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Transitional Periods of Individuals with Autism: A Parental Perspective on Services

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Transitional Periods of Individuals with Autism: A Parental Perspective on Services

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Abstract

This study looks at the experiences and perceptions of parents with children who are diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) aged eighteen or older and have experienced a significant transition out of high school. By using a qualitative method of interviews and analysis, as well as two rounds of coding, I explored the nature of program options as well as the challenges of the individuals with Autism during this time of their life. This study looked at the challenges in the transition as well as some potential insights to helping ease the challenges.

Introduction

The United States education system is built around the ideology of free and appropriate education to all children no matter their race, religion, sex or ability according to the equal protection clause of the 14th amendment (Const. Amend. XIV). Children with disabilities are given an extra safeguard with the individuals with disabilities act, which states that the US has an obligation to provide children with disabilities a free and appropriate education as well. With this being said, children facing disabilities have the right to the same form of education as their non-disabled peers. One of these groups of children are those with Autism Spectrum Disorder. Autism Spectrum Disorder or ASD can be classified as a neurological and developmental disorder that affects how people interact with others, communicate, behave and most importantly, learn (5th ed.; DSM–5; American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Children with ASD have different abilities when it comes to learning. Because of this, these children receive help in school with a special plan called an Individualized Education Plan or an "IEP".

An IEP is a specialized education program designed to meet a specific child's educational needs. It is crafted by a team of individuals from the school as well as the parents of the child so both parties have input into the child's education. An IEP is reassessed every year the child is in school in order to continuously provide that child with a fair and equitable education. In some cases, fair and equitable education may be to help provide that child with skills for their lives after high school. This in hindsight

sounds like a fantastic approach to schooling for children with ASD, but how far does this support really go?

Children with ASD are faced with a service cliff upon leaving high school. This means, all the support they received through their K- 12 education comes to a harsh and fast end, and they and their parents are left to fend for themselves. When faced with this harsh reality, parents are given very little support in the search for new programs for their child. On top of this many children with ASD are extremely dependent on a schedule, and when graduating from school, a huge change to their life of no longer attending school does not come easy. It is up to the parents of these individuals to provide the support and find a fitting program. Parents are left with the difficult process of deciding if they want to find a new adult program for their child as well as finding a fitting program. The following research questions help aid in this research; Who is in charge of finding special education programs for individua's with Autism? How do parents of children with autism ages 18 + describe the help provided by special education and adult programs when finding a fitting program? What is the nature of the help available?

The challenges faced by individuals with Autism, especially those with higher support levels during transitions are apparent, but adult programs provide some help in easing transitions. However, the struggle of finding fitting adult programs predominantly falls on parents due to limited program options, highlighting the need for accessible resources and help. Additionally, the experiences, both positive and negative, of individuals with Autism in adult programs shows the impact of individual differences on their overall fit in these programs.

Literature Review

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

Autism Spectrum Disorder also known as ASD can be defined as "persistent deficits in each of the three areas of social communication and interaction plus at least two of four types of restricted, repetitive behaviors" (5th ed.; DSM- 5; American Psychiatric Association, 2013). ASD can be diagnosed in a child as early as 18 months, but it is considered to be most reliable at age 2. By age 2, children can be diagnosed based on three levels of severity. Level 1 requires support, level 2 requires substantial support and level 3 requires very substantial support (5th ed.; DSM- 5; American Psychiatric Association, 2013), substantial support can be looked at as the amount of help an individual will need on a day-to-day basis with daily activities. A child is diagnosed with autism in consideration of these criteria; social and communication difficulties, restricted, repetitive and or sensory behaviors and interests, autism signs and the must have had these signs since childhood (5th ed.; DSM- 5; American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

According to Marlene Lauritsen a doctor in the field of psychology, "the three areas of impairments in ASD are reduced to two areas, namely a social- communication domain and a behavioral domain including fixed interests and repetitive behaviors" (Lauristen, 2012). With these two domains having the largest impacts on individuals with ASD, it makes it extremely hard for them to communicate, learn, develop social

skills, and behave in a correct manner. Because of this, many individuals who have ASD are placed in special classes throughout their education or are given individualized paraeducators to help them. Daniel Hallahan uses the term exceptional learners to help refer to students with disabilities, he states "As of 2018, the CDC reported that 1 in 59 persons (1.69%) under 21 years of age was diagnosed with ASD (Hallahan et al., 2020). With previous literature laying out the defining pieces of ASD as well as the prevalence in our society, why is it that we are still struggling to find a way to teach these exceptional learners as well as provide them with a successful way of life?

