

Contents lists available at [ScienceDirect](https://www.sciencedirect.com)

Research in Autism Spectrum Disorders

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/rasd

“Always a glass ceiling.” Gender or autism; the barrier to occupational inclusion

Susan M. Hayward^{a,*}, Keith R. McVilly^a, Mark A. Stokes^b^a School of Social & Political Sciences, The University of Melbourne, Victoria, 3010, Australia^b School of Psychology, Faculty of Health, Deakin University, 221 Burwood Highway, Burwood, Victoria, 3125, Australia

ARTICLE INFO

Number of reviews completed is 2

Keywords:

ASD
Asperger's
Female
Job
Sex
Work

ABSTRACT

Background: Under- and unemployment adversely affect the economic, health, and social circumstances of people with autism; notably those with a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder or high autistic traits (HATs). However, little research has been published comparing the experiences of women to men with HATs, and women without autism (*i.e.*, those typically developing; TD) to ascertain if employment issues are a function of gender or autistic traits (ATs).

Method: An anonymous online survey was conducted attracting 28 women and 18 men with HATs aged 18–68 years ($M = 38.63$, $SD = 13.12$), with a further 21 TD women and 16 TD men aged 23–62 years ($M = 38.38$, $SD = 10.32$). Quantitative data were analysed *via* logistic regression to ascertain the extent to which employment issues were a function of gender or ATs while controlling for confounding variables such as education, and age. Qualitative data were analysed using inductive thematic analysis, then quantitatively using chi-square or Fisher's Exact Test.

Results: It was found that ATs, not gender, was significant to most vocational experiences.

Conclusions: It is proposed that employers place greater importance on technical ability than social-communication skills when hiring and supervising women with HATs to reduce barriers and increase workplace diversity.

1. Introduction

Affecting approximately one in 189 females and one in 42 males (Baio, 2014), people with neurodevelopmental conditions such as those with High Autistic Traits (HATs), including Asperger's Syndrome, exhibit greater difficulties with interpersonal skills than their typically developing (TD) peers; *i.e.*, those without autism (Gal, Landes, & Katz, 2015). While challenges with social-communication and interaction are the hallmarks of autism (American Psychiatric Association [APA], 2013), these skills are suggested to be imperative to workplace success (Smith, 2013). This includes gaining (Charney, 2016; Deepa & Seth, 2013; Jones, Baldi, Phillips, & Waikar, 2016), maintaining (Agran, Hughes, Thoma, & Scott, 2016; Lin & Kwantes, 2015), and advancing in employment (Deepa & Seth, 2013; Lin & Kwantes, 2015).

However, some employers recognise the unique technical skills possessed by those with HATs compared to those TD (*e.g.*, ASPertise, SAP, Specialisterne, ULTRA Testing, Willis Towers Watson, and Microsoft). Recognition of diversity in employment challenges the social model of disability which stipulates that individuals are not impaired by their disability but by societal barriers

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: susan.hayward@unimelb.edu.au (S.M. Hayward), keith.mcvilly@unimelb.edu.au (K.R. McVilly), mark.stokes@deakin.edu.au (M.A. Stokes).

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rasd.2018.09.001>

Received 23 February 2018; Received in revised form 3 September 2018; Accepted 4 September 2018
1750-9467/ © 2018 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

(Oliver, 1983). Yet, many with HATs report unfavourable employment circumstances; difficulties gaining and maintaining employment, and skilled underemployment (Hurlbutt & Chalmers, 2004; Müller, Schuler, Burton, & Yates, 2003). These issues can negatively affect well-being (Blustein, Kozan, & Connors-Kellgren, 2013; McKee-Ryan, Song, Wanberg, & Kinicki, 2005; Rosenthal, Carroll-Scott, Earnshaw, Santilli, & Ickovics, 2012). Yet, the extent to which some of these issues might be a function of gender or autistic traits (ATs), while controlling for potential confounding variables (e.g., education and age) is yet to be investigated.

While challenges with social-communication skills might account, in part at least, for unfavourable occupational experiences of people with HATs, only one known paper has compared individuals with HATs to TD individuals which included women (Gal et al., 2015). These authors reported differences in work related aptitude, such as interpersonal and working styles. However, this research did not investigate the potential influence of gender. Here, gender could be an important variable given other research suggests women with HATs might possess 'superior' social-communication skills compared to their male counterparts (Brooks, 2016; Head, McGillivray, & Stokes, 2014; Lai et al., 2011). For women, 'superior' social-communication ability could moderate the effects of ATs in the labour market.

