



## Case report

## Employment in the community for people with and without autism: A comparative analysis

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## ABSTRACT

Employment in the community continues to be a major barrier for many people with disabilities in the United States. Analyzing the 2008–09 National Core Indicators Adult Consumer Survey, this study investigates community employment of working age (18–65) individuals with and without autism spectrum disorder (ASD) who receive services in the intellectual and developmental disability (IDD) service systems in 19 states. The findings show that 18.2% of adult service users of IDD services had a community job. People with ASD and people with ID had significantly lower odds of being employed in the community compared to those without ASD, after controlling for age, health, mobility, gender, level of ID, and challenging behavior. Results are presented in the context of current employment research and the implications of these findings are discussed.

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## 1. Introduction

## 1.1. Employment of people with ASD

Employment plays a critical role in social, emotional, and financial well-being for people with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) (Hendricks, 2010; Walsh, Lydon, & Healy, 2014). With the array of social, communication, and behavioral challenges associated with ASD, many people face significant barriers to obtaining and maintaining a job (Nicholas, Addridge, Zwaigenbaum, & Clark, 2014; Hendricks, 2010; Hendricks & Wehman, 2009; Migliore, Mank, Grossi, & Rogan, 2007). Co-occurring disabilities create additional layers of complexity to an already complex condition. The varied nature of ASD requires variability in the types of supports and services for individuals with ASD (Müller, Schuler, Burston, & Yates, 2003).

Individual supported employment is a known effective intervention for people with significant disabilities. Since its inception in the 1970s and 1980s, individual supported employment has expanded to include many different researched-based approaches to address individual barriers, support and career planning, assessment, social capital development, and employment customization (McDonogh & Revell, 2010; Nord, Luecking, Mank, Kiernan, & Wrey, 2013).

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Despite the many approaches to support people to find and keep a job, the majority of adults with ASD receiving formal services remain unemployed, and for those with employment, underemployment is common (Hendricks, 2010). In the United States, much of the employment research is conducted in the context of the vocational rehabilitation (VR) service system, a short-term national employment support system implemented at the state level. Findings show that despite receiving VR services only 40.6% of participants with ASD across all age groups left with employment, working an average of 23.7 h per week and with monthly wages of \$793.34 (Cimera & Burgess, 2011), an income below the United States poverty threshold for a single person in 2007 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). Recently published data on transition-age adults with ASD show a 2011 employment rate of VR service users that ranged by state from 50% employment or greater for Alaska, Delaware, Vermont, and Wyoming to less than a 25% employment for Arkansas, Florida, Kansas, Louisiana, Maine, and Montana (Burgess & Cimera, 2014).

Long-term services and supports are also available for many people with ASD from state intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) agencies. Though existing employment research of long-term services and supports does not examine people with ASD explicitly, it is known that a small percent (18.6%) of people with IDD that access day supports actually participated in integrated employment services during FY2013 (Butterworth et al., 2014; Migliore, Butterworth, & Zalewska, 2014), a statistic that includes people with ASD.

## 1.2. Research questions

This study sought to expand what is known about the employment of people with ASD in the United States who received services from state IDD agencies by answering two questions:

1. How do employment outcomes for working age people with ASD compare to those without ASD?
2. What effect does ASD and co-occurring IDD have on the odds of working in the community?

**Table 1**  
Personal characteristics by ASD diagnosis (N = 8969).

Personal characteristic/level	ASD Diagnosis		Total	$\chi^2$	p
	No %	Yes %	n		
Level of ID					
None	80.5	19.5	380	132	<.001
Mild	93.6	6.4	3194		
Moderate	88.8	11.2	2447		
Severe	84.2	15.8	1266		
Profound	87.7	12.3	1257		
Missing			425		
Gender					
Male	85.9	14.1	5084	127.49	<.001
Female	93.4	6.6	3883		
Missing			2		
Race					
White	89.1	10.9	6510	0.25	0.62
Non-white	88.7	11.3	2149		
Missing			310		
Ethnicity					
Not Latino	89.2	10.8	8316	0.52	0.471
Latino	88.2	11.8	592		
Missing			161		
Overall health rating					
Excellent or very good	85.7	14.3	3255	60.17	<.001
Fairly good	91.1	8.9	4105		
Poor	93.7	6.3	316		
Missing			1293		
Mobility					
Independent without aids	87	13		144.31	<.001
Independent with aids	96.1	3.9			
Always needs assistance	97.2	2.8			
Missing			42		

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