

Transition and Employment for Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder Khalid M. Al Ohideb

المرحلة الانتقالية والتوظيف للأشخاص ذوي اضطراب طيف التوحد

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الملخص:

يدرس موضوع البحث المائل أنماط توظيف ذوي الاحتياجات الخاصة، وخاصةً ذوي اضطراب طيف التوحد في نطاق المملكة العربية السعودية، حيث عادةً ما يُحرمون من الحصول على الأفضلية في جميع هذه الأمور المماثلة. وغالبًا ما يعاني المصابين باضطراب طيف التوحد من عدم قدرتهم على التواصل والتفاعل الاجتماعي مع الأفراد الآخرين. توجد العديد من التوضيحات المقدمة بخصوص الممارسات غير العادلة لأصحاب العمل خلال عملية التعيين والتي تتضمن نقص الوعي وغياب ثقتهم في أداء قدرات ذوي الإعاقة. يعد العمل الانتقالي أحد الحلول لتأمين مستقبلهم بشكل أفضل وبالتالي تعزيز حقوق المساواة لذوي الإعاقة الباحثين عن العمل في المملكة العربية السعودية.

لتمكين هؤلاء الأفراد من أن يكونوا مؤهلين للالتحاق بوظائف منتظمة في مجال العمل عليهم الخضوع لعملية مكونة من أربع مراحل تتضمن: (١) التخطيط المتمركز حول الذات (٢) المرحلة الانتقالية (٣) التأهيل المهني (٤) التوظيف. المرحلة الأولى وهي التخطيط المتمركز حول الذات الذي يُمكن الشخص من تحديد جودة حياته وفق تصوره ووضع خطة لتحقيقها. أما المرحلة الثانية فهي المرحلة الانتقالية والتي بدورها تتيح فرصة تحسين فرص العمل لذوي الإعاقة من خلال تقديم التدريب المهني، والذي يصبح فيما بعد مفيداً في المقابلات الشخصية وبدء وظائف جديدة. المرحلة الثالثة وهي التأهيل المهني الذي يدرس مشاعر هؤلاء الأفراد ويساعدهم على التكيف الوظيفي في المركز المهني. وفي النهاية تأتي المرحلة الأخيرة وهي عملية التوظيف الانتقالية التي تشمل التوظيف الفعلي حيث يمكن جمع البيانات حول فائدة البرنامج في مساعدة الأفراد الذين يعانون من اضطراب طيف التوحد في الحصول على وظيفة والمحافظة عليها بعد ذلك. أن تطبيق خطوات برنامج التوظيف الانتقالي يساعد ذوي الإعاقة إيجاباً في حصولهم على فرص العمل وبالتالي استقرارهم واستقلالهم مادياً مما يجعلهم معتمدين على ذواتهم في مواجهة متطلبات الحياة المستقبلية.

مفاتيح البحث:

التوحد - التخطيط المتمركز حول الذات - المرحلة الانتقالية - التأهيل المهني - التوظيف.

Summary

This body of research studies employment patterns of people with disabilities, specifically Autism Spectrum Disorder, in the context of Saudi Arabia where they are usually given second preference in all such matters. ASD is most often characterized by a difficulty to communicate and socially interact with other individuals. There are many offered explanations for employers' unjust hiring practices, including lack of employer awareness and mistrust of their ability to perform. Transitional employment is one solution to better secure their future and therefore promote equal rights for individuals with disabilities seeking employment in KSA.

