Identifying the Needs of Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders at an Australian University: A Pilot Study

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Overview

• Overview of research question
• Background: What do we Know?
• Why is it important?
• Research design
• Preliminary Results
• Implications & Recommendations
Introduction

• What are the issues for students with ASD?

• Do students with ASD feel supported?

• How could the University improve support services for students with ASD?
• 81% of Students with ASD that have finished school did not go onto receive higher education
• 42% of people with ASD are employed in Australia
• Lack of employment can lead to many difficulties in life
Common Difficulties at University include:

- Academic Skills
- Executive Functioning
- Social Skills
Participants

• 7 Students with ASD
  – Ages ranging from 18 to 60
  – Been at the University for 2 or more years

• 3 Staff
  – Support Service Roles
Methods

• **Online Surveys for Students with ASD**
  – DSM-5 Self-Rated Cross-Cutting Symptom Measure
  – Brief Multidimensional Students’ Life Satisfaction Scale
  – Questions developed specifically for the University of the Sunshine Coast.

• **Online Surveys and Focus Groups for Staff**
  – Questions developed specifically for the University of the Sunshine Coast
The DSM-5 Symptom Measure

The DSM-5 Self Rated Cross-Cutting Symptom Measure For Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders at The University of the Sunshine Coast

Bar chart showing the percentage of students with various symptoms, including:
- Depression
- Suicidal Ideation
- Anxiety
- Memory
- Somatic Symptoms
- Mania
- Personality Functioning
- Repetitive Thought and Behaviours
- Anger
- Sleep Problems
- Dissociation
- Psychosis
- Substance Use
Brief Multidimensional Students’ Life Satisfaction Scale

- Your life overall
- Where you live
- Yourself
- Your school/university experience
- Your friendships
- Your family life

Very satisfied, Somewhat satisfied, Neither satisfied or dissatisfied, Somewhat dissatisfied, Very dissatisfied
Supports at USC

• Disability adviser
• Academic Skill Advisors
• Counselling
• UNIfy
• Mentors for First year students
• The Desk- online resources
• Online Resources
• Your Tutor
University Study Skills

- I get lower marks on assessment than I expected
- I understand what I am taught in class
- Worrying about assignments keeps me awake at night
- If I get something wrong I become anxious
- If I do not keep up in class I become anxious
- I am very worried about my marks
- I am worried I will not get a job because I have ASD
- I procrastinate
- I am able to put time aside to do work
- I fit in everything I want to do in a day
- I submit assignments in on time

- Always (Nearly every day)
- Moderate (more than half the time)
- Mild (several times)
- Rare (less than once or twice)
- Never (none at all)
University skills

• Developing and implementing independent study skills
• Understanding tertiary study demands
• Understanding roles of staff (academic, support, etc)
Social Skills

- I sit with the same people in my classes every week
  - 0%
  - 20%
  - 40%
  - 60%
  - 80%
  - 100%

- I find it difficult to work on group assignments
  - Always (Nearly every day)
  - Moderate (more than half the time)
  - Mild (several times)
  - Rare (less than once or twice)
  - Never (none at all)

- I feel lonely
  - Always (Nearly every day)
  - Moderate (more than half the time)
  - Mild (several times)
  - Rare (less than once or twice)
  - Never (none at all)

- I find it easy to make new friends
  - Always (Nearly every day)
  - Moderate (more than half the time)
  - Mild (several times)
  - Rare (less than once or twice)
  - Never (none at all)

- I am able to find a study group if I want one
  - Always (Nearly every day)
  - Moderate (more than half the time)
  - Mild (several times)
  - Rare (less than once or twice)
  - Never (none at all)
“(I am) Not aware of any way to connect with other ASD students to discuss similar experiences” - Student Participant

“As these students find it difficult to connect with others, a support service is required” - Staff Participant
Accessing Support

- I know where to get academic help
- I don’t know how to talk about my diagnosis
- I am able to talk to my lectures and tutors about my Autism Spectrum Disorder and symptoms
- I am able to talk disability services about my Autism Spectrum Disorder and symptoms

Options:
- Always (Nearly every day)
- Moderate (more than half the time)
- Mild (several times)
- Rare (less than once or twice)
Accessing Support

“(I would like) assistance with diagnosis, advocacy and resources to overcome” – Student Participant

“Wider range of support options tailored to the student, ie study skills, social connections, info for parents on how best to support their child, role clarity” – Staff Participant
“I don't fully know what is available. I am concerned that having ASD will affect my options of further study re Honours and Masters and would like to talk to someone about it but not sure how…. (there is) Too much pressure to perform well as I need to so that I can do Honours and Masters... Having peace of mind that my disability will not impede my progress would be really good.” – Student Participant
Limitations

- Small sample size
- Limited Timeframe
- Sample from single University
- Closed question design
Summary

- University Skills
- Social Support
- Accessing Support
- Mental health support
- Future Research
Transforming Tertiary Education

• Develop support packages
  – Peer & Social connections
  – Orientate to Universities resources
  – Activity/leisure options

• Education for staff

• ASD support groups
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References

References