

0394

BECOMING A MEMBER OF THE WORK FORCE: PERCEPTIONS OF ADULTS WITH ASPERGER SYNDROME

Beate Krieger¹, Astrid Kinebanian²

¹Zurich University of Applied Studies, Occupational Therapy, Switzerland, ²Hogeschool Amsterdam, Occupational Therapy, Netherlands

Introduction:

The degree to which adults with Asperger Syndrome (AS) participate in the competitive work force is generally reported to be very low. It is mostly explained with low acquired social skills. However, some adults with Asperger Syndrome have been successful in keeping a job against all odds.

Objective :

The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate how working adults interpret the meaning of those contextual factors in their biographies, which contribute to their successful work participation.

Methods:

Using a biographic narrative approach in the hermeneutic tradition of Paul Ricoeur, each of six participants, who live in Switzerland, told his or her story in two in-depth interviews. After having constructed a core narrative and emplotment, the subsequent data analysis included a first naïve interpretation to grasp context as well as two structural analyses (plot structure and core metaphor) in order to deepen understanding.

Results:

Analysis showed that the participants became socialized for future work situations during their childhood by having acquired basic social competences and by others fostering their ability to learn. They are able to adapt to their actual fee labour market work through their strong inner motivation for work, their capacities for understanding and adapting to social norms, and by grasping the particular needs of themselves. Disclosure is rare and stigmatization is still present.

Conclusions:

Although diagnostic criteria have been defined for diagnosing Asperger Syndrome in childhood, the recognition that AS displays "persistence over time" is leading to a new look of how supportive conditions can enhance the transition between child to adulthood. The findings of this study are intended to enhance occupational therapists' understanding of how individuals with AS and their contexts can be supported towards labor participation

Consequences for OT practice:

Occupational therapists can influence social, physical or cultural conditions of children and teenagers and enhancing their life-long learning. How to set priorities, for example in social leaning programs, in handwriting programs or in supporting family attitude towards accepting their children is vividly expressed by the participants of this study.