

INTEGRATION IN WORKFORCE OF QUÉBEC ADULTS LIVING WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER OR ASPERGER SYNDROME

Carole Sénéchal¹, & Serge Larivée²

¹Faculty of Education, University of Ottawa (Canada)

²École de psychoéducation, Université de Montréal (Canada)

Abstract

This communication presents an exploratory study which evaluates the impact of the program *Le Pacte pour l'emploi: Le Québec de toutes ses forces (2008)*. This program aims at the professional integration of adults with autistic disorder (ASD) or Asperger syndrome (AS). This program is implemented in different regions of Quebec. The evaluation takes into consideration the conditions of employment, professional integration procedures and the receptivity of potential employers. The results show that the employment conditions of these people are quite similar. However, the type and number of services offered as well as the training of information agents vary from one employment center to another.

Keywords: *Autism, disorder, integration, adults, Asperger syndrome.*

1. Objective

Current employment conditions for people with Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) are similar in all regions of Quebec. The majority of employment agents maintain that, without specialized training, these workers secure wages that correspond to the skill levels, often limited to the minimum-wage positions. Those organizations that employ trained educators to support new employees, to provide on-the-job follow-up, to make adaptations to the environment, and raise and to raise awareness in the community, would like to have more than one in their team. Such a specialized educator provides a framework for the worker and the workplace, which potentially contributes to success. There is a consensus that employment subsidy programs have adequate funding and financial resources, which often meet demands for successful workforce integration (Martin, 2018).

2. Methods

This exploratory research aimed to document services provided in employment centers for people with ASD or Asperger syndrome (AS), and to assess the impact of the implementation of the Quebec program. An important theme that emerged from the interviews highlights the transition from school to the job market as a turning point in these people's lives. Counselors at centers that have developed services in this area, realize the importance of investing in this transition process. In the case of centers that offer no transition services at all, it's unrealistic to think that a person with ASD or AS will be able to maintain a job position, if they have not had the opportunity to develop professional, communicative and social skills (Gouvernement du Québec, 2024).

Overall, the findings of this exploratory study indicate that professional integration for adults with ASD or AS follows a similar pattern across the six regions of Quebec. Based on questionnaire results, this study allows us to identify the different nuances of this problem, which, to our best knowledge, is unprecedented in our literature review on the subject. This analysis shows how far we have come and, above all, the challenges that still need to be addressed for a successful professional integration of adults with ASD or AS (Howling, 2000).

Considering the study findings, it is evident that some people enter the workforce long before obtaining a school-leaving certificate. Therefore, the following questions remain unanswered. What happens after school? Are we offering these students all the tools they need to achieve full citizenship? Should funding for the professional integration of adults with disabilities be used exclusively to add work contracts, internships and work contracts, internships and jobs with adapted companies? Are we providing the right tools and sufficient training for employment centers? Clearly, much remains to be done to improve support services for the professional integration and job of adults with ASD or AS.

3. Discussion

It is surprising and even concerning that only four out of ten agents report having required understanding of ASD and AS. Identifying the specific needs, strengths, and limitations of adults with these limitations requires knowledge. Why don't employment center managers and university programs offer courses and training on the different training on the different clientele of employment centers? Why not structure the network into specialized vocational integration service points specialized according to the agent's expertise? This is so because we can't expect our agents to know all the particularities of each of limitations, nor can they be expected to know how to deal with all clients that they serve (Spectre emploi, 2024).

The introduction of the Quebec program is regarded as a commendable government initiative to address the issue of labor shortage. However, agents still question how the funds will be used: hiring specialized educators, awareness-raising employers in their region, setting up internships and exploratory workshops, etc.

In fact, this study emphasizes the professional integration of adults with ASD or AS extends far beyond searing employment and earning a salary. Various factors such as the employer's open-mindedness, training, employability, subsidies, etc., often add complexity to the job-hunting process. For example, employment centers do not necessarily have the same resources nor do they offer the same services pertaining to school-to-work transition, exploratory internships, training courses, specialized educators, adapted workshops, etc.

Moreover, most agents do not have the training required to sufficiently serve specific clientele they work with on a daily basis. Undoubtedly, they do the best they can to help with what they know. Those who have employers who are more supportive of professional development are likely more at ease in their work, more realistic in their expectations and assessment of the candidate, better able to find the right environment and, thereby successfully integrating their clientele.

This research also highlights several weaknesses in the professional integration process of the adults concerned. Would it be more appropriate to fund the various services that play a decisive role in the success of professional integration? In any case, we can draw up a list of such services that deserve to be developed and financed: the school-to-work transition, on-the-job instructors - mentors in the workplace, an increase in the number of vocational integration agents in employment centers, internships, semi-specialized training, awareness-raising services for employers and co-workers, training for training for employment center agents in psycho-social matters and the development of subcontracting agreements. These are components likely to reinforce the various success parameters- the process of integrating adults with autism or ASD into the workforce (Nesbitt, 2000).

4. Conclusion

Finally, like most exploratory research, this one has its limitations. Here are at least three of them. Firstly, even though we had access to six regions of Quebec, it was impossible to obtain the participation of employment center agents in the Montreal area. From this first limitation stems a second: the limited nature of the sample. Thirdly, we regret that the Centres de readaptation en déficience intellectuelle-troubles envahissants du développement (CRDITED) did not participate in this study on the grounds that their current priority is early childhood. Their views would obviously have provided a broader perspective on this research. This absence is all more regrettable in that CRDITED are as important players as the employment centers we contacted.

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