Legislature for Special Education

School choice is a reformative movement that is looking to give parents a choice in their child's education as well as help provide a more diverse education. School choice allows parents to send their children to schools outside of the school that is zoned for their neighborhood. In the 1980 education act parents of children with Special education needs (SEN), were not given the same equal opportunity to have a choice in their child's education as their neurotypical peers' parents did. The DFE booklet "special educational needs a guide for parents" outlines the rights of parents stating "You have a right to express a preference for which state school you want your child to go to. The LEA must (DFE emphasis) agree with your preference as long as: the school you choose is suitable for your child's age, ability, and special educational needs your child's presence there will not affect the efficient education of other children at the school placing your child in the school will be an efficient use of resource" (Bagley &

woods 1998). This act was created to give parents of SEN children more options in their education.

"Parental choice of school has been at the heart of policy discourse since the 1988 Education Reform Act" (Bajwa- Patel & Devecchi 2014). In 1996, a statement of SEN gave parents the ability to have a preference in which school their child attends, this statement brought for the Special Educational Needs Disability Act (SENDA) which gave parents the right to challenge schools and local officials on the basis of discrimination. But this still did not give parents the final say in their child's education. SENDA created an environment where schools were able to take steps towards inclusion and the creation of a "fair start in life, with the very best opportunity to succeed" (Bajwa- Patel & Devecchi 2014). Parental choice is an important piece to this study because it helps show the options available to parents as well as the many decisions they have to make in order for their child to have a successful education.

Special Education

Special Education is an idea composed of exactly what it sounds like, an education special from that of one would regularly receive, making it different than usual. The idea of special education is that it has to provide the child with an education that is effective and unique. Historically, special education was put into practice in the early 1800's but this was made into the special education we see today in the mid and early 19th century. In this, Hallahan and Kauffman created the beliefs and practices that shape special education today on the basis of seven principles. These seven principles are: 1. Individualized instruction, 2. Carefully sequenced series of tasks, 3. Emphasis on

stimulation and awakening of the child's senses, 4. Meticulous arrangement of the

child's environment, 5. Immediate reward for correct performance, 6. Tutoring functional

skills and 7. Belief that every child should be educated to the greatest extent possible

(Cook and Schirmer, 2003). These seven principles heavily correlate to special

education today, as we use special education to create opportunities for these

individuals to succeed in their own ways. In theory special education should be an

incredible resource to exceptional learners but it does not always play out as easy

access to equal education. According to a study by Lake and Billingsley in which they

interviewed twenty- two parents of individuals in special education who had an appeal

process, 16 school officials and 6 mediators in approximately 30-to-90-minute

interviews. From this they found that there were eight factors that would lead to conflict

in a special education setting, the main ones being discrepant views of a child or a

child's needs, and service delivery (Lake and Billingsley, 2000). Discrepant views of a

child or a child's needs was the leading cause of conflict in 90% of the interviews

conducted meaning the parent and the school had different views of the child and their

needs and or abilities. Similarly, service delivery was the next conflict creator in special

education as many parents struggled to agree with the school on the quality of the

services, the instruction and lack of options for their child.

      With so many potential problems in special education with conflicts between the

school and parents, many parents opt to homeschool their child. In another study by

Morse and Bell, they conducted a survey that was completed by 333 participants who

had previously had their child in public or private school and decided to move them to

homeschooling for a number of reasons. The survey consisted of 33 questions about

school choice and homeschooling. The study found that parents of children with special educational needs move their child to homeschooling when their public or private school is not meeting the child's educational needs (Morse and Bell, 2018). Families identified the fact that when they homeschool their child, they are able to be more involved in their child's education. Similarly, parents are able to help their child's succeed and teach them in the way that is best suitable to their needs. This helps connect to this study because it helps show the fact that many parents would rather go through home schooling rather than a school provided special education program. This gives parents the liberty to solely make the decisions about their child's education.

