

**Title:** Adults with ASD After High School: Pitfalls and Possibilities

**Topic:** Young Adults Living with Autism

**Grant Year:** 2015

**Principal Investigator(s):** Connie Anderson, PhD

**Funding:** \$30,000

**Institution:** Towson University

**Duration:** 12 months

**Purpose:** The purpose of this study is to determine the efficacy of transitional services that young adults with autism receive after finishing high school. These services range from educational materials to workshops on adulthood, money management, and navigating social situations.

**Objectives:** The researchers aim to determine the motivational and environmental factors behind why young adults with autism participate in these services and vocational opportunities in the years of early adulthood right after finishing high school. Specifically, the study aims to describe the experiences and barriers that young adults with autism and their families face when accessing services and educational opportunities. Additionally, the study hopes to develop hypotheses of family characteristics associated with disengagement in the years after high school. From these findings, the researchers intend to create a conceptual model of disengagement highlighting barriers faced by young adults with autism.

**Methodology:** Participants in the study will consist of two groups of families: those with a young adult who is certificate bound in high school and those with a young adult who is diploma bound in high school. The certificate bound individuals will plan to enter adult services at the age of 21 and the diploma bound individuals will plan to enter adult services at the age of 18. Each family will be formally interviewed in person for 60-90 minutes after completing a brief Pre-Interview Questionnaire which involves questions about socio-economic status and past experiences throughout their school experience. Young adults will also be asked about their goals and aspirations while envisioning a potential future life. After the interview is complete, the data will be analyzed using software called Atlas.ti, which will allow researchers to organize large amounts of narrative data to identify themes common within each interview.

**Expected Outcomes:** The researchers predict that schools will have a working knowledge of how to prepare students with ASD for the changes that come with transitioning into adulthood. Additionally, schools will create programs that communicate the challenges of ASD to educate teachers and staff on what to expect. The study also hopes to raise awareness of maturity levels of students with ASD regardless of age. Another expected outcome is that these students will have the chance to stay longer in school in order to develop higher maturity levels.

**Practical Relevance:** The study is relevant in solving the transitions into early adulthood for young adults with autism in that it allows for success in life after high school. The results from the study will reveal the motivations behind the disengagement from educational and employment opportunities for young adults with autism. Additionally, the study will help inform future research about how to improve educational resources for a wider audience of young adults with autism.

Yasmin Rafiq

George Mason University, 2017

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