Title: Spectrum Pathways Goal Attainment Program: Relationships between Identity and Self-Efficacy, Problem Solving, and Psychological Health

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Introduction: The overarching goal of this project is to increase health and wellbeing for young adults with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) through a community-based intervention focused on increasing self-determination with coaching support. There is an urgent need to prepare for the mounting number of individuals with ASD who are, and will continue to be, transitioning from high school into adulthood. As children with ASD age into adolescence and adulthood, their social environment becomes increasingly more complex, yet the number of services and interventions available to them dramatically decrease (Taylor and Seltzer, 2012). Additionally, these adults are undereducated and underemployed, and experience high rates of anxiety, depression and poor physical health (e.g., Taylor and Seltzer, 2012, Croen, Zerbo, Qian et al., 2015). Their outcomes in employment, education, and physical and behavioral health are highly inter-correlated. Furthermore, previous work by the first author established interrelationships between autism identity, employment and education status, subjective quality of life, and psychological health with positive autism identity related to better outcomes in the other factors (McDonald, 2016; 2017). As a group, these adults share challenges in core characteristics, yet they vary widely in their specific challenges, capabilities, skills, and identity making a one-size-fits-all approach to intervention difficult. The current intervention study addresses this difficulty with an individualized program to help adults select and attain their own goals. This poster reports on the baseline interrelationships between autism identity and self-efficacy, approach to problem solving, and behavioral health.

Method: We conducted an intervention using a repeated measures design with measures gathered at two pre-intervention baseline time points and at the end of the intervention. Sixteen adults (n = 16) with ASD (ages 18 – 35) who had exited the high school system participated in a three-month program providing weekly peer-tele coaching. Peer-coaches received training on neurodiversity, coaching skills and goal attainment interventions. Prior to the coaching sessions, all participants received instruction on the process of goal attainment and goal progress tracking. Additionally, all participants wore actigraphy watches to measure sleep and activity and completed pre-intervention surveys measuring autism identity, self-efficacy, approach to problem-solving, and physical and mental health. Some participants also received an immersive program, one week prior to coaching, with curriculum on topics such as self-determination, self-advocacy, and stress reduction at a variety of community locations, such as the zoo, museum, or science center. There were no differences in measure scores between both pre-intervention time points. Pearson correlations were conducted to examine relationships between scores on the Autism Spectrum Identity Scale (ASIS; McDonald, 2016; 2017), General Self Efficacy Scale (GSE; Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995) Hope Scale (Snyder, Harris, & Anderson et al., 1991) and the Patient Health Questionnaire – Somatic Anxiety and Depression Scale (PHQ-SADS; Kroenke, Spitzer, Williams, & Lowe, 2010)

Results: As predicted, autism identity, self-efficacy, and anxiety were interrelated. Scores on the ASIS Positive Difference, Changeability and Spectrum Abilities domains correlated positively with self-efficacy (r(16) = .530, p = .035; r(16) = .774, p < .001; and r(16) = .655, p = .006, respectively). Positive Difference and Spectrum Abilities also positively related to the Pathways domain on the Hope Scale (r(16) = .574, .020; r(16) = 712, p = .002, respectively). Positive Difference, Spectrum Abilities, and Changeability were negatively correlated with anxiety, (r(16) = -.569, .021; r(16) = -.524, .037; and r(16) = .563, p = .023, respectively. Additionally, Changeability related negatively to depression, r(16) = -.533, .034. The autism identity domain of Context Dependent was not related to any factors.

Discussion: These baseline measures correspond to interrelationships between autism identity and behavioral health found in previous literature. These results add relationships of self-efficacy and problem-solving to the list of factors relating to autism identity. Self-efficacy and problem-solving may be critical factors for successful employment. Future research in this program will examine the effect increasing self-determination skills supported with peer-coaching on self-efficacy, problem-solving, autism identity, and physical and behavioral health.
References/Citations:


