

Bridging the autism service cliff with job interview training

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For adults with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) trying to land a job, one-

on-one interview training is a better way to prepare than group sessions, which may work for others, a Rutgers study found.

"One of the first steps to obtaining employment is succeeding in a [job interview](#), but for people with ASD, social communication deficits can make this experience difficult," said SungWoo Kahng, a Rutgers professor in the Department of Applied Psychology and lead author of the study [published](#) in the *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*.

"To compensate, we looked at the use of behavioral skills training delivered to individuals via remote instruction as a way to teach interview skills to adults with ASD," Kahng said.

Every year, nearly 112,000 teens with autism enter adulthood, a milestone autism specialists call the service cliff. After years of educational, therapeutic and skills-related support, students leave school and enter adulthood essentially on their own.

For [autistic adults](#), the impact is immediate. Young adults with [autism spectrum disorder](#) have one of the lowest rates of employment among any disability group at slightly more than 50%.

In Kahng's study, participants—six [undergraduate students](#) and one recent graduate—received group training by answering questions related to individual strengths, interests and job expectations. After the group instruction, the researchers delivered the same course to each participant individually via an online videoconferencing program.

Answers were scored using a 0–3 scale based on quality and appropriateness of the responses. Interviews were recorded and participants were given feedback. Students who needed more practice were given the opportunity to repeat their answers until their scores improved. Training sessions ranged from one to seven hours.

Results showed overall improvement during one-on-one training compared with group sessions, suggesting that an individualized approach to teaching is more effective for adults with ASD.

"These were all very bright individuals, but [autism](#) is a spectrum, and our participants needed varying levels of training to get to a point of mastery," said Kahng. "One-size-fits-all approaches didn't work."

While the sample size was small, Kahng and co-author Courtney Butler, a behavior analyst at the Rutgers Center for Adult Autism Services, already have plans to expand the research.

"This was a preliminary study and was implemented based on need identified by people we work with at the center," said Butler. "Going forward we want to study how to make these programs scalable to benefit as many people as possible."

Ultimately, the long-term goal is to help young adults with ASD achieve their full potential, said Kahng. "Most [autistic people](#) who work get placed in a job," he said. "We want to change the formula. Everyone should be able to select the job they want, and doing so starts with a successful [interview](#)."

More information: SungWoo Kahng et al, An individualized approach to teaching adults with autism to successfully navigate job interviews via remote instruction, *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis* (2023). [DOI: 10.1002/jaba.977](#)

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