Towards a Model of Employment Support for Adults with ASD

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Conflicts of Interest

We have no conflicts of interest to declare

Presentation Outline

1. Background of ASD

2. Brief review of methods

3. Results

4. Implications for health services for adults with ASD

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Background

Cost associated with supporting adults with ASD:
- 45% of adult costs are due to **lost employment**[1]
- $22 billion a year goes toward supporting those with ASD in Canada

Mental health **comorbidities**:
- Anxiety and depression[2]

Background (continued)

- Employment is reported to be a significant factor contributing to **one's identity** and **quality of life**[3]

- The unemployment rate of Canadian adults with ASD is estimated to be **66%** (10x Canadian rate of unemployment)[4]

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Why are we interested in this topic?

- Occupation is recognized implicitly as an **important determinant of health**[6]

- Enabling people to do what they want and need to do **= their occupations**

- **Occupational Therapy** enables ALL people to live full and meaningful lives through engagement in meaningful occupations.

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Research Question

What is known in the existing literature about the **barriers** and **facilitators** to employment for adults with ASD?
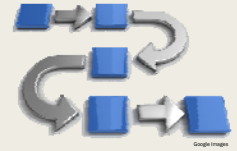

Methods: Scoping Review

Used methodological framework outlined by Arskey and O'Malley[5]

Five components:
1. Determine the research question
2. Identify relevant studies
3. Study selection
4. Appraise the quality and extract the data
5. Collate and summarize results

Identification of Relevant Studies

Inclusion Criteria:

- Published in the English language
- Human subjects, 18 years and older
- Published between **January 1, 2000 and March 31, 2017**
- Research subjects with a diagnosis of ASD
- Literature from peer-reviewed journals or grey literature
- Review articles
- Research reviews limited to developed countries

Exclusion Criteria:

- Non-rigorous journal articles that are outside those defined in the inclusion list (e.g. opinion articles, anecdotal information, book reviews, etc.)
- Undergraduate dissertations
- Policy analyses

Study Selection

Initial search: 2083 articles → After screening: 161 articles

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Evidence-Based Table

| Level of Evidence	Study Design	Number of Articles Selected
I	Systematic reviews, meta analyses, randomized control trials	28
II	Two groups, nonrandomized studies (e.g. cohort, case-control)	26
III	One group, nonrandomized studies (e.g. before and after, pretest and posttest)	35
IV	Descriptive studies that include analysis of outcomes	72
		Total: 161

Person Environment Occupation Model[7]
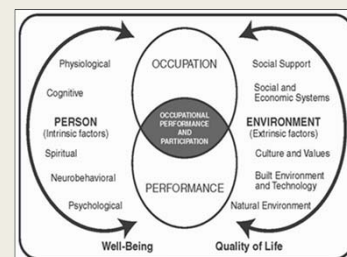
Barriers and Facilitators
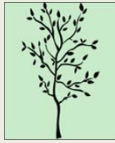
| Person | Environment | Occupation |

Findings in each category: **Person**

	Facilitators	Barriers
Physiological	• Not discussed	• Poor personal hygiene • Physical health issues
Cognitive	• Skills specific to certain jobs	• Decreased **executive function skills** • Difficulty **following instructions**
Self-Identity	• Positive self-identity	• Low self-esteem
Neurobehavioural	• Higher functioning • Fewer symptoms	• More severe communication/social difficulties • More symptoms
Psychological	• Insight • Self-advocacy	• Mental health challenges • Resistance to change

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Findings in each category: **Environment**

	Facilitators	Barriers
Social Support	• **Trained coaches, teachers, mentors, support staff** • Positive employer/coworker attitudes	• Non-preferred level of social interaction • Negative employer/coworker **attitudes**
Social & Economic Systems	• Long- & short-term workplace supports/programs • Individualized accommodations	• **Lack of long-term workplace supports/programs** • Lack of information/access to programs
Culture & Values	• General value of diversity • Understanding disclosure rights, positive disclosure experience	• Social stigma • Negative disclosure experiences
Built Environment & Technology	• Preferred level of sensory stimuli • Technological aids	• Poor **person-environmental fit**
Natural Environment	• Not discussed	• Not discussed

Findings in each category: **Occupation**

	Facilitators	Barriers
Training & Support	• Multi-area training • Support for job search, interview, job prep	• Lack of individualized workplace training • Lack of support for job search, interview, job prep
Job Fit & Preferences	• Good job fit • **Fair compensation**, working conditions, opportunities to grow	• **Poor job fit** • Unfair compensation, poor conditions
Feedback & Expectations	• **Clear expectations**, boundaries, schedule • Feedback, self-monitoring, goal setting	• **Unclear expectations**, boundaries, schedule

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Primary Themes

- Higher functioning, experience, skills, insight of the individual
- Highly trained coaches, teachers, mentors, professionals providing services
- Customized long-term supports
- Multi-area training
- Meaningful job fit (any job is not the right job)
- Building supportive communities

Gaps in the research

- Mental health
- Stigma
- Transition Services
- Consensus on content of support programs/training
- Strategy for supporting employers and families

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Conclusions

- The literature on the topic of employment and ASD is **extensive**
- There are many small sample size studies and lower "quality" research
- **Key themes** included customized and diverse training/support from well-trained professionals and a positive surrounding community
- Recommendation: **coordinated**, **systematic** and **comprehensive** approach to employment support

Next Steps

- **Create** an innovative and useful tool for professionals working with adults with ASD
- **Partner** with local adults with ASD, families, and relevant stakeholders
- **Advocate** provincially and federally for customized workplace accommodations and comprehensive support programming [8]

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