

A review of ASD students’ experiences of tertiary education

Introduction

ASD is a neurological development disorders and/or life-long developing disorder characterised by three core deficits: impaired communication, repetitive and restrictive behaviours and impaired reciprocal interactions (World Health Organization, 1992; Matson and Sturmey, 2011; American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

Approximately 1% world's population has been diagnosed with ASD (Malcom-Smith et al., 2013), with similar levels reported across Europe and across the United Kingdom (UK) (Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology, 2008)

Up to 70% of children and adolescents experience one or more of several re-occurring mental health conditions or comorbidities:

- **Anxiety**
- **Depression**
- **ADHD**
- **OCD**

(Craig et al., 2015; Davis et al., 2014; Gadow, et al., 2012; Gotham et al., 2014; Mack et al., 2010; Van Steensel and Heeman, 2017; Matson and Nebel-Schwalm, 2007; Meier et al., 2015; Simonoff et al., 2012

Justification

Tertiary education has been viewed as an accessible option for students with additional learning (ALN), including those with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) (Ward and Webster, 2018; Ames et al., 2016; Gardiner and Iarocc, 2013). Educational and employment outcomes for adults with ASD are limited (Gelbar et al., 2015). However data has shown:

- **ASD individuals are 43% more likely to not engage in further education and training**
- **1/3 of ASD individuals (UK) fall under Not-in-Education-Employment-or-Training (NEET)**
- **40% ASD students complete their studies**
- **4.1% ASD individuals gain employment**

(Shattuck et al., 2012; Bancroft et al., 2012; Taylor and Seltzer, 2011; Sanford et al., 2011)

•

Findings

The transition from compulsory-education to tertiary, or higher education (HE) presents numerous challenges, including academic and non-academic

Non-Academic experiences

ASD students feel social participation is unnecessary and forced, and increases levels of

- **Anxiety**
- **Isolation**
- **Loneliness and anger**

(Gurbuz et al., 2019; Ward and Webster, 2018; Jackson et al., 2018; White et al., 2016) .

The comorbidities related to ASD has been noted to contribute towards poor social engagement (Craig et al., 2015; Davis et al., 2014; Gadow, et al., 2012; Gotham et al., 2014; Mack et al., 2010; Van Steensel and Heeman, 2017; Matson and Nebel-Schwalm, 2007; Meier et al., 2015; Simonoff et al., 2012;Ward and Webster, 2018).

Academic Experiences

48% of ASD students report that they are happy with the academic workload (Gelbar et al., 2014; Jackson, et al., 2018)

However, several studies identify a number of challenges:

- **Groupwork**
- **Presentations**
- **Time-management**
- **Information processing**

(Macleod and Green, 2009; White et al, 2016; Jensen, et al., 2018).

ASD refrain from seeking support from academic members and institutions out of fear of other people’s perceptions of them; therefore, this suggests that institutions need to apply early interventions to remove the students’ perceptions of stigmatization

Methods and Materials

- **Snowballing**
- **manual searches**
- **online searches.**
- **CASP**

Inclusion criteria

- **10-year spectrum (2010-2020)**
- **Peer reviewed studies**
- **Qualitative/ phenomenological studies**

Recommendations

- Research to be conducted within other westernised countries.
- Examine male and females (with ASD) experiences.
- Conduct quantitative research in addition to the existing body of research.
- There is a need to not only provide support but to increase training for all academic staff members.
- There is a need for early interventions.

References

American Psychiatric Association. (2013). Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders. 5th ed. Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association.

Ames, M. E., McMorris, C. A., Alli, L. N. and Bebko, J. M. (2016). Overview and Evaluation of a Mentorship Program for University Students With ASD. Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities. 31(1): pp. 27 –36.

Bancroft, K., Batten, A., Lambert, S. and Madders, T. (2012) The way we are: Autism in 2012, London: The National Autistic Society.