Transitions Out of High School

Preparing an individual with ASD for a large transition such as leaving school, a schedule they have gotten used to for 12 or more years is extremely important. "Planning for the transition to adulthood is supposed to include determining student strengths and interests, assessing possible target outcomes that match these strengths and interests, setting goals for building skills necessary to attain targeted outcomes and delivering services to teach these skills" (National Autism Indicators report, 2015). The National Autism Indicators report also includes the statistic that only 58% of ASD youth had a transition plan, this is extremely disheartening considering it is federal law that requires schools to provide students in special education with transition plans. Many students who leave high school without a transition plan, that being set goals and plans for life, of those 37% are considered to be disconnected from both work and education. In other words a transition plan is extremely important to an individual with Autism

looking to have success in leaving high school. Similarly, the disconnection rate was even higher for individuals who are on the ASD spectrum (National Autism Indicators report, 2015). Lack of preparation and help from the school leaves 81% of ASD individuals unable to live independently in their 20's, 68% will never live apart from their parents, 64% are unable to obtain secondary education and 42% are unemployed (National Longitudinal Transition Study, 2011).

Preparation is extremely important because individuals with ASD face a loss of services after high school, they no longer have the help they previously received during their schooling. The biggest success in this transition is seen when the school system works in conjunction with adult programs and allows for collaboration of the two in which the child slowly makes the transition rather than the abrupt transition out of high school, unfortunately though this collaboration rarely happens (Laxman et al., 2020). In 2020, Daniel Laxman ran a longitudinal study with approximately 406 participants whose child was aged 10 or older with ASD. The participants were surveyed for approximately 15 years using surveys, questionnaires, and in-home interviews with questions about services they received post high school graduation. This study by Laxman found that individuals with ASD of families with higher incomes experienced better services and had more of their needs met when making this transition. As for the less affluent families, the individuals with more unmet needs came from families who were of lower economic status. The study also found "those who live away from family often live in agency-supported residences that provide other services in addition to residential supports. Hence, their residence could have provided a pathway to services in adulthood that living with family does not offer" (Laxman et al., 2020). This is interesting

as they are living away from their families but again, a family of a lower economic status may struggle to fund the placement of their child in these facilities. This is an interesting outcome that helps support my study because it shows the fact that not all the services provided are accessible to everyone so how much is the help really helping?

As for the individuals with ASD who can attend college post high school graduation, they also are faced with lack of accommodations from their respective colleges. Another major difficulty these students face is not due to lack of intellect but rather being in a new place, leaving family, friends and creating a new routine of a college student, finding classrooms, purchasing their books, and meeting other students (Alverson et al., 2019). This study by Alvarez was done in a qualitative way where they interviewed individuals with ASD for 6 to 12 months to hear their experiences in college. This study found that there are "5 cross- case themes that seemed to influence the successful transition from high school to college: (a) internal source of motivation to attend college, (b) high levels of disability awareness, c) international family supports, (d) coordinated transition planning, and (e) clear post school goals" (Alvarez et al., 2019).

 Adult Special Education Programs

Adult special education programs come in a wide range and are created to help with specific needs, one of these needs is to work on social skills. Social skills training groups were created to help work on the social interaction and communication difficulties of individuals with ASD (Hotton & Coles, 2016). Help in social skills is a major key to helping increase peer relationships and increase their participating in activities. In

order for these individuals with ASD to live normal lives and be able to have relationships such as friends and romantic partners come with helping these individuals work on their social skills. "Social difficulties predict a lower number of peer relationships and reduced participation in recreational activities as well as reduced ability to form romantic relationships, factors known to lead to a significant reduction in psychological wellbeing" (Hotton & Coles, 2016). In a study looking at a 12-week intervention of individuals with ASD after the 12-week intervention, it was generally associated with increased generalization of the targeted social skills (Hotton & Coles, 2016). These programs seem to work when implemented in the correct ways, but not all adult programs are run as smoothly. In many situations it is difficult and stressful for parents of individuals with ASD to find an adult program and get their child enrolled in the program.

For those looking into respite services, respite is a service provided by the state governments in which an individual diagnosed with ASD can get care close to home or in their home. Respite is defined as " the provision of care to children with complex needs for a specific period of time with the intent of providing temporary relief to their main careers and the family" (Cooke et al., 2020). It allows the parents to leave for work, go grocery shopping or anything else for a period of time where a professional is either in their home or taking their child to a place near their home and watching the child, interacting with the child and or working with the child on necessary skills. Parents of children with autism are faced with more demands than a parent of a neurotypical child and are in a bigger need for respite services, but they do not always qualify for respite services. Many parents have difficulty accessing respite services because they

are unable to get correct medical information needed to access respite services. Although these services are extremely helpful and necessary, they are not very accessible.