In order to enable these individuals to qualify for regular jobs in the employment

sector, they are required to undergo a four-stage process, which involves: (1) person-centered planning; (2) transition; (3) vocational rehabilitation; and (4) employment. The first step of person-centered planning allows the person to identify the quality of life that they picture for themselves and to devise a plan to make it a reality. The second stage of transition allows for the improvement of employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities by providing vocational training, which becomes useful in interviews and beginning new jobs. The third stage of vocational rehabilitation studies the feelings of these individuals in a vocational center. Finally, the last stage of the transitional employment process involves actual employment where data can be gathered about the usefulness of the program in helping individuals with ASD obtain and sub

Though there were many strengths and limitations to the studies on transitional employment for individuals with ASD, the results paint a clear picture that the application of a transitional employment process to the context of Saudi Arabia would create a positive change for individuals with ASD seeking employment. For individuals with ASD, employment would provide stability and a source of independence. Future research could explore how to better implement individuals' choice of employment within the framework of PCP. By focusing on the individuals' choice for their work, the outcome may be more positive due to a greater level of interest on the part of the employee. My recommendation for KSA's government is to incorporate the information in these studies to transition into using PCP for individuals with disabilities. It is important that the government focuses on each person individually, rather than their diagnosis, as each person's needs and choices are different and cannot be combined into one generalized experience.

People strive for a life that is meaningful and fulfilling by playing a positive role in society. However, according to Saudi Arabia's (KSA) 2013 "Plan to Employ," individuals with disabilities have significantly lower rates of employment than adults without disabilities due to various reasons, such as a lack of employer awareness or understanding, mistrust of their abilities as productive workers, unwillingness to provide reasonable accommodations, and the lack of laws regulations and labor legislation. In addition, according to the KSA Ministry of Labor, the number of unemployed individuals with disabilities exceeds 180,000, of whom more than 100,000 have the ability to work. Since the establishment in 2016 of a younger government in KSA, a national transformation plan called Vision 2030 aims to guarantee rights for people with disabilities and involves them in workplaces by providing appropriate job opportunities so they contribute to the development of the country as a whole.

All of these changes in KSA have increased my desire to learn more about and to become an expert in the topic of Transitional Employment (TE). Learning more about TE

would help me play a positive role in empowering individuals with disabilities to live the life they wish for, which might include being more independent and having their own income. One example of a documented disability that may affect individuals in the workforce is autism spectrum disorders(ASD).

The primary purpose of this review of literature is to identify the best transition planning for students with autism to successfully obtain and maintain employment. To help them become effective employees in the community and have a better quality of life, their work site should be based on their areas of interest. This research will specifically highlight four stages: Person Centered Planning (PCP), Transition (T), Vocational Rehabilitation(VR) and, Employment (E).

In this paper, I will explore and evaluate the research question “What evidence based practices exist for person- centered planning and transition from high school to employment for young adults with autism spectrum disorder that promote maintaining jobs and becoming financially independent?”.

Background Information

Autism can be defined as a disability that makes it difficult for a child to communicate and socially interact with others (Block, Block, & Halliday, 2006). Children diagnosed with autism may experience difficulties with communication, social connection, and reciprocal play. Block et al. also indicate that they may display self-regulation behaviors, such as “repeated body movements, flapping their hands in the air, or rocking back and forth” (p. 8). They frequently become distressed with changes to a daily routine and may also establish unusual attachments to objects. Autism is a “life-long neurodevelopmental disorder of unknown etiology” (Johnson & Myers, 2007, p.636).

According to Autism and Developmental Disabilities Monitoring (ADDM) Network, the estimated percentage of children identified with ASD remains high. In 2016, about 1 in 68 (1 in 42 males, 1 in 189 females) were diagnosed with ASD (Community Report on Autism, 2016). The average age of diagnosis is 3.1 years for children with ASD (Mandell, Novak, & Zubritsky, 2005). According to Buesher, Cidav, and Knapp (2014), in the United States “the cost of supporting an individual with both ASD and an intellectual disability during his or her lifespan was \$2.4 million,” and “the cost of supporting an individual with ASD without intellectual disability was \$1.4 million” (p. 721). These numbers highlight the necessity for an accessible workforce for students with ASD, as the barriers to entry that currently exist prohibit many individuals with ASD from living more independently.