Craig, F. (2015). Overlap Between Autism Spectrum Disorders and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder: Searching for Distinctive/Common Clinical Features. Autism Res. 8(3): pp. 328–337

Davis, T. E., White, S. W. and Ollendick, T. H. (2014). Handbook of Autism and Anxiety. London: Springer International Publishing.

Gadow, K. D., Guttman-Steinmetz, S., Rieffe, C. and DeVincent, C. J. (2012) Depression Symptoms in Boys with Autism Spectrum Disorder and Comparison Samples. Journal of Autism Developmental Disorders. 42: pp. 1353-1363

Gelbar, N. W., Smith, I. and Reichow, B. (2014) Systematic review of articles describing experience and supports of individuals with autism enrolled in college and university programs. Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorder. 44(10): pp. 2593–2601.

Gelbar, N. W., Smith, I. and Reichow, B. (2014) Systematic review of articles describing experience and supports of individuals with autism enrolled in college and university programs. Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorder. 44(10): pp. 2593–2601

Gotham, K., Unrugh, K. and Lord, C. (2014) Depression and its measurement in verbal adolescents and adults with autism spectrum disorder. Autism.19(4): pp. 491-504.

Gurbuz, E., Hanley, Mary and Riby, D. M. (2019). University Students with Autism: The Social and Academic Experiences of University in the UK. Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders. 49: pp. 617-631.

Matson, J. and Nebel-Schwalm, M. (2007) Comorbid psychopathology with autism spectrum disorder in children: an overview. Research in Developmental Disabilities. (28): pp. 341-352.

Jackson, S. L., Hart, L., Brown, J. T. and Volkmar, F. R. (2018) Brief Report: Self-reported academic, social, and mental health experiences of post-secondary students with autism spectrum disorder. Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders. 48(3): pp. 643-650.

Macleod, A. and Green, S. (2009) Beyond the books: A case study of a collaborative and holistic support model for university students with Asperger syndrome. Studies in Higher Education. 34(6): pp. 631-646.

Malcom-Smith, S. (2013) Autism spectrum disorder: Global Challenges and local opportunities. Journal of Child and Adolescent Mental Health. 25(1): pp. 1-5.

Gardiner, E and Iarocc, G. (2013) Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder in the University Context: Peer Acceptance Predicts Intention to Volunteer. Journal of Autism Developmental Disorders. 44: pp. 1008–1017.

Meier, S. M. (2015). Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder and Autism Spectrum Disorders: Longitudinal and Offspring Risk. PLOS One. 10(11): pp. 1-12.

van Steensel, F. J. A. and Heeman, E. J. (2017) Anxiety Levels in Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder: A Meta-Analysis. J Child Fam Stud. 26: pp. 1753-1767.

Sanford, C. (2011) The Post-High School Outcomes of Young Adults with Disabilities up to 6 Years After High School: Key Findings From the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2), Washington, DC: National Centre for Special Education Research: Institute of Education Sciences.

Shattuck, P. T. (2012) Postsecondary education and employment among youth with an autism spectrum disorder. Pediatrics. 129: pp. 1042-1049.

Simonoff, E. (2012) Severe mood problems in adolescents with autism spectrum disorder. Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry. 53(11): pp. 1157-116.

Sinclair, J. (1988) A note about language and abbreviations. [Online] Available at: <https://web.archive.org/web/20080606024118/http://web.syr.edu/~jisincla/language.htm> [Accessed 5 March 2020].

Taylor, J. L. and Seltzer, M. M. (2011) Employment and post-secondary educational activities for young adults with autism spectrum disorders during the transition to adulthood. Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders. 4. 1(5): pp. 566-574

World Health Organization. (1992). The ICD-10 Classification of Mental and Behavioural Disorders: Clinical descriptions and diagnostic guidelines, Geneva

Ward, D. and Webster, A. (2018) Understanding the Lived Experiences of University Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD): A Phenomenological Study. International Journal of Disability, Development and Education. 65(4): pp.

Author:
Johnathen Wyatt
PGCE (PCET)
student