To summarize, it is extremely important for individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder to have special education programs while they are in school as well as out of school. While their child is still in school, parents have a choice in how to school their children either in the school system with special education or homeschool in which they control their child's education. Important legislation has been passed so that these individuals are taken care of while they are in the education system but what happens when they leave the education system can either make or break their future. By this I mean that parents have to make the difficult decision of placing their child in an adult program or not, on top of this parents have a choice in where they place their child. A lot of times, parents of higher socioeconomic status have more options than those of lower status, this is because they have more access to the means necessary. This is unfortunate because adult special education programs can be seen as a huge key in adult success of individuals with Autism.

Methods

Methodology

In this study, I used qualitative research to answer the question of how parents of individuals with autism ages 18 + describe the special education options available during the transition from school-based programs to adult based programs? And what the nature of the options available are. In order to help answer these questions I

conducted 6 interviews of parents of individuals with ASD. I conducted these interviews with the idea of the researcher being a key instrument, "data collection through themselves examining documents, observing behaviors or interviewing participants" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In this case, the researcher is a key instrument because I was running the interviews, as well as coding the transcripts afterwards. I opted to use interviews because it gave me the most amount of information from personal experiences of the parents compared to simply a survey. In these interviews I was able to get more personal as well as have the option to ask to follow up questions or clarifying questions. This is helpful in allowing me to get more in-depth information about the parents and their child. I will also be recording these interviews in order to get a transcript which I will use to look back to when finding common themes in these 6 interviews. One limitation to this process is the access to people who are interested in participating, many people in this community are very protective of their children so it will take very specific and correct wording in order to not offend or make a participant feel uncomfortable. It was difficult to find people who were interested in participating even though a gift card was being offered. Because of this, I had to switch to more of a snowball method of recruiting participants where the participants I did have pointed me in the direction of someone who they knew. The snowball methods worked in which a participant who I interviewed would direct me to another person they knew who qualified for the study.

Participants

In these interviews I interviewed approximately 6 parents of individuals with parents of autism. I looked for parents who have a child with Autism who is eighteen or older because they need to either be going through the transition or have already gone through the transition. This is the only specific selection criteria I had in place because other than the age of their child, I wanted to have participants who came from any and all backgrounds. My participants were 4 women and 2 men, 3 of which were White, 2 were Hispanic and one was Black, I did not specifically look for people from specific groups, but I think by reaching out to all different kinds of people I received diverse participants. Majority of my participants came from either California or Connecticut, due to having to switch to using a snowball method, so the sample seemed to stay in those geographic locations. I believe sampling parents of individuals with Autism eighteen and older is an appropriate sample because they can see the challenges themselves and their child face on a daily basis. I am targeting the parents rather than the individuals with Autism themselves because I feel as though the parents will have better insight in the transition as well as the search for a new program.

Data Collection

For this study, I used a flier in order to recruit individuals interested in participating. My flier contained the information about the study as well as a link to a contact sheet. This flier was posted on a Facebook group called "Autism Parents Support group" as the first form of recruitment. This group also has multiple smaller group chats where I also posted the fliers, one called "Adults with Autism", and another called "School and Support". This group was helpful because it contains individuals from

all over the United States and has parents of individuals with Autism of all ages. I also reached out to a number of different professors and used what is called a snowball method of recruitment in which participants pointed me towards other participants. The flier was also distributed through a community Autism center in Connecticut, this center holds events for children and adults with Autism as well as their families. In order to conduct the interviews, I created a set of sixteen questions that I will ask the participants, one example of a question is "describe the transition process", another being "What was your knowledge of the options available for your child at the time of looking?". I posed the questions to be open ended as well as not directed in a positive or negative manner in order to get the true answer from the participant without making them think they should answer a certain way. In these interviews, I used zoom, an online communication platform that allows for recording. So, the interviews were recorded and turned into a transcript, where I then cleaned up the transcript and ran it through a series of codes from a code book that I created prior to the interviews. The code book will help me separate the information and find common themes between the interview participants.

Data Analysis

I analyzed this data using a code book that I created prior to the interviews. I created my first round of codes by predicting common themes that will come from the interview questions I am asking. One example of these codes is "Feelings about Special Education" this is the main code, and it is separated into three subcodes, the first "positive feelings(PF-SPED)" the second "negative feelings (NF-SPED), and the third

"neutral feelings (NeuF-SPED)". I separated the codes in this manner because it allows me to separate pieces of the interviews into these categories and find commonalities. After completing the interviews, I looked at the transcripts where I compared them to the audio file and cleaned them to make sure it matched the audio.

