

Participants and Methods: 400 autistic adults, recruited via the Simons Powering Autism Research (SPARK) participant registry Research Match service, participated in this study (40.5% male, mean age=28.9 years). All participants completed the LNST, which collects responses to 13 core questions about learning (such as challenges with memorization, note taking, spelling and identifying arithmetic signs), as well as 7 additional questions with checkbox and free response options, and yields a total score from 0-30. LNST item 14 and its response options (1-9) capture suspected causes of learning difficulties (e.g., 'too much noise or activity bothers me,' 'I get nervous taking tests'). These individual questions as well as the total of endorsed learning related challenges were then evaluated in relation to historical special education receipt ("yes" vs. "no") and vocational outcomes ("yes" vs. "no" engaging in 10+ hours of postsecondary education or employment without supports), as assessed via the Taylor Vocational Index.

Results: Logistic regression was utilized to predict the dependent variables of interest. Models included sex assigned at birth and age in the first step as covariates. Then either the total of learning related challenges endorsed or the 9 individual learning-related challenges from the LNST were included as independent variables of interest. For historical special education receipt, two items – "It's hard for me to work by myself" ($B = .78, p < .05$) and "I get nervous taking tests" ($B = .49, p < .05$) were positively associated with a history of special education services. For vocational outcomes, the total learning related challenges ($B = -.25, p < .001$) as well as endorsement of one item – "It's hard for me to work by myself" ($B = -.88, p < .05$) were associated with poorer vocational outcomes.

Conclusions: These findings shed light on the possible learning-related challenges that are experienced by autistic adults. Further examination of the role these learning related challenges play in the receipt of special education and on vocational outcomes is warranted. In particular, difficulties with independence in work was related to both special education receipt and poorer vocational outcomes, indicating that it may be a fruitful area of focus for vocational training programs.

Categories: Autism Spectrum Disorders/Developmental Disorders/Intellectual Disability

Keyword 1: autism spectrum disorder

Keyword 2: pediatric neuropsychology

Keyword 3: academic skills

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17 Studying the Use of Politeness in Employment Specific Scenarios in Youth with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

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Objective: Employment is crucial in the lives of adults with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) as gainful occupational activity creates opportunities to form meaningful social relationships, participate in community life, and become financially independent. Impairments in pragmatic language skills (i.e., use of language to achieve social goals) negatively impact the ability to make and maintain cooperative work relationships with employers and coworkers, which are critical aspects of employment. A specific pragmatic skill key to workplace communication includes using a suitable degree of politeness, loosely defined as demonstrating the appreciation of the thoughts and feelings of your listener. Politeness can be measured with politeness markers (PMs). Appropriate PM use promotes positive, cooperative relationships. There are two main categories of PMs: positive and negative PMs. Positive PMs express appreciation or praise to the listener. Negative PMs avoid conflict and marks consideration of the thoughts and feelings of the listener. Crucially, negative PMs require more monitoring of social boundaries as they require consideration of the conversational partner's potential reactions to statements and their emotional states. This makes PMs a novel new approach to evaluating speech in persons with

ASD. Because PMs serve a purely social function in language, they include non-tangible words, such as would, could, may, or might. The current study explores the utility of an employment-specific social communication assessment tool, the Voicemail Elicitation Task (VET), in persons with ASD. The VET has proven sensitive to identifying social communication deficits in persons with traumatic brain injury.

Participants and Methods: The current cohort comparative study included a sample of young adults with ASD (n=22) and neurotypical controls (NTC; n=10). All participants were given the VET, which utilizes a standardized computerized language sampling procedure that assesses politeness markers (PMs) in work-related role-play scenarios. The outcome measure of the VET is PMs per minute (PMpM) which is obtained by dividing the sum of PMs by the speaking time (in minutes). Higher PMpM indicates higher PM use (more politeness), while lower PMpM indicates lower PM use (less politeness).

Results: The preliminary results indicated a significantly lower total PMpM in ASD participants (mean: 13.68 SD: 6.28) compared to NTCs (mean 18.72, SD: 3.65), $p = 0.026$. Post hoc analysis indicated that the differences in groups were driven by significantly lower negative PMs rates used by the ASD group (mean 9.18, SD: 5.77) compared to NTCs (mean: 16.30, SD: 7.78), $p = 0.002$, while both groups were similar in their mean level of positive PMs use, $p = 0.442$.

Conclusions: This study represents an important step toward validating the VET for use in ASD, which will improve the capacity of the field to address unemployment in this population. The results of the current study indicate that individuals with ASD show deficits in PM use which could impact their interpersonal relationships within the workplace environment. Designing interventions to target these deficits could help provide better employment outcomes for this population.

Categories: Autism Spectrum Disorders/Developmental Disorders/Intellectual Disability

Keyword 1: autism spectrum disorder

Keyword 2: language disorder

Keyword 3: assessment

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18 Improving Job Interview Skills in Autistic Youth Using a Combined Intervention Approach Inspired by Positive Psychology

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Objective: Nearly 85% of adults on the autism spectrum are unemployed, although nearly 70% of those who are unemployed express a desire and willingness to work. The job interview has been identified as a significant obstacle to obtaining employment by young adults on the spectrum. A growing field of research has been focused on evaluating innovative training tools to improve interview skills. Our previous work shows that a virtual reality job interview training (VR-JIT) tool improves certain job interview skills (such as sounding professional, establishing rapport), but does not improve the ability to speak about personal strengths and abilities. The current study combined VR-JIT with a new training tool: Kessler Foundation Strength Identification and Expression (KF-STRIDE), an intervention grounded in principles of positive psychology. KF-STRIDE targets identification of personal character strengths and expressing those strengths to employers in a socially appropriate way.

Participants and Methods: The current study evaluated data from 20 autistic youth, randomized to an experimental group (n=10) and a services-as-usual (SAU) control group (n=10). Those in the experimental group participated in a 12 session intervention (9 sessions using VR-JIT and 3 sessions in KF-STRIDE). Each session was roughly one hour. Job interview performance was assessed by video-recorded mock job interviews rated by blinded assessors pre- and post- the intervention. Paired samples t-tests were conducted to examine differences in job interview skills from baseline to follow up in both groups.