

PERCEPTIONS OF AUTISM IN THE WORKPLACE: A STUDENT'S PERSPECTIVE.

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Prifysgol Cymru

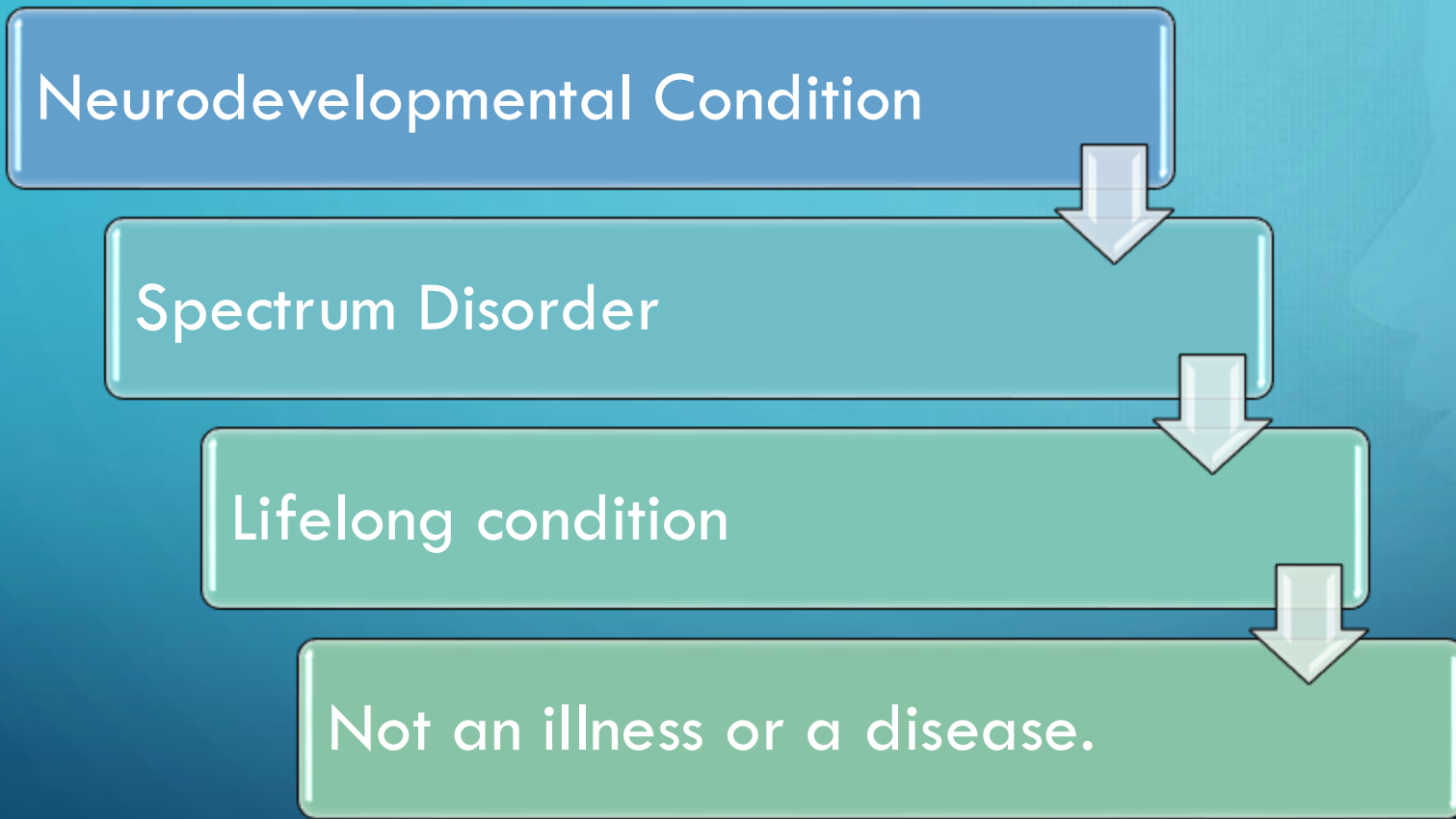
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WHAT IS AUTISM?

Neurodevelopmental Condition



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graph TD; A[Neurodevelopmental Condition] --> B[Spectrum Disorder]; B --> C[Lifelong condition]; C --> D[Not an illness or a disease.]
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Spectrum Disorder

Lifelong condition

Not an illness or a disease.

AUTISM IN THE WORKPLACE: WHY IT MATTERS.

My Luca.

One in 100 children is diagnosed with ASD.

Increase of 450% in adult diagnoses since 2011

Only 22% of adults with ASD in paid employment.

Today's students are tomorrow's workers.



AIMS OF THIS STUDY

To examine students' perceptions of autism in the workplace.

Identify perceptions of workplace challenges and needs.

Implications for workplace integration.

