**Title**:Comprehensive framework for understanding employment barriers and facilitators.

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**Introduction**: Gaining and sustaining meaningful employment is a key research priority identified by the autism community (Davies et al., 2024; Hayward et al., 2019). It is important to examine facilitators of meaningful employment and find solutions to employment barriers for autistic adults (Diener et al. 2020). The goal of this qualitative study was to capture a comprehensive range of factors that contribute to improving employment outcomes for autistic adults.

**Method**: Current analysis presents data collected as part of an ongoing longitudinal study examining employment and education stability in autistic individuals. Participants in this analysis included 80 autistic adults (58 biological males) between the ages of 18-45 (*M*=31.52), and 73 informants (51 mothers). Autistic adults were interviewed about their workplace successes and challenges within the last six months and were asked to describe strengths, difficulties and external supports related to these employment experiences. Informants who know the autistic participants well (e.g., parent, spouse, or friend) were also asked to report on the autistic adult’s workplace successes and challenges. All interview responses were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Transcriptions were checked and verified for accuracy before coding.

Data coding and analysis was conducted by following COREQ guidelines, an evidence-based qualitative methodology (Tong et al., 2007). A hierarchical coding system was developed and refined using a preliminary review of the transcripts. Coders established reliability using the coding system on one transcript. Coding was compared and discrepancies resolved through reconciliation. Remaining transcripts were independently coded within adult-informant dyads to consider each adult within their context. We used an iterative inductive/deductive approach to qualitative data analysis (Azungah, 2018; Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). Deductively, the conceptual framework was informed by social ecological theory (Golden & Earp, 2012; Stokels, 1996). Inductively, we used coded quotes to identify higher order themes and relationships between themes.

**Results**: The qualitative analysis presented a multidimensional model of contributors shaping employment outcomes. Several individual factors contributed to employment experience and were modified by mental health supports and family involvement. Additionally, there were external factors, such as workplace settings, job characteristics, and employment logistics, affecting employment engagement.

In this abstract we focus on the individual factors that impact employment experiences. Emerging themes that influenced employment included persistence, self-awareness, self-efficacy, coping strategies, motivators, and expectations. Under self-awareness, one participant noted that reducing “masking” of autistic traits helped conserve energy, while another participant focused on learning to work diligently without risking burnout. In terms of self-efficacy, participants emphasized recognizing when to persevere versus when to seek support and resources. For coping with overwhelm, strategies for managing anxiety and executive dysfunction emerged as essential, particularly when personal responsibilities felt daunting after prioritizing work and social commitments. These individual factors revealed participants demonstrating resilience and resourcefulness while highlighting the need to balance personal well-being with productivity.

**Discussion:** This study identified several individual strengths and challenges that contribute to positive and negative employment experiences. This framework offers guidance for future research and practice, providing researchers with a structured approach to understanding factors that impact meaningful employment for autistic adults. In turn, employers can use the overall framework for practical application by implementing individualized workplace accommodations that support autistic employees’ specific needs while leveraging their unique strengths.

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