Exploring the causes and countermeasures of employment difficulties of autistic patients from multiple perspectives

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Abstract: Autism spectrum disorders (ASD) cannot be completely cured by acquired causes. According to surveys, 30% to 80% of individuals with ASD suffer from attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and the co-morbidity rate for all types of anxiety disorders in adults with ASD is 17.8% higher. As a result, many individuals with ASD in their job search period face employment difficulties after completing their education. The team identified the research question in this regard: What are the social and self-factors that contribute to the low employment rate of individuals with ASD? The team makes the following hypothesis. The low employment rate of people with autism involves a combination of internal and external factors. Weaknesses such as psychological deficits and poor communication skills put people with autism at a disadvantage when seeking employment. At the same time, companies are not willing to hire the relevant group. The team reviewed information to obtain the current situation of the employment difficulties of patients, and used online questionnaires, online interviews and offline research and visits from the patients' perspective. Based on the results of this survey, we further explored the attitudes of companies towards employing people with autism and proposed a feasible solution to this problem. Ultimately the team's findings are consistent with the hypothesis and provide support for subsequent research to provide more employment opportunities for patients who are experiencing employment problems.

Keywords: Autism spectrum disorders (ASD); Employment difficulties; Employment environment

1. Research background

Autism, one of the typical developmental disorders, has clinical manifestations such as social communication obstacles and stereotypical repetitive behaviors. The population with autism is large, with over 70 million individuals with autism worldwide as of April 2021, which have a deep impact. Moreover, research indicates that approximately ten percent of individuals with autism have savant syndrome. This syndrome means that individuals with autism may have ADHD, various anxiety disorders, and some unusual abilities. Additionally, employment is important for everyone, especially for individuals with psychosomatic disorders, because it not only promotes their physical and mental development, improves their economic status, and enhances their social skills but also helps them to live independently or semi-independently, to participate and integrate into society in a quality way, and to improve their quality of life. In recent years, the employment of older individuals with autism has received much attention at home and abroad. Therefore, the research problem of this team is: How to propose some strategies to solve the problem by studying the social factors and self factors of the low employment rate of individuals with autism?

The primary objective of our research team is to evaluate the deficiencies in the system concerning the protection of the rights of adults with autism and to explore the current employment situation of individuals with autism. The team explores related solutions based on the patient's own psychological problems related to employment as an entry point and the understanding of employment for individuals with autism. The two perspectives are combined to form a more comprehensive perspective, providing employment opportunities for patients who are experiencing employment problems and helping to enhance the recognition of individuals with autism in today's society in the form of theoretical support and suggestions. Furthermore, after resource integration and research, the team decided to narrow the scope of the study to the city of Ningbo and targeted the population of individuals with autism aged 18-35 in Ningbo.

In response to the inquiry, "What are the specific factors contributing to employment difficulties for individuals with autism?" At the beginning of the study, the team proposed the following
hypothesis: Individuals with autism are unable to concentrate for long periods of time, are emotionally unstable, and lack communication skills in the context of themselves, society, companies, and the state. To some extent, this keeps the social group away from them and creates a certain sense of inferiority in the patient's psychology. However, since the patients themselves are not very articulate and have a tendency to stay at home, this results in greater barriers to job-hunting; on the other hand, concentration and communication skills are pivotal factors at work. The patient's lack of concentration can lead to inefficiency, which affects the operation and overall effectiveness of the company. Whereas patients' communication difficulties can lead to obstacles in work handover and progress, thus resulting in situations such as misunderstanding work items and wasting time. This affects the operation of work projects and wastes one's energy. Although there are national policies to address the employment difficulties of individuals with autism, the lack of enforcement and influence of the policies makes it impossible to eliminate the stereotype of individuals with autism in society. The employment situation of individuals with autism is still severe. Therefore, the team will start to explore and study how to improve the employment rate of individuals with autism.

After browsing more than ten references on relevant academic websites and studying them carefully, the team decided to analyze the causes of employment difficulties of individuals with autism from the main perspectives of psychology and sociology. The team combined personal factors and external factors to analyze the degree of awareness of individuals with autism and the potential problems and effects of employment for individuals with autism. The team accordingly proposes an employment initiative program and employment initiatives for special populations.

