Increasing Supports for Transition-Aged Youth with ASD: The College to Career Program

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Overview

• The challenge for transition-aged youth

• What we know from research
  • Longitudinal studies
  • Pivotal transition periods

• UCLA College to Career program
  • PEERS© for Careers pilot
  • Autism Speaks RCT
Adults with ASD in the Media

The Washington Post
Health & Science
For adults with autism, a lack of support when they need it most

The Atlantic
FAMILY
The Coming Care Crisis as Kids With Autism Grow Up
The number of adults with autism diagnoses is soaring, but there aren’t enough programs and services to meet the demand.

SLATE

The Tricky Path to Employment Is Trickier When You’re Autistic
Autistic children grow up to be autistic adults. Our society doesn’t give them the support they need.

BY SARAH CARR
SEPT 22, 2017 • 5:50 AM

FORTUNE
MAGAZINE • AUTISM
Where Autistic Workers Thrive

BY Dinah Eng • June 24, 2018
The Tip of the Iceberg

Kanner 1943  DSM-III 1980  Diagnostic Boom 1990  Current 2019

Current age: late 80’s  Current age: 35-45 years old  Current age: 25-30 years old  70% under the age of 14 years old

1943  1980  1990  70%
LONGITUDINAL STUDIES
NATURAL HISTORY STUDIES

• Longitudinal Studies of Autism Spectrum Disorders: 2 to 23
  *Catherine Lord and Colleagues at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor*
  
  • Longitudinal sample of 213 children referred for assessment of possible ASD prior to 2 years funded by NIMH from 2008-2013

• Adolescents and Adults with Autism
  *Marsha Mailick Seltzer and Colleagues at the Waisman Center*
  
  • Prospective, longitudinal study of 406 families spanning 14 years of development (1998-2015)
Key Findings

✓ Majority “Improved” in autism symptoms
✓ Majority “Improved” or remained stable in reported behavior problems

• **Diagnostic stability is very high**
• Verbal individuals showed greater improvements than the delayed verbal, and minimally verbal individuals
• Large proportion of young adults (77% at age 18) showed notable discrepancy between IQ and achievement and adaptive functioning
Change in Daily Living Skills in Longitudinal Sample

W-ADL Scores for Autism Sample

W-ADL Scores for Down Syndrome Sample

Smith, Maenner & Seltzer, JAACP, 2012

Courtesy of Marsha Mailick Seltzer
Predictors of Success

• Predictors of academic achievement
  • Higher cognitive skills
  • General education or inclusion classrooms

• Predictors of social-communication
  • Many improvements related to phrase speech development

• Improvements also related to environmental factors:
  • Higher levels of maternal praise over the course of the study
    • Parental influences on development even in adulthood!!
PIVOTAL TRANSITIONS: HIGH SCHOOL AND BEYOND
High School Exit: Slowing of Improvement in Longitudinal Sample

Taylor & Mailick Seltzer, JADD, 2010

Lower income = < 25th percentile
Higher income = > 75th percentile

Courtesy of Marsha Mailick Seltzer
Employment Post-High School
(Shattuck et al., 2012)

• 2 years post-graduation: Over half of young adults had neither paid employment nor enrolled in vocational training or college
  • “no participation” rate higher for ASD than any other disability group tracked, including ID

• 6 years post-graduation: Only one third had attended college and only half had ever held a paid job

• Influence of family income: One in three employed in families earning less than $25K, and three out of four in families earning more than $75K
SERVICE NEEDS
Service Needs across the Lifespan

• Survey comparing child to adult service needs (N=3,440; Turcotte et al., 2016)
  - Adults receive **far fewer** services with **higher unmet needs** in: speech and language therapy, one-to-one support, occupational therapy, social skills training

• Analysis of Medicaid reports of service use and related expenditures among adolescents with ASD transitioning to adulthood (N=2,054; Shea et al., 2018)
  - Medicaid-enrolled adolescents with ASD are relying upon the public health insurance system for psychiatric and medical outpatient services and medications
  - Expenditures for these services increase as they age
Health Status in Adults with ASD
(Croen et al., 2015)

• Participants were adult members of Kaiser Permanente Northern California enrolled from 2008 to 2012 \((N=1507)\)

• Compared to controls, adults with autism had significantly increased rates of all major psychiatric disorders