After the transcripts were cleaned, I went through a two-step process of coding. The first was using the codebook that was created prior to the interviews and the second step was creating new codes that seemed to come up in the interviews that I didn't previously code for. In the second round of coding, I looked for common themes in these interviews that I did not previously code for. In this round, I coded for finding a fitting program (YesFIT), (NoFIT). I used this code because when I was coding my interviews, I noticed that a lot of parents did find programs for their child but in many cases the first couple programs were not great fits to these individuals. So, I added this to my code many parents had to find multiple programs and their child would go through a test trial on the program to see if it was a fit or not. The next code I added was college resources and help, "good resources" (CRG), "no resources" (CRN), and "bad resources" (CRB).

Findings

From my research, I found three main findings as well as two smaller findings that connect to finding two and three. The first finding is the idea that finding a fitting adult program for individuals with Autism is placed on the shoulders of the parents. The second finding is the idea that individuals with Autism of higher support levels struggle with transitions and within this finding I found that adult programs can provide some

support in these transitions. The last finding is the idea that the experiences positive and negative of individuals with Autism in adult programs varies based on their individual differences, and the smaller finding connected to this is the idea that success and positive experiences in these programs is not only dependent on the program.

Parents Faced with Finding Programs

My first finding of finding a fitting adult program for individuals with Autism is placed on the shoulders of the parents is my most basic finding but still holds extreme importance. In many of the interviews, parents identified the fact that they had to find a program for their child that was fitting to their child as well as affordable as they have a limited budget for daycare. This is shown in a quote from the Reese interview stating "They [the Regional Center] weren't real forthcoming with wanting to give you choices. They want to just give you one and please sign up for this one. And, but they did give more options once we were like, hey, we need more than one choice or I think went and looked at the first one and then came back and said, no that's not going to work"(Reese). Similarly, in the interview with Gill, they state "And so, in that first meeting, trying to get him the classes that would help them was kind of a struggle, because it seemed like nobody wanted to help you to the point where they [College Student Resource Center] would tell you well, you know, college isn't for everybody" (Gill). Both of these quotes help show the fact that for parents in the search for programs and help for their child, there is very little help offered. But with the help that is offered, they are given the bare minimum and expected to make it work. Most of the time, the first program that an individual with Autism goes into is not always going to be

the best fit. But as stated in the interview by Nicholls, "you have to pick one, you have to because when you are an adult with disabilities, at 18, you sign up for SSI and Medicaid. And through those programs that's what pays for these adult programs. And so, you have to pick one, and then they [Regional Center] bill for that program" (Nicholls). With the help from the government they, as in the regional center closes to the city the family lives in will pay for the program but it will only pay for one and it is often difficult to switch the payment from one program to another.

Struggles with Transitions

My second finding is the idea that according to parents, individuals with Autism of higher support levels struggle more with transitions and the smaller finding correlated is the fact that adult programs can offer support to these transitions. In my research I found that in the parents that I interviewed with children who are of higher support levels, they noted their child to have a harder time in transitioning from high school to an adult program. This can be seen in a quote from the Nicholls interview stating "For Tyler transitions are harder. He doesn't make friends as easily as Sean. So, it was probably, little harder for him. but he definitely struggled a little more …but he was really interested in the brass section of the program's drum core" (Nicholls). With Tyler, he really struggled in the transition from high school to the adult program but his brother Sean who needs less support made the transition easily because he is more independent, he made friends easier and was more interested in the program. Tyler was switched to another program that offered a way to help with the transition using shorter trail days in which Tyler was able to learn about the program before fully

attending. This is shown in the interview stating "so at that time, they had something called Sunday Funday where you could sign up for the year to be 16 or older to sign up for Sunday Funday so we did sign both the guys up so that the program would get to know who they were? And they [Nicholls sons] would kind of get to get used to going into the building at all" Nicholls). This helps show how adult programs can aid in helping ease the struggle of transitions for individuals with higher support levels.

Individual Differences based on place on the Spectrum

My last finding is the idea that according to parents, the experiences, positive and negative of individuals with Autism in adult programs is based on their individual differences and needs. The smaller finding, I found connected to this finding was the idea that an individual's success or positive experience in a program is not only dependent on the program itself. I saw this in many cases of the interviews because in many cases the fit between the individual and the program was not only dependent on the program type but also the individual's needs and well as their function level. This is shown through the interview with Gill in which he states "so, we placed in that program [adult program through the high school]. And right away the first, I believe, the first month, one of the instructors, tells me, you know, your son is way beyond this class. He doesn't need to be here" (Gill). In this case, Gill's son was well beyond the support level of the program, and he was not gaining anything from being in the program, so rather than remaining in the program, Gill put his son into classes at the local community college. While Gill's son was too high of a function level for his program, Nicholl's son really struggled in his program because it was not matched for his support level.

