Plain Language Summary
RS#2 Year 3
October 2026

Associations Between Aspects of Employment and Psychological Health Among Autistic Adults

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RRTC on Employment of Persons with Intellectual & Developmental Disabilities

A QUICK LOOK

Individuals with autism often have different experiences at work than their peers without disabilities. Those experiences can have a positive or negative impact on their well-being. In this study, Mueller and colleagues investigated how various aspects of employment affect the psychological health of autistic adults. To answer this research question, the team collected information about employment, daily living skills, and well-being from 109 adults with autism who had paid jobs in their communities. The participants answered employment questions like whether they worked full- or part-time, how positively they perceived their workplace, and how often they interacted with others while on-the-job. The participants also answered questions about their perceived quality of life. Finally, participants answered questions about their level of independence completing everyday living tasks like domestic chores, hygiene tasks, and community participation.

KEY FINDINGS

The research team found the following results:

- There was only one aspect of employment that impacted mental well-being in this study. Autistic adults who experienced more positive work climates reported a significantly higher psychological quality of life.
- The association between more positive work climates and higher mental well-being was stronger for middle-aged participants rather than younger autistic adults.
- The association between more positive work climates and higher mental well-being was also stronger for autistic adults who had less independence in daily living skills.

PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

The findings from this study highlight the importance of fostering positive work environments within community businesses to support autistic employees. The results of this study indicate that workplace climate is a particularly important aspect of employment that affects an autistic employee's mental well-being, even more so than how often the individual works (full vs part-time) or how often they interact with others at work (talking to customers, answering phones, etc.). Service providers should evaluate the workplace climate of community businesses when supporting autistic individuals in pursuing work opportunities. Service providers can offer disability awareness training for employers or other methods of support to help foster more positive work environments for autistic employees.

NEXT STEPS

While this study examined several important aspects of employment, there are many other facets of employment that may impact overall quality of life. Future research should consider the influence of variables like wages, accommodations, advancement opportunities, job descriptions, and other elements of work on quality-of-life. Furthermore, future research should consider the impact these employment factors may have on other quality of life domains, such as physical or social health, for autistic employees.

LEARN MORE: https://idd.vcurrtc.org/research/rs2.cfm

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