Person Centered Planning (PCP)

Timmons, Freeman, Olson, Benway, and Gulaid (2016) describe person-centered planning (PCP) as “an individualized process that supports a person with a disability to identify what he or she would define as a high quality of life for him or herself and a plan for how to bring that purpose and meaning to life” (p.36). The purpose of their research was to give a detailed outline of what constitutes person-centered practice as well as a person-centered transition planning process. They also highlight the essential steps and elements required to ensure complete success in the process of person-centered planning. Along with this, the researchers reveal the essential elements for the outcomes of this process. With the aid of this process, people living with disabilities can easily identify a high quality of their life by focusing to adding value to their life.

Timmons et al. found that in order for a person with a disability to improve the quality of their life, they need to follow a few basic approaches of person-centered practice such as directing one’s focus to the greater picture, prioritizing one’s choices as well as the changes introduced, being happy about any form of success, always being focused towards one’s goal and never rushing into achieving those goals and most importantly, ensuring that whatever results being produced can be implemented easily.

However, there may be limitations to achieving the steps of this process. It can be difficult to have easy access to community services, and the quality of these services may not meet high standards due to the lack of funding for community living. Examples of other barriers include the lack of authority to choose roommates, lack of opportunities for supportive employment, and lack of technological advances that could aid in improving employability.

Hanger, Kurtz, May, and Cloutier (2014) highlight the process of person-centered planning, specifically focusing on transition-aged youth that have ASD. People living with ASD face a lot of issues while transitioning and participating in PCP. Hence, this study sought to reveal strategies and techniques that allow a person with ASD to transition with ease and participate in the PCP meetings. The strategies presented by this study include focusing on individualized preparations for upcoming meetings, engaging in casual activities to act as an ice breaker between the planning facilitator and the meeting participants, ensuring that the meetings are not very rigid in design, and managing to get more support for the implementation of different forms of communication.

Hagner et al. (2014) employed a qualitative, mixed method design for this study. The participants were chosen based on their answer regarding an announcement about transition assistance that was passed on to 28 high schools in the areas of New Hampshire as well as Maine. After giving the sample a time period of three months to decide, a final sample of 47 ASD 16 year old students agreed to enroll. The researcher was examined the relationship between the level of adaptive behavior of youth with ASD and the use of accommodations. According to the findings of this research study, it was revealed that PCP can be effectively employed with transition-aged youth with ASD. This will allow them to actively participate in the transition planning activities. However, some limitations were faced while conducting this study. First, there was miscommunication regarding the ideal time for everyone to be present for the meeting, especially the rehabilitation counseling professionals. Moreover, it is a long-term process that makes it difficult to implement on a huge scale.

Claes, Hove, Vandavelde, Loon, and Schalock (2010) conducted a study of the literature dating back to 1985 on person-centered planning and found that due to the many different variations of definitions for PCP, there is no one philosophy that will work for everyone. their findings indicate that though PCP improved some areas of a person's life, such as career choice, ageing-related themes, leisure and retirement, there were still other areas, such as choice-making, health, wellness or living arrangements. Interestingly, in some of the reviewed studies, results indicated that there was a decrease in confrontational behavior and an increase in social behaviors along with higher levels of being social in an educational environment.

Though PCP has had some success with improving the lives of individuals with disabilities, also indicates that PCP has had little effect on "inclusive social networks, employment, physical activity or medication and a change in the negative direction for risks, physical health, and emotional and behavioral needs" (p. 447). Menchetti and Garcia (2003) found no effect on salaries or period of employment (as cited in Claes et al., 2010)

There is limited research on the topic of PCP. PCP is a more modern approach, so research on it is still being conducted. As far as its effectiveness, it is difficult to discern whether or not PCP has a significant impact on the lives of individuals with disabilities with only two articles to review. It would be most helpful to have a longitudinal study from the time a child is diagnosed with autism and measure the effectiveness of PCP throughout their lifetime. This would give valuable data that would help answer the question as to PCP's effectiveness.