Nicholls states "He doesn't get involved with the plays that the program puts on, he suffers with a lot of anxiety. So, he does not want to be involved in the plays at all" (Nicholls). This is interesting to see because in the case of Nicholl's son, the program was not a good fit because it had activities that were outside of her son's comfort zone and created anxiety for him. Finally, not all programs are fitting because of individual differences, for example , Reese states " I think structure is a big thing. I mean, that's just how he thrives. structure and knowing what's coming and they couldn't even tell me where they were going for lunch" (Reese). The problem with this program was not due to the fact that it was not a match to the support level but rather it did not fit his individual needs of structure and schedules.

Discussion

Connections to Previous Research

In my findings, I found that it makes large connections to previous research while also looking at it from a different perspective in which I was able to find an interplay between two findings. Similar to Laxman et. al., I also found that adult programs can help an individual make a smoother transition. But unlike Laxman et al., I did not see the emphasis on financial status or higher socioeconomic families having better access. I think if I would have looked further into socioeconomic status I may have had the same findings as Laxman et. al., but it was not the main purpose of my study. I did notice that based on money provided by the regional centers, they are able to pay for the adult program of their choosing. But getting access to the regional center and approval in order to gain access to their services, you have to be able to provide them with a bunch

of things, go through a house check and checks with the individual with Autism. Not only this but only individuals with higher support needs are able to qualify for these services.

Lack of Service

In looking through my findings and previous research, I found that it is not the services that we are lacking rather the services we have are not providing enough help. Similarly, the people who work for these services and other services like in college resource centers, these resources are not helping as much as they could. A study by Connie Anderson and Catherine Butt, they found that many parents with Autism end up having to exacerbate their child's symptoms and the support needed. Parents do this because otherwise, it is extremely difficult for parents of these individuals to receive the services. The findings that they found in this study were very significant, the one that stood out the most to me was "fighting for access" and "staffing issues". This was interesting to me because it helps show the fact that it is not the services themselves that we are lacking but the success of these programs is not good due to these factors such as staffing issues and program suitability (Anderson, 2018). Similarly, because of these lack of staffing issues the regional center makes it so that they will only pay for one program. With this, they also want to give you as few options as possible when you are beginning your search, most of the time you will only get one. Unless parents know to ask for other options, they will just place their child in the program they provided no matter the fit. As we have talked about a lot, the fit of the program is extremely important to the individuals post- high school success in life. If the regional center, the city central locations these parents are supposed to look to for support is not even

offering the best support, where are parents to look. The regional center needs to look into the services they provide and look at how important the fit is for an individual with Autism.

Limitations

A couple limitations did come into play in my study, the first being the geographical location to which my participants came from. Because I had to switch to more of a snowball method my study is a pretty small sample size, and all of my participants came from California and Connecticut. I was able to collect a larger sample size as well as collect samples from all over the United States my study would have higher external validity. Another limitation could be the fact that I did not collect ethnic, or economic statuses, which prior research says has a large impact on the services one could receive. Every participant in my study was of a white background so this could have also played a role in what I found. Many of these participants knew about the services and the fact that they could ask for more options but a person of their background or economic status might not have access to the same information. I think in the future, a study could focus on the resources and help provided to individuals of different ethnic and economic backgrounds in order to compare the difference in services.

Conclusion

To conclude, in talking with parents of individuals with Autism it is evident how crucial this transitional period out of high school is. As they go through this transition

these individuals can face challenges due to social interactions, communication and schedule changes. It is extremely important for parents of these individuals to be provided with the support to help get their child the help and adult program they need. In looking for an adult program it is important that the parent takes into account their child's individual function level as well as their needs when looking at adult programs. Future research can look at the effects and success of being placed in an adult program that is fitting to an individual's needs as well as their function level compared to an individual in an adult program that is less fitting for them and why. This is important because a child who is placed in an adult program that is out of their ability range will not gain as much support as they would in one best fit to their abilities. It is important that we as a society can find ways to offer the most support to these parents, so they are not left to find these programs themselves.

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