

# Young adults with autism found to have difficulty transitioning into employment

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A study published in the September 2013 issue of the *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry* found that young adults with an autism spectrum disorder (ASD) have more difficulty transitioning into employment than their peers with different disabilities.

Using data from the National Longitudinal Transition Study 2 (NLTS2; a longitudinal nationally-representative survey of youth ages 13-16 years as of December 2000 and receiving special education services), a group of researchers led by Dr. Paul Shattuck of Washington University in St. Louis examined the employment outcomes of 620 [young adults](#), ages 21-25 years, who previously received special education services in secondary school under the autism eligibility category. Employment outcomes for young adults with an ASD were compared to outcomes for similar-aged young adults with different disabilities, such as mental retardation, learning disabilities, emotional disturbance, and speech/[language impairment](#).

The study found that only half (53%) of young adults with an ASD had ever worked for pay outside the home in the first 8 years following high school, the lowest rate among disability groups even when controlling for impairment severity, [household income](#), and social demographics. Only 34% were employed at the time of the survey interview. One in five worked full-time with average earnings of \$8.10/hour, significantly lower than disability comparison groups. Young adults with an ASD were most frequently employed in office and administrative support occupations and experienced less variation in job types than young adults

with other disabilities. Outcomes were better for those who were older, from higher income households, or who had higher functional skills.

Study author, Ms. Anne Roux, said, "The news is mixed. The study confirms low rates of employment for young adults with an ASD using a large, national sample. It highlights the marked difficulty that youth with autism are having during the transition into adulthood compared to their peers with other disabilities. However, we also note that half of young adults with an ASD did work outside the home for pay in the first years after high school, including those with more challenging levels of impairment. This finding provides hope for what might be possible with more effective preparation for employment, transition practices, and workplace supports. Learning about what works to improve [employment outcomes](#) is critical given the growing number of youth diagnosed with autism who are entering adulthood."

**More information:** The article "Postsecondary Employment Experiences Among Young Adults With an Autism Spectrum Disorder" by Anne Roux, Paul T. Shattuck, Benjamin P. Cooper, Kristy A. Anderson, Mary Wagner, and Sarah C. Narendorf, ([DOI: 10.1016/j.jaac.2013.05.019](#)) appears in the *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, Volume 52, Issue 9 (September 2013)

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