• Nearly all medical conditions were significantly more common in adults with ASD, including immune conditions, gastrointestinal and sleep disorders, seizure, obesity, hypertension, and diabetes. Rarer conditions, such as stroke and Parkinson’s disease, were also significantly more common.
Psychiatric and Medical Comorbidities

• Any mental health dx 51%
  • anxiety disorder 29%
  • OCD 25%
  • depression 18%
  • ADHD 16%
  • schizophrenia 1%
  • bipolar disorder 6%
• Seizures 22%

• Largely preventable causes of death in 19 of the participants (e.g. choking, undetected cancer, accidents)
Summary

- Longitudinal studies show overall improvement in autism symptomatology and behavior problems but declining adaptive functioning into adulthood
- The transition from high school into adulthood is a critical turning point for young adults with ASD
  - Marked by slowing in overall improvement, especially for those from low-resource communities
- A majority of young adults with ASD are unemployed post graduation and suffer from comorbid mental and physical health concerns
UCLA COLLEGE TO CAREER PROGRAM
UCLA College to Career Program

- Multifaceted program to support young adults during transition from college to career

- **PEERS© for Careers** – *employment-related social skills*

- **Adults with Autism: Independence and Mental Wellness (AAIM)** – *topics related to challenges faced by young adults with ASD, incorporated CBT, DBT, and ACT*

- **Bruin Evaluation for Autism with Recommendations (BEAR)** – *accepts UCLA student health insurance (UCSHIP) and provides evidence-based evaluations for ASD and targeted recommendations to support students*
Northwestern Mutual Partnership

- John Klemm and Chau Le
  - “Improve and maximize the college experience of students with ASD and increase their employability post-graduation”
- Hosted “The Spectacular Sounds of Autism” benefit concert to support the launch of PEERS® for Careers pilot
- Created an internship program focused on employing students with ASD and teaching job skills in supportive and inclusive environment
PEERS® for Careers Pilot Study

• PEERS for Careers Course
  – Spring Quarter 2019
  – 10-week course
  – Two 90-minute weekly classes
  – Equivalent of a 3-unit class
• Concurrent but separate young adult and career coaching groups
• 10-hour/wk commitment
  – 3 hrs/wk didactics
  – In-session behavioral rehearsal exercises with career coaches
  – Up to 7 hrs/wk in vivo homework assignments / practice
• Pre- and post-assessments
Competitive Integrated Employment and Internships

- Internships / employment based on career interests of the adults
  - Summer Quarter 2019
- ASD supports provided via UCLA CAN Clinic
- Individualized support and treatment planning provided
- Ongoing career coaching from undergraduate and graduate students
- Training and support needs provided to employers
- In-house workplace mentors identified and trained
- Follow-up assessments with adults and employers
Self-Perceived Preparedness for Employment

Pre-Treatment

Post-Treatment

Employment Status

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pre-treatment</th>
<th>Post-treatment</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>60%</td>
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NEW DIRECTIONS
PEERS© for Careers RCT

• 2019 Autism Speaks Adult Transition Research Grant
  • Investigate the effectiveness of PEERS© for Careers
  • Target the development of social competence and related skills in the work setting
  • 20-week didactic course and subsequent 10-week internship
AIMS

1. To examine the effect of PEERS© for Careers on employment-related social skills acquisition and subsequent internship success in young adults with ASD enrolled in the PEERS© for Careers program

2. To test the optimal sequence of pairing of the coach to intervention across the 20-week didactic training and 10-week internship

3. To examine how individual student factors moderate the success of the PEERS© for Careers intervention
Study Design

Didactic Training

PEERS© for Careers + Coach  P1-A

PEERS© for Careers  P1-B

Internship

PEERS© for Careers + Coach  P2-A

PEERS© for Careers  P2-B

PEERS© for Careers + Coach  P2-C

PEERS© for Careers  P2-D

Sequence

“Constant Coach”

“Didactic Only Coach”

“Internship Only Coach”

“Never Coach”

Phase 1 (20 weeks)

Phase 2 (10 weeks)

Maintenance (10 weeks)
Final Thoughts

- 50,000 individuals with ASD turn 18 in the US every year
- Programs are underdeveloped and underfunded to meet the needs of this growing population
- Research needs are great, including:
  - A need to understand the kinds of services that support successful transition into adulthood
  - A need to develop effective interventions and support services with an emphasis on employment opportunities
  - Special focus on helping low-resource adults overcome barriers to access
- Silver lining may be the recent surge in interest into research, service and support at both local and national levels
Thank you!
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