Transition

Transition is defined by the Individuals with Disabilities Act as promoting actions that help an individual transition first by improving academic and functional achievement and then to facilitate the movement from school to post-school activities, with the ultimate goal of getting the individual into the employment market and becoming self-reliant (“Transition to Adulthood,” 2017).

Hedley et al. (2017) focused on improving employment outcomes for people who are diagnosed with ASD. The study aims to identify the importance of factors that play a role in shaping a successful transition to their new working environment. Additionally, it highlights the barriers that people with ASD face in their work places, and provides the perspective of the individual with ASD and their fellow co-workers and/or supporters. Due to there being only one female participant out of 28 total participants, the researchers cite gender imbalance as a limitation. Demographically, this sample comprised nine trainees with ASD, seven members of their support staff, six family members as well as six co-workers. Upon completion, the study identified various benefits, challenges and overall outcomes of this program. The research methodology employed was qualitative in nature and followed the “consolidated criteria for reporting qualitative research,” or (COREQ) guidelines (Tong et al., 2007 as cited in Hedley et al., 2017, p. 3). This inductive approach of analysis aided the researcher in addressing specific questions and objectives through “coding and categorizing raw data,” then developing a framework based on key themes drawn from these categories (p. 3).

The results revealed the factors that aided ASD trainees in transitioning to work. For example, the presence of a motivational mentor greatly improved productivity, thus, promoting positive changes in the trainees. Relationships were significantly improved at home as well as the workplace. Along with this, confidence levels increased as ASD trainees were placed at the same level as other co-workers without the diagnosis of ASD. The most noteworthy barriers were that of technical difficulties and symptomatic miscommunication, indicating the most significant barriers were at the level of employer and co-worker attitudes and understanding. The only limitation faced by the researchers was that they might have received overly positive responses because of the social pressure of being present in a group.

Biggs and Carter (2010) examined the subjective health and wellbeing of youth in the age of transition from high school to adulthood that had been diagnosed with autism or any intellectual disability. Participants included 389 parents or qualified caregivers of children ages 13-21 diagnosed with the aforementioned disabilities in the state of Tennessee. Data were collected via printed instruments mailed to participants. The main research instrument employed in this study was the parent proxy version of the KIDSCREEN-27. Data received from the KIDSCREEN field survey comprises 22,296 children and adolescents and 16,888

proxy respondents across 11 countries. The reason why this instrument was employed is because it has the ability to incorporate various quality of life domains, displays solid psychometric properties, has high internal and external validity, is capable of being used for normative comparisons, and also has a validated parent-proxy version.

The results of the study revealed three main findings that were consistent with previous research in this area. First, parent's perception of quality of life for their children with ASD or ID was lower than the age-matched normative sample of children. Second, the difference in quality of life can be attributed to the environment of special education classrooms. Third, three individual factors are highlighted that have a significant impact on the quality of life of individuals while they are undergoing the transition period: community involvement, religious faith, and character strengths. Moreover, the limitations faced in this study were that it only captured the quality of life at one point in time, in one U.S. state (Tennessee), and most of all, employed only one measure regarding quality of life.

Vocational Rehabilitation

Vocational rehabilitation is defined as a service providing individuals with counseling, on-the-job training, job placement, and assistance with vocational training. It provides assistance to the individual through case management during transitional life changes (U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs, 2012).

Lawer, Brusilovskiy, Salzer, and Mandell (2009) explored the experiences and feelings of adults with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in a vocational rehabilitation system. The purpose of a vocational rehabilitation system is to maximize the number of positive outcomes for individuals with disabilities by allocating services, for example, on the job training and job search assistance. Any person with a disability can be a part of this rehabilitation system, as it provides a job for these people by teaching them essential skills so they can be hired. 382,221 participants between the ages of 18-65 were selected to participate.

