Asperger’s Syndrome/Autism-Making the right career choices and advice for the prospective employer. A power point presentation from the Living Autism Conference 2013

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Asperger’s Syndrome/Autism - Making the right career choices and advice for the prospective employer

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’The under employment of individuals with ASD is an international phenomenon'

Julie Lounds Taylor. Marsha Mailick Seltzer (2010)

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‘Adults with autism want to obtain jobs, but they face significant difficulties in obtaining jobs’.

Hurlbutt and Chalmers (2004)

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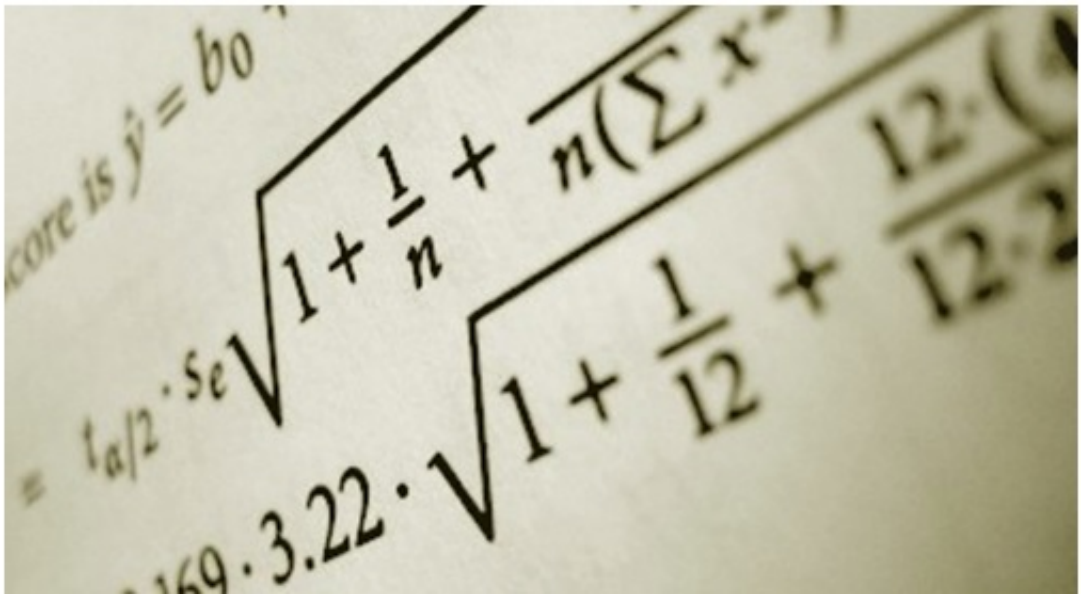
Statistics



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The National Autistic Society (NAS) report that only 15% of adults with autism are in full time employment.

(The employment rates for all disabled and non disabled people are taken from Labour Force Survey Quarter 2, 2011)

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More than 80% of adults with HFA are out of work (full or part-time) at any given time (Barnard et al., 2001)

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34% of adults with autism in the UK (n=68; aged 21-48 years) had reported that they had participated in some form of employment (eg. Independent work, sheltered work, self-employment, family based work).

Howlin et al (2004).

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Participation in employment in individuals with autism varies across studies, and across countries. Several studies have, however, reported a low %age (<50%) of participation in employment.

Chiang et al (2012)

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Participation

So what encourages adults with autism to participate in employment?

- Family support...e.g. financial incentives, daily praise.
- Characteristics of the individual.
- Characteristics of the job.
- Employer support e.g. reasonable adjustments such as modification of jobs/schedules and behavioural support.

Burt et al (1991) n=4; adults with autism aged 21-29 years

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What are the problems of employing someone with AS/autism?

- A sense of unfairness could lead to meltdown.
- Mis-read Arrogance from others.
- Difficulties asking for assistance; reluctant team worker.
- Sensory affects.
- Requirement for clarity in instruction-giving.
- Naïveté regards people politics and unwritten rules.
- Misperceptions: over or under-reactions to conflicts.
- Own dress code!
- Inflexible and not wanting to change.

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'He described having had over fifty employers and a majority of jobs came to a natural end or he moved on to something better. He was made redundant five times and was sacked on three occasions'.

AfA Client Anon.

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What are the benefits of employing someone with AS/autism

- Capable of great focus.
- Attention to detail.
- Natural researchers.
- Strong long-term memory.
- Usually good time-keepers.
- Honest.
- Loyal.
- Fair.
- Determined.

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To disclose or not to disclose?

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Dilemmas concerning disclosure for many. No formula!

Burden falls on the individual.

Entirely personal choice.

Consider the many unwritten social cues that are needed to navigate around the average work day.

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Disclosure can benefit individuals who are currently in jobs as well as those who seek employment. It is perhaps wise to disclose if your traits are noticeable or hard to manage during the working day. Disclosing can be much more effective than simply hoping that your social and communication difficulties will go by unnoticed.

