Perceptions of Employers in Spokane County Regarding Employing Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder

Shannon White  
Eastern Washington University

Curtis Pearson  
Eastern Washington University

Amylynne Sargent  
Eastern Washington University

Jennifer McQuillan  
Eastern Washington University

Molly Hobbs  
Eastern Washington University

Follow this and additional works at: http://dc.ewu.edu/srcw_2014

Part of the Occupational Therapy Commons

Recommended Citation

http://dc.ewu.edu/srcw_2014/7
Perceptions of Employers on Employing Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder

Molly Hobbs, OTS, Jennifer McQuillan, OTS, Curtis Pearson, OTS, Amy Sargent, OTS, & Shannon White, OTS
Outline

- Defining the problem
- Research methods and results
- Analysis
- Moving forward
- What did we learn
- Questions?
What would happen?

“What would happen if the autism gene was eliminated from the gene pool?

You would have a bunch of people standing in a cave, chatting and socializing and not getting anything done”

--Temple Grandin, 2008
Overview of Autism Spectrum Disorder

What is it?

- Neurodevelopmental
- Symptom onset prior to age 3
- Characterised by functional deficits in
  - social interaction
  - communication
  - behavior

(APA, 2013)
Recent Changes

- DSM-5 (APA, 2013)
  - Single classification
  - Symptoms along a continuum

- CDC statistics (CDC, 2014)
  - 1 in 68
  - 29% increase from 2008

Impact of ASD Through the Lifespan

“Most people with ASD...have difficulty participating in everyday life occupations” (Gal, Meir, & Katz, 2013, p.1)

- Symptom presentation unique to each individual (Autism Speaks, 2013; CDC 2012)
- Impacts performance and participation through the lifespan (NINDS, 2014)
- Isolation and restricted involvement in activities (APA, 2013; NINDS, 2014)
- Outcome for adults dependent on their level of functioning (Volkmar et al., 2005)
Literature Review: What we Found

There is limited research regarding...

- Adolescents or adults with autism
- Support for individuals with ASD in employment
- Programs available to companies employing individuals with ASD
Adults and ASD

As the population of adults with ASD grows, so too will the demand for supports to help them live independently (Cimera & Cowan, 2009; Hendricks, 2010; Morgan & Schultz, 2012)

“She has more to offer the world than just separating trash” (Clickprod, 2012)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DNm8qnf2jpY
Research Questions

- What level of knowledge or awareness do employers have regarding ASD?
- What are the perceptions to hiring individuals with ASD?
- What kind of opportunities are available for individuals with ASD?
- Are there employment opportunities for individuals with ASD in our own community?
Challenges to Employment

Behaviors associated with ASD impact the ability to find and maintain employment (Lee & Carter, 2012; Matson & Rivet, 2008)

Characteristics considered difficult to manage in the workplace:

- Concrete thinking
- Problems with executive functioning
- Overly attentive to detail/fixation
- Social awareness
- Difficulty with communication

(Lee & Carter, 2012; Standifer, 2009)
Benefits to Employers

“People with disabilities have a lot more potential than people give them credit for.” (as cited in Ladika, 2012)

Some programs have recognized strengths of individuals with ASD

- High level of math and computer skills (Gal, Meir, & Katz, 2013)
- High quality of work (Hopkins, 2013; Ladika, 2012)
- Good memory (Gal, Meir, & Katz, 2013)
Employer Perceptions

“Who wants to be labeled as ‘oh, that odd person’?” (Clickprod, 2012)

Negative perceptions can create a barrier to employment

- Problems with communication and socialization (Fitzgerald, 2014; Wallis, 2012)
- Challenging behavior (Schall, 2010; Ladika, 2012)
- Increased training time (Schall, 2010)
National Employment Climate for Individuals with ASD

National Longitudinal Transition Study 2 (NLTS-2)

