people without disabilities
- Employment can make an important contribution to individual well-being, for example, by providing people with a sense of purpose
- Important to understand individuals with Autism as it often does not look like what media portrays it and their is stigma surrounding neurodivergence

## Challenges Faced:

- Stigma and lack of understanding of autism by public and potentially employers and work colleagues
- Difficulty transitioning into a different routine
- Difficulty communicating between different neurotypes, causing increased difficulty understanding each other
- Distracting and disruptive sensory environmental conditions

# College to Employment
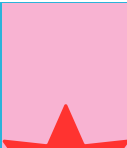
- The number of autistic students that are graduating is increasing. It is important to identify how individuals feel about the transition and what supports may help. In the 6 months post graduation 12.1% of autistic college graduates were unemployed compared to 5.1 of non-autistic college graduates.
- Autistic individuals often like routine and structure, and transitioning out of college can be additionally challenging.
- 34 autistic graduates participated in this study and 80% reported feeling fear around leaving, less than ⅓ felt prepared, and only ⅓ had emotional or career related support post graduation (Lucas et al., 2022).
- Additional support was desired for life planning, career planning, employment accessibility, autism-specific support, and forward planning.
- It is important to support individuals transitioning from college to a career, it is especially helpful if there are resources tailored to autistic students' needs and important to plan early.

# Perspectives on Challenges

**(Sarrett, 2017)**

- As an increasing number of autistic adults are seeking and gaining employment it is important to consider this community's perspectives of the workplace.
- In a study (Sarrett, 2017) they asked autistic adults over the age of 18 to participate in a survey and focus group activity. They asked about challenges related to employment and autistic individuals perspectives.
- Interviews can be difficult due to the social interactions and interview training may help. It is also important to consider navigating the job, after the interview if the individual gets the job.
- Many individuals reported not wanting to disclose their autism diagnosis for fear of stigma and how misunderstandings about autism might affect how others view them. Many feared that others wouldn't believe them if they disclosed because of how autism is often represented.
- Developing strategies to improve employment outcomes and reducing stigma for autistic individuals is critical as this community can greatly add to the work community.

# Disclosure Experiences

**(Romualdez et al., 2021)**

- Autistic individuals face challenges in the workplace such as social communication and disclosure could ease this but it also opens individuals up for discrimination.
- 238 autistic adults with employment experience participated in a survey that asked about disclosure experiences (Romualdez, 2021).

- Participants were most concerned with how others would perceive them. Participants often only disclosed selectively, about ⅓ disclose to everyone. Rarely disclosed in the interview process. Many individuals retrospectively disclosed (after experiencing issues). Only ⅓ reported disclosing as positive and even less reported positive adjustments after.
- This highlights the importance of organizations facilitating disclosure for individuals or a clear pathway for disclosure. Organization wide training can also be important to reduce stigma and discrimination.

# Disclosure and Outcomes
### (Romualdez et al., 2021)
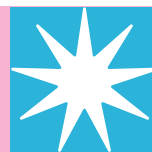
- Autistic individuals have difficulty finding and maintaining employment based on a difficult sensory environment, lack of flexibility in hours, and unclear communication. This can often be helped through disclosure.
- This study aimed to understand factors affecting disclosure outcomes and to understand why autistic individuals choose to disclose (Romualdez, 2021).
- Three disclosure themes arose which include preference for keeping diagnosis private, disclosure in the workplace is still important, and it has mixed outcomes.
- Three factors that determine outcomes include understanding of autism, adaptations, and the culture of organizations. This showed the importance of improving inclusive practices.

# Supportive Employment Practices
### (Hedley et al., 2021)

- Research is needed to find strategies for autistic adults to maintain employment. This study (Hedley et al., 2021) asks autistic individuals in the information and technology sector what their perspectives were.
- The study found four themes that were significant. The first was previous employment experiences, autistic individuals often are unemployed, employed part-time or in low paying positions. The second was expectations of the employment program, individuals often are pessimistic about outcomes due to previous experience. The third was recruitment and selection process, if given time to develop skills and learn the job individuals felt more positive then traditional hiring processes. The fourth was training and the transition short training period left individuals feeling unprepared, frustrated or bored.
- Overall there was support for alternate hiring and training processes but more research is needed to identify the best support.

# Resources

Hedley, Spoor, J. R., Cai, R. Y., Uljarevic, M., Bury, S., Gal, E., Moss, S., Richdale, A., Bartram, T., & Dissanayake, C. (2021). Supportive employment practices: perspectives of autistic employees. *Advances in Autism*, *7*(1), 28–40. https://doi.org/10.1108/AIA-09-2019-0029

Lucas, Cage, E., & James, A. I. (2022). Supporting Effective Transitions From University to Post-graduation for Autistic Students. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *12*, 768429–768429. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.768429

Romualdez, Heasman, B., Walker, Z., Davies, J., & Remington, A. (2021). "People Might Understand Me Better": Diagnostic Disclosure Experiences of Autistic Individuals in the Workplace. *Autism in Adulthood*, *3*(2), 157–167. https://doi.org/10.1089/aut.2020.0063

Romualdez, Walker, Z., & Remington, A. (2021). Autistic adults' experiences of diagnostic disclosure in the workplace: Decision-making and factors associated with outcomes. *Autism & Developmental Language Impairments*, *6*, 239694152110229–23969415211022955. https://doi.org/10.1177/23969415211022955

Sarrett. (2017). Interviews, Disclosures, and Misperceptions: Autistic Adults' Perspectives on Employment Related Challenges. *Disability Studies Quarterly*, *37*(2). https://doi.org/10.18061/dsq.v37i2.5524