Disclosing also compels an employer, under The Equality Act, 2010, to make reasonable adjustments for employees. An adjustment is a modification/adjustment that allows a disabled individual to participate in the interviewing process or to perform the essential functions of his or her job.

Examples of reasonable adjustments include providing written instructions, subdued lighting, allowing the use of headphones to block office noise, a modified training programme, flexible scheduling.

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The Autism Act 2009, and the subsequent public strategy: Valuing People Now and Valuing Employment Now has highlighted the requirement to significantly improve the employment opportunities for people with autism.

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So where does someone with AS begin?

At age 11 or earlier. Special interest(s) – can they be steered into academic knowledge eg. Video gaming as an interest might lead to a degree in computer science.

Special interest can be the key to success.

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‘Personal interests are the things children like to do and prefer to do, and situational interests are the things that evoke prolonged child attention and engagement (Renninger et al., 1992).

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Studies of young children with and without disabilities and delays have found that interest-based learning is associated with positive child behavioural consequences (DeLoache et al., 2007; Dunst et al., 2001; Johnson et al., 2004; Pruden et al., 2006).

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Children's interests can be helpful in increasing social interaction with peers – Boyd et al. (2007).

Interests motivate and promote prosocial behaviour and development.

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Some special interests

- Lego
- Pokemon & Manga
- Train spotting.
- Stamp collecting
- History/Dates
- Dr. Who/Harry Potter
- Physics/science

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Associated possible professions

- Lego - architecture
- Pokemon & Manga – graphic art
- Train spotting – train driver
- Stamp collecting – Museums
- History/Dates – Librarian
- Dr Who/Harry Potter – Bookshops
- Physics/science - Chemist

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Not-so-good jobs for auties:

- Barperson
- Customer service representative
- Disco Dancer
- Assembly-line.
- Secretary with oral dictation.
- Chef/waitress.

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Good jobs for auties

- Vet/Doctor
- Fixer
- Computer programming
- Lab work
- Repairs
- Video game designer
- Accountant
- Gardening

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What employers need to do *(the interview).*

Adjustment(s) required from the outset:

- Prior to the interview, an information sheet or information recording of the process and format.
- Use literal speech during the interview (avoid idioms).
- Do not judge the person by their lack of eye contact; allow for this.
- If the interview normally lasts for 30 minutes, add extra time for the autie interviewee (say, 10 minutes).
- Quiet space will aid focus.
- Reduce panel numbers if possible.
- Try not to judge appearance and/or handwriting.
- Allow the individual the assistance of another if necessary, so to aid interpretation.

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Tips for auties

- Sell your work not your personality – portfolios are helpful.
- Sell your positives not your negatives – character and/or professional references pre-written helpful.
- Future social life CAN be work-related.
- Rehearsals important.

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What employers need to do once autie employee has been appointed

- Ensure that all staff receive training on autism per se to assist NT understanding. There are a number of external organisations who can help with this task. Make this a once-yearly occurrence so to capture new staff and refresh extant staff members' knowledge.
- After training appoint a mentor (in-house). The mentor should also be able to advocate on the autie employee's behalf if required.
- Work through employment contract verbally/face-to-face to aid understanding of rights/wrongs.
- Ensure that employee knows of 'time out' rules ie. Where to go in the event of meltdown & who to tell.
- Be mindful of the fact that for auties social or team concepts are not always best when it comes to meetings, training platforms or similar.
- Be mindful also that only constructive criticism is helpful; malevolent criticism is damaging to esteem.
- Written instructions a priority over verbal instructions (visual thinking).

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Ergonomics

er·go·nom·ics (ûrg-nmks)*n.*

- **1.** *(used with a sing. verb)* The applied science of equipment design, as for the workplace, intended to maximize productivity by reducing operator fatigue and discomfort. Also called *biotechnology*, *human engineering*, *human factors engineering*.
- **2.** *(used with a pl. verb)* Design factors, as for the workplace, intended to maximize productivity by minimizing operator fatigue and discomfort: *The ergonomics of the new office were felt to be optimal.*

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Ergonomics (more)

- Lighting systems. Avoid strong fluorescent or spotlight lighting if possible.
- Avoid four-legged chairs.
- Position employee away from strong product and/or canteen smells.
- Windows and noise reduction.
- Temperature levels not greatly important.
- Scheduling white board.

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If you are an autie who is ‘stuck’…

Education and the right to take exams is not age-limited…if at first you don’t succeed!

- 'I'm just a late bloomer': Britain's oldest student graduates with a degree in military intelligence aged 91
- Bertie Gladwin left school aged 14 with no interest in academia after he was put in the low ability class by teachers
- Today his has a total of three degrees and is even considering doing a PhD
- He says that his time at university has helped him understand young people and hopes he showed them that 'old people aren't too bad either’.

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Links

http://www.autism.org.uk/prospects

http://www.autismworks.co.uk

http://www.sminty.net/links

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If you need help looking for services for an individual with an autism spectrum condition, we can help. Click below for the Autism Placement Support Service.