BACKGROUND: WORKPLACE CHALLENGES

Communication
Difficulties

Sensory
sensitivities

Lack of available
accommodations

Workplace
misunderstandings

Isolation and
reduced
collaboration

BACKGROUND: THEORIES

Theory of Mind (ToM) (Baron-Cohen, 1995)

- Mindblindness – difficulty attributing mental states to others

Social Representation Theory (SRT) (Moscovici, 1961)

- Examines how collective and cultural narratives shape an individual's understanding of the world

Person-Environment Fit (P-E Fit) (Lawson, 1983)

- Mismatch between the individual's ability and the workplace demands

Social Model of Disability

- Disability is not the issue. Instead, physical and institutional barriers are the issue.

METHODOLOGY: PARTICIPANTS

- Participants
 - Recruited through the Experiment Management System
 - 21 students completed the online questionnaire
 - Seven students attended the focus group.



METHODOLOGY: DESIGN

- Mixed-methods study using quantitative and qualitative data collection.
 - Online Questionnaire.
 - Designed to gauge students' perceptions of autism in the workplace.
 - The purpose of the online questionnaire was to facilitate questions for the focus group.
 - Descriptive Statistics on SPSS
 - Focus group.
 - Further explore students' perceptions of autism in the workplace.
 - Focus group questions were designed to complement the findings of the questionnaire.
 - The purpose of the focus group was to gather insights into social attitudes, workplace barriers, and perceptions of how individuals with autism could be better supported in the workplace.
 - Thematic Analysis conducted.

(Braun and Clarke, 2012).

METHODOLOGY: MATERIALS

Online questionnaire:

- Ten revised questions from the *HR Professional's Perception of Employability of Persons with Intellectual disabilities* (Berry & Kymar, 2012).
- Answered between 1 (Not a barrier) and 5 (Always a barrier).

Focus Group:

- Questions were devised from the answers of the online questionnaire.

Sample of Focus Group Questions

1. How do you think people in the general public define Autism?
 - What do you think the public might say are specific traits of autism?
 - How do you think people with autism are generally viewed in society?
 - Prompt: Do you think autism affects how a person with autism thinks?
 - How easy do you think it is for people with autism to gain employment?
 - How motivated do you think employers are to hire people with autism?
 - What kinds of jobs might people consider to be suitable for a person with autism?

METHODOLOGY: PROCEDURES

Pilot studies:

Participants were students from the psychology and counselling modules.

Four participants completed the online questionnaire and provided feedback.

Successful, and no revisions needed.

Mock focus group conducted with four student participants recruited from the psychology and counselling module.

Participants were invited to share feedback, and the pilot was successful with minimum feedback and no changes made.

Online Questionnaire

Designed on Qualtrics,
Distributed on the Experiment Management System at UWTSD.

Information sheet.

Consent form.

Questions

Debrief and Thanks

Focus Group

Private Room at UWTSD

Information Sheet

Consent Form

Demographics Form

Session audio recorded

Confidentiality

Right to Withdraw

Debrief

Support offered and Thanks



RESULTS: QUESTIONNAIRE

Key Findings:

- 21 Questionnaires Completed. Six were excluded due to failure to meet criteria.
- Lack of education and lack of work experience were perceived as barriers.
- Negative attitudes from coworkers and employers were perceived as barriers.
- Issues with accessibility and work-life balance were perceived as barriers.
- Provided rich data for the focus group.

RESULTS: FOCUS GROUP

1. Perceptions of Autism

- Negative Stereotypes
- Stigmatising Language
- Outdated Terminology
- Spectrum Disorder

2. Workplace Challenges

- Lack of Understanding
- Empathy and Understanding
- Lack of education/training
- Flippant Attitudes
- Barriers to Employment
- Emphasis on Diagnosis

Four key themes emerged:

3. Strengths of ASD

- Diversity
- Highly Focused
- Creative
- Logical Reasoning

4. Workplace Accommodations and Support

- Need for Routine and Structure
- Environmental Accommodations
- Technological Accommodations

Supporting Quotes:

1. Stigmatising Language: "I think maybe, like, a burden. Like, you see that the NHS is saying that they're overrun with trying to diagnose people with autism now." (Monica)

2. Lack of Understanding: "I don't think many people understand the needs of people with autism unless they have been, umm, they've got a close family member or, you know, the best friend has autism." (Mark)

3. Highly Focused: "I think people with autism can be quite passionate about stuff they enjoy, so it means like they'll put all their effort into being hard-working." (Rachel)

4. Routine and Structure: "I think everything from a routine – they like a routine, and if, for example, they had to finish work late or something or work didn't go to plan for that, what messed up the time they got home" (Mark)

DISCUSSION



STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES



Strengths

- Mixed-Methods Approach
- Strong theoretical approaches
- Addresses a real-world issue regarding individuals with ASD
- Robust ethical considerations ensuring research integrity
- Actionable recommendations for workplace accommodations.



Weaknesses

- Small sample sizes affected generalisability
- Potential sampling bias due to only recruiting students from UWTSD
- Limited demographic data, which restricted a more robust analysis
- Potential transcription bias from myself.

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Thank you!