Still, gender could negatively impact labour market experiences for women generally (Hoobler, Wayne, & Lemmon, 2009; Joshi, Jooyeon, & Hyuntak, 2015; McGraw, Kramar, & McGraw, 2011), and especially for women with disabilities (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2015; Doren, Gau, & Lindstrom, 2011). Some authors argue that gender inequality (England, 2005; Folbre, 1994) and *structural oppression* (Ritzer & Goodman, 2008; Young, 2011), i.e., organisations that possess norms favouring men, may contribute to women's under-representation in the workforce (ABS, 2017b). This includes in full-time employment (Workplace Gender Equality Agency, 2014). Women are also over-represented in part-time and casual work (ABS, 2017a). Thus, they may have limited access to the economic benefits provided by adequate employment (Schofield et al., 2011).

In conjunction with gender, it is possible that education and age may moderate employment experiences. Post-secondary attainment (education beyond High School) may decrease unemployment risk (ABS, 2017b; Ohl et al., 2017). While younger aged persons are at increased risk of unemployment (ABS, 2017b).

Although skilled underemployment, defined by Duffy (2009) as working in a role where skill, knowledge, and experience are not fully utilised, is problematic among those with HATs (Baldwin, Costley, & Warren, 2014; Hurlbutt & Chalmers, 2004; Müller et al., 2003), another type of underemployment yet to be examined is time-related underemployment. Time-related underemployment is not working as many hours, up to full-time, to which a person is willing and able (Hauser, 1974). Research suggests potential time-related underemployment issues among people with HATs, as most of these unemployed individuals report being willing to work (Autism Spectrum Australia [Aspect], 2013; Griffith, Totsika, Nash, & Hastings, 2012). Further, over-representation of those with HATs in casual employment (Autism Spectrum Australia Aspect, 2013; Baldwin et al., 2014) may follow similar patterns in the general population where, compared to full-time employees, casual employees are more likely to report wanting to work more hours (ABS, 2009). In addition, age may moderate this relationship as younger individuals, in the general population, are more likely to be casually employed (ABS, 2014).

Thus, this research contributes to the current literature by investigating if vocational experiences such as skilled and time-related underemployment are a function of gender or ATs, while controlling for either education or age utilising samples of women and men with HATs and TD individuals. Understanding these occupational experiences will assist addressing areas of concern and support reasonable and effective adjustment, if required, to mitigate potential social and economic impacts. Therefore, based on what is known regarding the employment experiences of women generally and individuals with HATs, the following research questions were posed: are overall unfavourable employment experiences influenced by gender or ATs?; Is gender or ATs predicative of occupational instability?; Does gender or ATs influence difficulty maintaining employment?; Does gender, ATs or education predict unemployment?; Are gender, ATs, or age predicative of skilled and time-related underemployment?; Is casual, part-time or full-time employment predicted by gender, ATs, or age?

2. Method

2.1. Participants

The protocol for this project was reviewed and ethics approved by the overseeing university (approval number 1749 897). Participants were obtained via autism related social media sites as well as the websites of autism organisations. Respondents reported themselves to reside in Australia; these were 49 women and 34 men. Participant demographic details are provided in Table 1 where significant differences ($p < .05$) between women and men with HATs, and women/men with HATs vs TD women/men are indicated.

2.1.1. Participant grouping

Participants within the HAT group reported a diagnosis of autism and possessed an Autism Spectrum Quotient (AQ) score (a screening tool for ATs) at or above the published criterion of 32; the recommended score for a diagnostic assessment referral (Baron-Cohen, Wheelwright, Skinner, Martin, & Clubley, 2001). Conversely, those assigned the TD group did not report a diagnosis of autism and scored below 32 on the AQ. The AQ was completed online by participants at the end of the study given its extensive use in research. This was to maximise participation by not providing a screening tool at the beginning which some might find intrusive. It was thought that potential participants might be more open to completing the AQ after having completed the narrative component of the survey. The tool has good overall fit, discriminating those with HATs from TD individuals (Ruzich et al., 2015). This includes women with HATs from TD women (Lau, Kelly, & Peterson, 2013). Further, the AQ is highly sensitive to HATs at a criterion of 32 (75% and 77% respectively; Broadbent, Galic, & Stokes, 2013; Woodbury-Smith, Robinson, Wheelwright, & Baron-Cohen, 2005).

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/10139220>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/10139220>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)