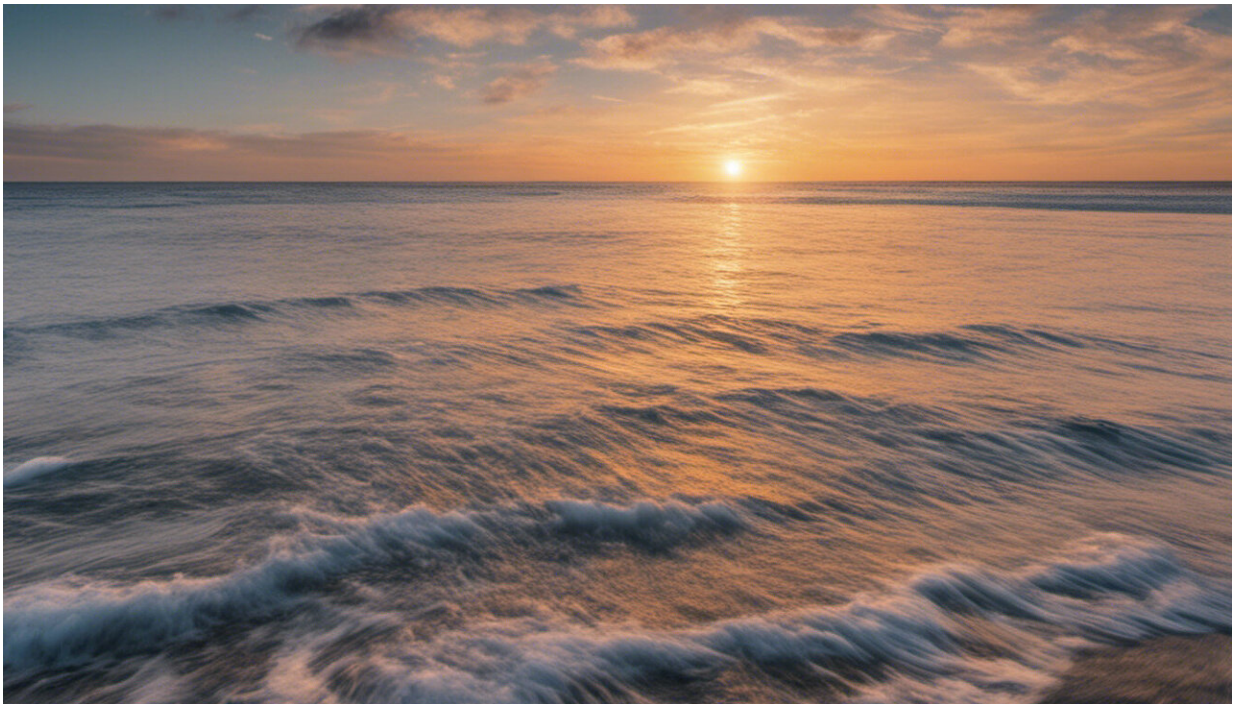


Employment may lead to improvement in autism symptoms

January 15 2014, by Jennifer Wetzel



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(Medical Xpress)—More independent work environments may lead to reductions in autism symptoms and improve daily living in adults with the disorder, according to a new study released in the *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*.

Researchers at Vanderbilt University and the University of Wisconsin-Madison examined 153 [adults](#) with autism and found that greater vocational independence and engagement led to improvements in core features of autism, other problem behaviors and ability to take care of oneself.

"We found that if you put the person with autism in a more independent vocational placement, this led to measurable improvements in their behaviors and daily living skills overall," said lead author Julie Lounds Taylor, Ph.D., assistant professor of Pediatrics and Special Education and Vanderbilt Kennedy Center investigator. "One core value in the disability community and at the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center is placing people with disabilities in the most inclusive environments possible. In addition, this study gives us evidence that increasing the level of independence in an employment or vocational setting can lead to improvements in autism symptoms and other associated behaviors."

Participants averaged 30 years of age and were part of a larger longitudinal study on adolescents and adults with autism. Data were collected at two time points separated by 5.5 years.

Taylor, in collaboration with colleagues at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, looked at such autism symptoms as restricted interests, repetitive behaviors, communication impairments and difficulties with social interactions and found the degree of independence in vocational activities was uniquely related to subsequent changes in autism symptoms, other problem behaviors and activities of [daily living](#).

The results provide preliminary evidence that employment may be therapeutic in the development of adults with autism. Similar to typically developing adults, vocational activities may serve as a mechanism for providing cognitive and social stimulations and enhance well-being and quality of life.

"The majority of research on autism has focused on early childhood, but autism is a lifelong disorder with impairments that limit quality of life throughout adulthood," Taylor said. "Given the prevalence of autism, now one in 88 children, we must continue to examine the factors that promote well-being and quality of life for adults with autism and other disabilities as a whole."

Underemployment is a common phenomenon among adults with autism, the authors noted, with around 50 percent of adults with autism primarily spending their days with little community contact and in segregated work or activity settings.

Taylor says this research highlights the importance of employment programs for adults with [autism](#) and stresses the need for more intervention programming for this population.

Provided by Vanderbilt University

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