2. Research methodology

The team studied the problem "What are the social and personal factors that contribute to the low employment rate of individuals with autism?" from three research methods: An online questionnaire survey, online interview, and field survey and interview.

2.1 Online questionnaire survey

Firstly, an online questionnaire survey can ensure the breadth of the survey. Gaining the attention of more companies on the Internet provides the team with more general and accurate information. Secondly, the online questionnaire survey is qualitative research essentially, which is organized in the form of questions, while the statistics of the survey results are quantitative research, which allows the team to use the scientific method of quantitative research to explore the humanistic issues of qualitative research and make the survey results more accurate. Thirdly, the online questionnaire survey can help the team to obtain more data in a shorter period of time as a foundation for later field interviews and field experiments.

2.1.1 Questionnaire design

This questionnaire was collected from companies in Ningbo about their thoughts on hiring individuals with autism.

2.1.2 Data statistics and analysis

The bar graph can visualize how much each option is in favor of the number and can mainly represent the count data systematically. Moreover, the bar graphs provide a good summary and integration of the data obtained from the questionnaire and make the results clear and understandable. The team used the pie diagram to efficiently compare the numbers to derive the perceptions of the employment group about individuals with autism.

2.2 Online interview

The main points of information obtained through interviews with this team about the employment of individuals with autism are the employment situation of individuals with autism, employment
policies, employment intentions of individuals with autism themselves, employment advantages, employment difficulties, companies’ acceptance, reasons for rejecting employment of individuals with autism, and several suggestions for employment of individuals with autism.

2.3 Field survey and interview

Since the online research cannot meet the research aim and the information collected is not timely and accurate, the team decided to conduct small-scale field research to solve the problem and obtain first-hand information and intelligence so that the research work can be carried out effectively and successfully.

2.2.1 Investigation situation

The team visited the field where individuals with autism work, a courier service company station that provides sheltered employment. The station currently takes in three individuals with autism for work; the average age of the patients is about twenty years old and is coordinated by guardians and employees.

2.2.2 Investigative process

Members communicated with employees with autism and family members of employees with autism, observed the working process and mode for individuals with autism in the field, and obtained some working ideas and working routines of individuals with autism. Moreover, the team also asked the station operators about the main working mode of the station and conducted a general survey of the patients' working sites.

2.2.3 Findings

Through talking with individuals with autism, the team members realized that the main manifestations of individuals with autism are different from the impression of most of the respondents in the questionnaire, mainly in focusing on certain work, not good at talking, or being more emotional, the situation varies from person to person, and the comparison also shows how different each individual with autism is.

2.2.4 Interview questions

The team asked questions about the characteristics of individuals with autism in employment, employment difficulties, misunderstandings of others, and the current social support for individuals with autism in employment, to learn more about the employment patterns that individuals with autism are adapting to and the measures taken by companies. (see Appendix 2 for interview transcripts)

2.2.5 Interview process

The interviews were conducted at the organization where the individuals with autism work, and the team members interviewed the station operators on several specific questions, recording and taking real-time notes throughout to ensure the integrity of the information. The station operators provided precise explanations and answers to the questions asked by the team and provided the team with important information based on their own experiences.

2.2.6 Interview results

The team collated the following conclusions that the employment difficulties of individuals with autism are divided into several points: Firstly, the narrow interests of the patients themselves; secondly, the low understanding of the patients by others; and thirdly, the fewer conditions to support the patients' employment. In response to the above points, the team also clarified the specific manifestations of these difficulties in individuals with autism through the assistance of several examples of individuals with autism.
3. Research analysis

3.1 Patient perspectives

3.1.1 Unstable emotional state

The emotional problems of ASD patients significantly impact their employment, internship, and even vocational skills learning. The unstable emotions are regarded as the most pivotal factor affecting their employment by employers, teachers, and parents, and the emotional problems require too much effort and time from teachers in the usual education process, which prevents teachers from focusing more on how to improve their employment skills and quality.

