

Competitive Integrated Employment for Youth and Adults with Autism: Findings from a Scoping Review

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Schall, C., Wehman, P., Avellone, L., & Taylor, J. P. (2020). Competitive Integrated Employment for Youth and Adults with Autism: Findings from a Scoping Review. *Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Clinics*, 29(2), 373-397.

■ A QUICK LOOK:

Adults with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) often face bigger challenges becoming employed than adults without a disability. Employment interventions are designed to help adults with ASD be successful at finding and keeping jobs in the community. A thorough review of published research was conducted to examine which employment interventions are helpful for adults with ASD. This review included articles published between 2000 and 2019, in the United States or abroad, using a population of individuals with ASD, and included an employment intervention leading to competitive work within the community. Findings from this review identified several important employment interventions for adults with ASD.

■ KEY FINDINGS:

According to the research:

- Supported employment is an effective way for individuals with ASD to become employed in the community. Supported employment focuses on placing a person with ASD in a job and uses individualized training supports to help them be successful.
- A supported employment internship program (i.e., Project SEARCH +ASD Supports) resulted in very high rates of employment within the community. Project SEARCH + ASD Supports incorporated diagnosis specific training strategies known to be effective for teaching individuals with ASD.
- Certain vocational services were identified as leading to paid work including receiving services in an integrated environment, obtaining work experience before graduating high school, and using technology for support within the workplace.
- Customized employment, an extension of supported employment, showed promise as an effective intervention and should continue to be implemented and researched.
- Sheltered workshops, which typically focus on training before seeking employment, were not identified as a means to competitive employment by this review.

■ PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE:

This review identified several employment interventions with differing levels of success in helping adults with ASD obtain paid work. The “place, then train” model of supported employment was very effective for securing community jobs. The addition of specific supports for individuals with ASD (e.g., social skill training, behavior management, etc.), technology to learn job skills (e.g., virtual reality, iPod), receiving job support in an applied business setting, and having an opportunity to participate in real work before graduating from high school all led to competitive integrated jobs.

■ MORE ABOUT THIS ARTICLE

Understanding which employment interventions are effective in producing paid work is the first step in improving employment rates for adults with ASD. The current literature base indicates that preparatory employment training is not necessary for gaining paid work for individuals with ASD. Individuals with ASD, their families, services providers, and educators should continue to prioritize the use of employment interventions which have been shown through research to result in paid community work over services that have not been directly linked to competitive integrated employment.

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