The Effects of Vocational Support Programs on Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders

Angel Kester  
*Cedarville University*, akester@cedarville.edu

Addie T. Martin  
*Cedarville University*, addietmartin@cedarville.edu

Ivey M. McRory  
*Cedarville University*, iveymcrory@cedarville.edu

Marybeth Williams  
*Cedarville University*, marybethwilliams@cedarville.edu

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Effects of Vocational Support Programs on Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders

Angel Kester, Addie Martin, Ivey McRory, & Marybeth Williams
Cedarville University

**PATIENT CARE ISSUE**
- Autism spectrum disorders (ASD): “A serious neurodevelopmental disorder that impairs a child’s ability to communicate and interact with others”[13]
- Vocational support programs: programs intended “to maximize employment outcomes by providing services such as assessment and diagnosis, counseling, job search assistance, assistive technology, and on-the-job training”[12]
  - Also known as: vocational rehabilitation and supported employment
- 1 out of every 68 children in the United States is diagnosed with ASD every year and the rates are only increasing [2]
- 50-75% of adults with ASD are unemployed, but have the desire and ability to be employed [7][8]
- Youth with ASD are transitioning into adulthood with a lack of employment, inadequate social skills, and a diminished quality of life [13][19]

**EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICE QUESTION**
**Question:** In transition-age youth with autism spectrum disorders and related diagnoses, how do vocational support programs versus the absence of these programs effect social skills, quality of life, and related diagnoses?

**P: Transition-age youth with autism spectrum disorders and related diagnoses**
- **I: Vocational support programs**
- **C: Absence of vocational support programs**
- **O: Employment rates, social skills, and quality of life**

**REGISTERED NURSE INTERVIEW**
An RN at Achieve, a program that helps ASD diagnosed individuals transition into adulthood, noted the following impacts of vocational support programs [11][15]:
- **Employment Rates**
  - Participants were capable of transitioning into business in the community (e.g. food service, custodial, etc.)
  - Participants showed more productivity and increased work ethic participation in the program
- **Social Skills**
  - Some learned to interact with peers and supervisors- talking through conflicts rather than throwing tantrums
- **Quality of Life**
  - Felt productive in society by working for and earning their own paycheck
  - Enjoyed going to their jobs and performing their assigned tasks
  - Required medication amounts decreased during program hours

**METHODS**
**Databases searched:** Cochrane Collection Plus, CINAHL, Medline, PubMed, UpToDate

**Key words:** Vocational rehabilitation, supported employment, autism spectrum disorders, intellectual disabilities, vocational services, developmental disorders, transitional services, ASD, and employment rates

**Inclusion criteria:** Articles pertaining to the use of vocational support programs in transition-age youth with ASD and related diagnoses; articles analyzing vocational support program effects on the outcomes of employment rates, social skills, and quality of life

**Exclusion criteria:** Articles analyzing different interventions, age groups, or outcomes other than those identified for this review

**Number of articles:** Twenty-four articles were initially found, nine articles were critiqued and included in this review

**REFERENCES**


**RESULTS**

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<tr>
<th>Employment rates</th>
<th>Social skills</th>
<th>Quality of life</th>
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<td>Laver, Brusilovsky, Salzer, &amp; Mandell (2009)</td>
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**SYNTHESIS OF EVIDENCE**

**Employment Rates:**
- Employment rates for recipients of supported employment were consistently higher than those without supported employment [18]
- After vocational rehabilitation, the employment rate of the participants was 62% [8]
- Implementing vocational rehabilitation early yielded an employment rate of 69.1% compared to the late implementation employment rate of 52.2% [6]

**Social Skills:**
- Individuals with ASD lack social skills but still want to socialize and interact with others [7]
- After participation in vocational rehabilitation, individuals had an increased awareness of other peoples’ thoughts and feelings resulting in some friendships [9]
- These increased social skills were key factors which allowed these individuals to gain and maintain employment [9]

**Quality of Life:**
- Supported employees with ASD can and do become more independent in performing competitive employment tasks [19]
- Parents reported that their child gained social interests and positive outlooks of their own situations, enhancing their quality of life [9]
- Vocational support programs have a positive impact on their participants because they allow the participants to feel accepted within a group, have the opportunity to meet people with similar diagnoses, and participants are able to discuss challenging issues they may face [9]

**EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Additional research is needed in this area of healthcare
- Nurses should be further educated and made more aware of vocational support programs
- Nurses should encourage clients with ASD to participate in vocational support programs
- Nurses should educate patients diagnosed with ASD and their parents about available resources

**LIMITATIONS**
- Lack of research on sustained outcomes of vocational support programs
- Inability to do exhaustive, up to date research due to limited resources related to area of study
- Limited generalizability to US population due to use of research conducted in various countries

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**
Roberta, RN from Achieve in Binghamton, NY [11][15]