3.1.2 Social communication obstacles

Social and communication problems are prominent issues for individuals with ASD. Since they have self-disorders, this causes them to have various problems in interpersonal interactions. In the employment process, social etiquette is seen as an important impression factor, in addition to general social behavior problems, especially when competing for jobs, where individuals with ASD can create an initial negative impression of employers due to their social etiquette problems. Additionally, poor communication skills can affect not only the likelihood of employment but also the acquisition of skills.

3.1.3 Impact of symptoms of individuals with autism on employment

Social communication skills are one of the core barriers for individuals with ASD, mainly in the areas of communication and interpersonal interaction. Individuals with ASD may not be able to understand what others are saying or what they mean because of their lack of social skills, which may lead to misunderstandings and conflicts and even trigger emotional problems. However, social skills are highly valued by companies, especially social etiquette. For companies in the service industry, patients' social etiquette performance can directly affect their interview and job performance.

When analyzed in relation to the characteristics of individuals with autism, individuals with autism have narrow interests and weaker language skills. In a medical test, the average IQ score of the general population is in the 90-100 range, while individuals with autism lie in the lower 90 on average due to problems with language expression and comprehension; patients are prone to feelings of alienation and fear, leading to mood swings and reluctance to work.
Therefore, in practice, each individual with autism is relatively different, and only a very small percentage of the population is able to create employment through their own talents. Most individuals with autism have uncertain employment and are unable to work consistently over time. Usually, simple operations with more repetitive steps and few fixed communication methods can satisfy their job needs.

3.2 Social and enterprise perspective

3.2.1 Less awareness of individuals with autism at the social level

Individuals with autism have received widespread attention from society, but a lack of in-depth understanding remains the biggest obstacle to employment for adults with autism.

![Figure 2. Society's perception of the characteristics of individuals with autism](image)

From Figure 2, it can be concluded that only 5.8% were not at all aware of autism, but more than 67% of the respondents had only heard of it.

![Figure 3. Society's perception of the advantages of individuals with autism](image)
According to the findings in Figure 3 and Figure 4, it can be found that there is a general awareness in society about the problem that individuals with autism have difficulties communicating with others. Moreover, almost all respondents mentioned the difficulties in communication and exchange. However, there was a clear lack of psychological preparation for the degree of communication difficulties. It is evident that society is not sufficiently aware of the true advantages and possible risks of individuals with autism. In essence, individuals with autism have a high tolerance for repetitive work in simple areas that they recognize. However, individuals with autism are very sensitive to the emotions of the people around them (especially those who do not know them and thus are alienated from them). The inability to integrate into the group and the work environment is more common than the inability to adapt to the work itself. However, this perspective is precisely the least appreciated in the comparative analysis of the bar graphs in Figure 3 and Figure 4. Although they can often perceive the emotions of others, they face challenges in effectively expressing their own emotions, thereby contributing to heightened employment difficulties.

3.2.2 Lack of motivation for companies to persist in employing individuals with autism in the long term

According to Figure 5-6, less than 5% of companies are employing or have employed individuals with autism, more than 70% of companies do not understand the policy of employing individuals with autism, and 28.25% of companies understand it but do not know how to implement it. In general, it is difficult for companies, especially small and medium-sized companies, to translate the social benefits of public welfare into economic benefits, and they lack the motivation to persist in the long term. Moreover, the self-organized self-employment of patients' families often lacks the necessary operational capacity and faces the additional costs brought by individuals with autism, which makes it difficult to operate stably in the long term. At present, large companies have a stable channel to translate the social value of public welfare into a brand effect and thus a stable economic effect and also have enough capacity to deal with risks to provide more stable jobs for individuals with autism. (The exploration of Ningbo "Cainiao Station" in this regard is of great value for promotion and replication.)
3.2.3 Social organizations do not pay much attention to the employment of individuals with autism

Social organizations focus more on children with autism, but few have the capacity to provide skills training, competency assessment, position information, and employment guidance for adults with autism. Moreover, based on the interviews, the team learned that there are social organizations such as "Sunshine Home" in most of the communities in Ningbo that can provide short-term employment support for individuals with autism, but such sheltered employment is unstable, and it is difficult to provide individualized and specific support measures for a single individual with autism. According to the research data in Figures 7-8, social organizations do not have a comprehensive understanding of employment opportunities for individuals with autism, and social organizations are
less able to provide social support due to concerns about the physiological and psychological characteristics of individuals with autism.