This study found that the combination of being older, male, and having more education, as well as having a previous case closure in the past 36 months positively predicted competitive employment. While the majority of the study had positive results, the authors found that people with ASD had more of a chance of being denied services because their disability was more "extreme" than others. That being said, the most notable limitation of the study was that it did not include information on co-occurring conditions, for example, intellectual disability. The authors also noted a possibility that people with ASD will never work because some of their family members had discouraged them from seeking services in the past.

Chen, Sung, and Pi (2015) found that unemployment or underemployment of individuals with a disability was a common problem. Chen et al. researched the factors that were related to young people with ASD's employment outcomes in different age groups, as these people often had trouble finding work. The authors surveyed the effects of demographics and VR service variables on employment. Participants included a total of 5,681 individuals who had ASD, were not employed before they applied for VR services, received VR services based on their Individualized Education Program (IEP), and last but not least, completed the VR services before participating in the study. The participants were divided into three groups based on their ages: (1) transition youth (age 18 or below); (2) transition young adult (age 19-25); and (3) adults (age 26 and above).

The results of the study indicated that individuals with ASD were underemployed; for example, they had lower wages even when they were overqualified for the job. It was also observed that the transitioning youth left VR with the lowest hourly wage rate and employment rate as compared to the other two groups. However, a positive takeaway was that all the individuals can benefit from vocational interventions with the right services. Other findings indicated that when a transition age young adult (19-25) went and sought employment, employers took gender, education, and race into account when they screened applicants for positions. However, these factors did not apply when the individual reached adulthood. A limitation was that the dataset was unable to provide information like the cost and time associated with providing services, which limited the scope of the study.

Alverson and Yamamoto (2016) examined the attributes that individuals with ASD possess in order to assess employment outcomes. This meta-analysis compiled data from 50 states for a span of ten years from 2003 to 2013. The majority of the individuals with ASD in the study were male (81% in 2003 to 84% in 2012), and most of them were white. The conclusion after analyzing the data was that there was an increase in employment for white males with ASD where there was no such increase in female and black clients with ASD. The rate of clients increased after completing postsecondary education. However, the percentage of older adults with ASD who had a postsecondary education was unknown (Haley, 2011 as cited in Alverson & Yamamoto, 2016). It was also seen that between the four predictors —gender, education, race, and IEP status—gender had the most impact on employment. Being a male was the best way to predict if a client with ASD would get a job or not. This could be because more males are known and identified with ASD than females in the United States Department of Labor. The limitations included the fact that there was no age variable, so it is hard to tell accurately which age group is more successful and if there is any difference between the wages and the kind of employment between young versus adult clients. The second limitation was due to the lack of a specific education variable. It was tough to distinguish between people who had special education, those who were still receiving education in school, and those who left before getting their diploma.

Employment

Employment can be defined as a necessity in modern human civilization. Societies view employment as a positive construct because it not only provides a “purpose” for people but also rewards them with income and stability in their lives. This stability enables a connection to others, ensures economic survival and creates a sense of self-reliance (Alsaman & Lee, 2017). If work can provide all these benefits for a person without a disability, imagine what it can do for a person with special needs? For a person with a disability, work is considered more valuable because it provides them with stability and a sense of purpose outside of their disability (Blustein, 2008 as cited in Alsaman & Lee, 2017).

Strickland, Coles and Southern (2013) analyzed the efficacy of a training program to develop high-level interview skills in people diagnosed with high functioning ASD. The program was conducted via the Internet, which incorporated theory of mind-based guidance, visual aids, and practice sessions in virtual reality. This research addressed the fact that plenty of youth with ASD graduate from school and are then unable to find a job. Those who do manage to gain employment typically work fewer hours with less pay in comparison to fellow neurotypical colleagues. 22 individuals between the ages of 16 and 19 participated via a pre-and post-test method. All the participants were male adolescents with high functioning ASD or Asperger’s syndrome, selected from a significantly large metropolitan area in the southeast side of the United States of America. The participants were required to be of sound hearing and sight, have well-functioning motor skills, and know how to perform basic functions on a computer with access to both the computer and the Internet at home. The participants were assessed over the course of two employment interview sessions, with half of them engaging in a training intervention called JobTIPS after the starting interview, while the other half received no such training intervention. Participants’ performance was examined through a scale that evaluated both the delivery and the content of the interview.

