



Autism: Facts and Figures

The true challenge of autism lies not with the autistic's behavior, but in how society accepts, supports and respects the diversity of the autistic mind. Transition from school to work is at the heart of the problem.

Is autism a big problem?

Autism is a growing epidemic with enormous economic consequences for society. The incidence of autism has grown by 120% over the past ten years. According to the most recent 2018 CDC research about 1 in every 59 children in America is autistic. This is 15% higher than 2014 estimate of 1 in 68, and 30% higher than the 2008 estimate which was 1 in 88, 60% higher than the 2006 estimate when it was 1 in 110, and 120% higher than the 2002 estimates of 1 in 150 ("10 Things to Know About New Autism Data")

The cost of Autism is skyrocketing. According to Autismspeaks.org, in 2015 autism costs U.S. society over \$268 Billion a year with cost estimates of \$461 Billion by 2025. The cost has more than tripled over the last 8 years. 60% of costs are in adult services.

Why do we have to spend so much money on taking care of adults with autism?

Autistics are poorly educated. Only 56% of students with autism finish high school. In higher education 9.3% attend a vocational or technical program; 28% attend a 2-year college and only 12.1% attend a 4-year college. (Shattuck et al). Over 50% receive no higher education at all.

Without an education, it is difficult to find a job.

Very few people with autism are fully employed. Today 85% of adult autistics do **not** have full time jobs. Only 15% of autistics are employed full time compared to 31% of the disabled population and 57% of the general population (Knapp & Mandell).



What is causing this problem?

The primary cause of the employment gap for autistics lies in the failure of the educational system to accept, accommodate and inspire autistic students. Autistic children mature slowly and have poor communication skills, so they end up in Special Education. In high school, Special Ed programs focus on learning 'life skills.' Accesses to college prep classes are limited, so basically your education stops.

Autistics are highly encouraged to take low level jobs, despite their interests or intelligence. When you try to go to college there is little support and no accommodations (Zager & Smith). Services, like speech or occupational therapy, stop when you graduate from high school (Shattuck et al). So you are on your own in a hostile world. No wonder so few autistic youth make a successful transition.

What are the biggest problems people with autism encounter in the transition process?

Autistics' biggest challenges are in the areas of social interaction, communication and perceptual processing. That doesn't mean that they can't make extraordinary contributions to society. Autistics often have a hard time making friends because they are very focused on what interests them. However, this intense, narrow focus often is required for artistic excellence or scientific breakthroughs. 50% of people with autism cannot speak and those that can often have speech and language issues, like I do. That doesn't mean that they can't eloquently express themselves in other ways. Autistics often have sensory processing issues, which mean they hear or see the world differently. Gentle rain can sound like gunfire or they confuse hot and cold. However sometimes hyper acute senses are beneficial.

The true challenge of autism lies not with the behavior of people with autism, but in how society accepts, supports and respects them. Let's change that!



Works Cited

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