![Bar Chart](image1.png)

**Figure 7.** Factors influencing the employment of individuals with autism

![Pie Chart](image2.png)

**Figure 8.** Perception of suitable work for individuals with autism

### 3.3 Government perspective

Government is the first to be responsible for the public welfare, but policies specifically targeting individuals with autism account for only a small percentage of all disabilities, and there is a lack of policy support, as well as a lack of more targeted and actionable policy support. Especially for individuals with autism, for example, the "proportional employment" policy in today's Chinese context benefits more people of working age with physical deficits than individuals with autism with non-physical deficits and fails to attract social attention. Although the government has enacted a series of laws and regulations to protect individuals with autism, there is a lack of related policies and
operational details to improve the skills recognition, employment insurance, and social welfare of individuals with autism, and there is a lack of enforcement.

4. Conclusion and discussion

4.1 Combining the psychology of the employed population

Most companies have stereotypes about individuals with autism in the employed population; the employed population has a low acceptance rate of individuals with autism and has a hard time actively getting to know individuals with autism.

4.2 Combining the characteristics of individuals with autism

Individuals with autism have narrow interests and weaker language skills; an easily developed sense of alienation and fear, leading to mood swings and a reluctance to work; employment is uncertain, and there is a risk that they will not be able to work consistently over time; and each individual with autism is more different.

4.3 Combining government and companies measures

Companies and institutions should set up public welfare programs to guide individuals with autism in their work; set up a special work system to cooperate with individuals with autism and provide basic protection; and vocational support workers to guide individuals with autism in their work and solve a series of problems of individuals with autism. The national policy that employers should employ individuals with disabilities at a rate of 1.5% of the total number of employees directly or indirectly confirms our assumption that "individuals with autism have employment difficulties". Therefore, the team members proposed the following questions: Why is employment difficult for individuals with autism today? Why are companies reluctant to hire individuals with autism? What are the pitfalls of employment for individuals with autism?

To address the employment difficulties faced by individuals with autism, the team members conducted interviews with companies around them as well as with ordinary citizens and some organizations by distributing questionnaires and field interview surveys. Through these different research methods, the team members found that the main reasons for the low employment rate of individuals with autism exist in their characteristics, society, state, and companies. A portion of individuals with autism have access to employment opportunities, but generally, there are many problems, such as single types of jobs, low wages and salaries, and a mismatch of functions. Moreover, the lack of communication skills of individuals with autism makes the public subconsciously choose to alienate them, which leads to a certain sense of inferiority and alienation in the patient's psychology and causes more patients to choose to stay at home. In addition, the lack of concentration and weak communication skills are major taboos in employment. Lack of concentration can lead to inefficiency, which affects the operation and overall efficiency of the company, and there is a great risk for companies to employ individuals with autism; communication difficulties can lead to great obstacles in the handover of work, which can lead to the misunderstanding of work items and wasting time, etc., affecting the operation of work projects and the profit of the company; Finally, the state has made policies to address the employment difficulties of individuals with autism, but these policies are not comprehensive and do not address the root cause of the employment difficulties, and do not allow the majority of the public to eliminate the stereotype of individuals with autism.

4.4 Related solutions

1. To facilitate the employment of individuals with autism, it is important to first understand their specific areas of interest and strengths. Based on this understanding, suitable positions can be identified and arranged for them. Additionally, it is necessary to establish auxiliary positions and provide individualized support to address challenges related to communication difficulties and
interpersonal friction. This support can guide individuals with autism to work, adjust work schedules to accommodate their needs, and create a positive and fulfilling employment experience for them.

2. Encourage institutions that support individuals with autism to establish cooperation with companies to design public welfare programs that help individuals with autism to job-hunting, encourage individuals with autism to practice and create an opportunity to discover their interests, and realize the possibility of increasing employment opportunities for individuals with autism.

3. Customized employment, a practice successfully implemented in other countries for individuals with developmental disabilities. Therefore, the team believes that customized employment can be applied domestically to help individuals with autism job-hunting based on matching aspects and areas of concentration with the relevant competencies needed for the job while meeting the employer's needs and matching the job seeker's strengths and interests.

References