The results showed that adolescents with ASD who managed to finish the JobTIPS employment program expressed an improved level of verbal content skills, in comparison to those who did not receive the training intervention. The most significant limitation to this study is that it is not generalizable due to all the participants being male. It should also be noted that all the participants were volunteers and therefore may have exhibited a higher level of enthusiasm, which may not necessarily be the case for everyone. Furthermore, the JobTIPS intervention may prove to be effective in the short-term, but there is no evidence that the effects last. To investigate this, a follow-up study should be conducted in order to assess whether the transformations observed are time-sensitive or not.

Hayes et al. (2015) sought to determine the effectiveness of self and peer modeling in employment interviews in a myriad of work fields. Interviews at the time of employment call for a mastery of multiple skills, which can prove to be quite demanding for young adults, let

alone young adults with autism. In this study, a total of 15 students were selected to take part in a mock interview trial at the start and end of the month. Inclusion criteria indicated participants should be diagnosed with autism and also know how to use a smartphone effectively. Eight out of the 15 students were randomly distributed into an interventional setting and were asked to use a prototype video-modelling application, known as VidCoach, throughout the duration of the month; the other seven participants did not participate in any intervention. With the exception of one 17-year-old, the rest of the 14 participants were 18 years of age, with two participants being female and 13 being male. T-tests were applied to the quantitative data to determine the efficiency of each intervention, while the qualitative data were collected through interviews.

The results showed that the video-modelling technique was successful in enhancing the participants' performances in terms of reduced fidgeting, improvement in using logic, and improvement of hygiene. The control group showed improvement in the use of vocabulary and grammar. A significant limitation of this research was that the participants were aware of the interview only being a mock trial and, as such, may have been more relaxed and responsive.

Furthermore, over the course of the month, some participants had to participate in other actual interviews, which may have enhanced their performance during the research as they were subject to a practice-effect. These additional interviews may have skewed performance as compared to those participants whose first interview setting was in this research, with no prior experience.

Wehman et al. (2012) determined the impact of supported employment on acquiring and successfully maintaining jobs for people with ASD. The authors cited the fact that individuals with autism face difficulties in having the motivation to seek employment because they know they probably will not get the job as the motivation for this study. A total of 33 individuals, 25 males and 8 females, participated in this study. The mean age of all 33 participants was 25. The minimum educational qualification for inclusion was a high school degree, and participants needed to be diagnosed with a severe form of autism or Asperger's syndrome. The research implemented, along with specialists skilled in employment techniques, a four-step employment model: (1) development of potential employee's profile; (2) guidance of career development; (3) conduction of on-site job training; and (4) long-term solutions to maintaining a job.

The results indicated a high employment outcome, with 27 out of the 33 participants securing stable jobs with a mean wage of \$8.86 per hour. Employees with ASD who receive support during the employment process have a higher tendency to become independent and more competitive, while succeeding in maintaining their jobs for longer periods of time. Holistic interventions such as this four-step program are indeed successful in supporting young adults with ASD in their job search and transition, though they may be one of the more

expensive and time-intensive options. The limitations of this study include the inability to assess individual factors that set certain participants apart from others and determine whether they needed a higher or lower level of intervention. The study also does not offer any explanation as to why the 6 remaining participants failed to find a job during the course of this experiment, and did not use a control group to compare the efficacy of the intervention. Additionally, the results should not be generalized to the whole population with ASD, given the small sample size. Finally, most of the participants were already working at entry-level positions, which could have had an impact on how well they completed the intervention .

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