- 32.5 percent of young adults with ASD currently worked compared to 79 percent of all respondents
- 47.7 percent of youth with ASD worked for a paycheck in the past 2 years compared to 78.4 percent of all respondents
- 29 percent of youth with ASD were currently looking for employment compared to 47.7 percent of all respondents

(as cited in Autism Now, 2013)
National Employment Climate continued

- 46 percent of adults with ASD were employed through regular, supported, or sheltered employment; or were participating in full-time education

- Those employed individuals with ASD were in low level and under-paid positions

- Individuals with ASD are making 86 percent as much per hour compared to other adults with a developmental disability

Spokane County

Developmental Disabilities Board of Spokane

- Assist individuals with developmental disabilities obtain and maintain employment including individuals with ASD

Current support agencies in Spokane


(B. Nichols, personal communication, May 24, 2013;
Spokane County

- 750 individuals with a developmental disability are currently receiving assistance from employment support agencies.
- Currently there is no agency devoted strictly to the employment needs of individuals with ASD, employers, and possible employers.
- It is hypothesized that many people with developmental disabilities, and their support systems, are unaware of resources and assistance available for employment.
- It is hypothesized that one of the reasons employers do not hire more individuals with ASD is their lack of knowledge about such programs.

(B. Nichols, personal communication, May 24, 2013)
Introduction to the Problem

- Currently, no employment agencies provide services exclusively to the ASD population in Spokane County.

- Of all individuals with developmental disabilities in Spokane County, only 750 are receiving employment support of some kind.
Purpose Statement:

The purpose of this study was to discover employers' perceptions of employing individuals with ASD in Spokane County.
Study Design

- **Concurrent Nested Descriptive Case Study**
  - Qualitative core
  - Exploration of a problem
  - Identification of variables for future research
  - Flexibility
  - Detailed understanding of issue

- **Pilot study**
  - Descriptive detail
  - Development of a new phenomenon
  - Pave way for future research

(Creswell, 2007; Kielholner & Fossey, 2006)
Case Study

“The study of an issue explored through one or more cases within a bounded system” (Creswell, 2007, p. 73)

- Builds a foundation for understanding
- Our research question
- Collective case study
- Bounded system ➔ Spokane County, WA
  - Collect data from multiple sources within our bounded system
  - Participating businesses
Population

- **Target Population**
  - Businesses within Spokane County, WA

- **Inclusion Criteria**
  - Industry categories: food, retail, building supply, entertainment, technology, and manufacturing

- **Exclusion Criteria**
  - Government agencies
  - Active involvement with an ASD organization
  - Immediate family member diagnosed with ASD

Retrieved from http://www.commons.wikimedia.org
Sampling

- Utilized Dexknows.com
- Businesses within Spokane County, WA
- Non-randomized purposive sampling
  - Needed data that was useful and understandable
- Every 3rd business on alphabetized list
  - Sample pool of 745 businesses
  - Eliminates bias
Data Collection

Survey

- Survey Monkey

- Letter of Intent
  - Employer in charge of hiring

- Qualitative
  - Frequencies of responses

http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=oPPI1uFz2cu68hqNhMnb22D1j092ZDKmd%2bcIqJqSagM%3d
Survey

Five domains and 15 total questions

1) Demographics
2) Awareness of ASD
3) Awareness of need for employment
4) Perceived opportunities in the business to employ individuals with ASD
5) Awareness of support services available for employment of individuals with ASD
Data Analysis

Data Analysis

- Thematic analysis
- 5 steps
  1) Compiling data
  2) Individual analysis and initial code development
  3) Collaboration of ideas and development of finalized codes
  4) Group analysis of codes to establish themes
  5) Direct interpretation of themes to develop generalizations, an in-depth picture of the case, and identify implications to OT

(Braun and Clarke, 2006)
Results

- 745 letters mailed out
- Response rate: 1.8%

Retrieved from http://www.thefeedingdoctor.com
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Employees</th>
<th>Business Sector</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Range</td>
<td>Frequency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-10</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-20</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-50</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51-100</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt; 100</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Other sectors mentioned were: “manufacturing” and “wholesale distribution”*
Has your Company Employed an Individual with ASD?

Yes: 5 responses
No: 8 responses
Exclusions

Do you have an Immediate Family Member who has been Diagnosed with ASD?

- Yes: 2 responses
- No: 10 responses

Are you Currently or have you ever been Involved in any ASD Related Organizations?

- Yes: 7 responses
- No: 3 responses
Are you Aware of any Employment Opportunities for Individuals with ASD in Spokane, County?

Number of Responses

Response

yes

No
Available Knowledge

There is a lack of knowledge concerning autism in the workforce within Spokane County

- “unaware… no knowledge”
- “I am not aware of any”
- “no idea”
Employment Opportunities

There are limited jobs individuals with autism can fulfill within a company.

- “Depends on their ASD. Maybe nothing. We work with large machines, cutting tools, not sure if that is a safe environment for them. Being a receptionist has a lot of numbers involved.”

Retrieved from http://blog.jobsgopublic.com/
Potential Traits

Employers perceive that individuals with autism are intelligent, focused, and detailed orientated

➢ “Great employee, honest, trustworthy, always on time and in proper dress.”
Additional Resources

Employers perceive that it requires more resources and time from them to employ an individual with autism compared to an employee without ASD

➢ “hiring someone with ASD would be a hardship because our employees work with very little supervision or direction.”
Social interaction and communication skills of individuals with autism hinder employer’s willingness to hire them.

- “For example, he could run the cash register extremely well, but wasn’t great at customer interaction.”

- “It would be difficult for an individual to be a manager that had to multitask a lot or interact a ton with others.”

Retrieved from http://tricomb2b.com/
Moving Forward

What does this mean for:

- The profession of occupational therapy
- Individuals with ASD
- Employers
- Future research

Retrieved from http://www.gettyimages.com
Implications for OT Intervention

- Work ➔ an area of occupation (AOTA, 2008)
  - Selecting, obtaining, and maintaining employment opportunities

- Assisting individuals with ASD
  - Identify skills, traits, positions
  - Accommodations that work best
    - daily schedule, dividers, sunglasses
  - Self-advocacy in the workplace

(Brouhard, 2013; Jordan, 2008; Scott 2011)
Implications for OT intervention cont’d

- Assisting employers
  - Provide resources – mass or targeted distribution
    - Institute for Community Inclusion & Boston University
  - Providing accommodations
    - Alternative interviews
    - Specific instructions
  - Accompany the individual and their employer to educate
    - Segment of day
    - Orientation day

(Brouhard, 2013; Jordan, 2008; Scott 2011)
Next step: Future Research

- **Employers**
  - Skills to be successful
    - transitional programs
  - Workspace modifications
  - Best way to be educated

- **Individuals with ASD**
  - Do they have the skills they need

- **Larger sample size**
Future Research continued

Metropolitan area comparison

- Towson University
  - Similar research question and study design; co-occurring
  - Goal to compare results
    - Similar themes
    - Rural vs. Metropolitan
      - Resources
Strengths of Study

- Qualitative study
- Exclusion criteria
  - True representation of those not yet invested
- Sampling method
  - Eliminated the potential for bias and inconsistency
- Use of Survey Monkey
- True Spokane County representation attempted
  - Exclusions outside of Spokane County
Weaknesses of Study

- Wording of survey questions
- Lack of survey reminders
- Sensitive topic
- Response rate
  - 1.8%
Limitations

- **Funds**
  - Database access, reminders

- **DexKnows**
  - Categorization
  - Lack of email addresses
  - Didn’t stick to our parameters

- **Geographical limitation**
  - Spokane County, WA

- **Survey monkey**
  - Access to computer or request hard copy
  - Transferring link from paper to computer

Retrieved from http://www.naplyn.com
Hope for the future

“I’m going to change the world someday by, like, changing the way the world thinks about autism” (Clickprod, 2012)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DNm8qnf2jpY


References
References


References


