

Autistic Spectrum Disorder: Needs Assessment Plan

1484 words

7 pages

Subject: Psychiatry

Topics: Autism, Disorders

Introduction

For individuals diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), the transition from school to adult life can be particularly challenging due to their unique needs. The New Beginnings Program, based in Miami, Florida, was developed to address these challenges by offering young adults with ASD access to vocational and life skills training, ultimately aiming to improve their employment prospects and overall quality of life. This paper presents a needs assessment plan for this project, drawing on survey data and relevant research findings.

Purpose and Scope of the Needs Assessment

The purpose of the needs assessment for the New Beginnings Program is to use a quantitative survey to investigate key challenges reported by individuals with ASD and their parents regarding the transition to adult life. A 20-question online survey will be administered to high school graduates with ASD living in Miami, with two questions directed to their parents. The assessment will help identify subgroups facing the most significant barriers in education and professional development, as well as the geographic distribution of these challenges. Ultimately, it will assess the extent to which high school graduates with ASD may benefit from the program's vocational training opportunities. The scope of the assessment includes examining factors that hinder a successful transition to adulthood, identifying priority groups, and reviewing outcomes of previous initiatives.

Data Collection and Analysis Plan

The needs assessment aims to provide clear insights into the priority population and the effectiveness of current solutions. Alongside reviewing existing programs that support young adults with ASD, a 20-question quantitative survey will be conducted online (Nardi, 2018). This direct data collection approach will gather insights from high school graduates with ASD in Miami.

Survey respondents will answer multiple-choice questions on their perceptions of current and future challenges, provide demographic information, and assess their community's support for autistic individuals. Specific questions will cover job availability, the impact of ASD on access to post-school opportunities, and the presence of vocational guidance services. Caregivers will answer questions on post-school opportunities in Miami and access to guidance services.

Survey results will be systematically analyzed to identify factors predicting post-graduation challenges. Initially, the proportion of former students with ASD expressing a high need for community support will be calculated. Comparative statistical tests will then evaluate connections between demographic factors and perceived education or employment barriers. The findings will inform further assessment steps, helping identify subgroups with the greatest need for professional transition support.

Factors Linked to the Problem: Current Solutions and Their Success

To ensure program effectiveness, specific factors impacting ASD individuals' post-school opportunities must be reviewed. For instance, existing vocational training programs are limited, partly due to the stigmatization of developmental disorders, which reduces the number of businesses willing to employ individuals with ASD (Seaman & Cannella-Malone, 2016). Additionally, financial constraints impact program availability, with adults with ASD often requiring more expensive vocational services than other groups (Seaman & Cannella-Malone, 2016).

Data on local organizations, such as ADE Miami and the Florida Autism Center of Excellence (FACE), will be collected and reviewed to identify service gaps and community concerns. Survey responses will also help assess the success of current efforts by examining employment data and vocational training availability, thereby highlighting

Miami-specific service deficiencies. Although current funding often targets younger individuals with ASD, the services gap, or “services cliff,” remains a significant issue (Remnick, 2019). Analyzing the efforts of these organizations alongside survey results can enhance the program’s success.

Program Focus: Priority Population, Subgroups, and Their Needs

Identifying the program’s focus is an essential part of needs assessment. The primary group includes high school graduates diagnosed with ASD, with a need for effective vocational training that considers their abilities and circumstances (Taylor & DaWalt, 2017). Survey findings will help confirm this need and provide additional insights from the target group.

Due to the large and diverse nature of the population, narrowing the program’s focus is crucial. Data collection will explore the internal structure of the priority population, identifying demographic factors that predict post-school challenges for individuals with ASD. Research suggests income disparities and socioeconomic variables influence employment outcomes within this group (Gere et al., 2017). Therefore, the subgroup with the greatest need for vocational support likely includes low-income adults with ASD.

Economic factors are also linked to vocational access, with studies indicating that ethnicity may play a role in vocational training success (Gere et al., 2017). Thus, high-risk ASD populations in Miami may be concentrated in low-income, non-native English-speaking neighborhoods. Studies have also found higher risks of post-school challenges among ASD individuals in disadvantaged areas (Anderson, Martin, & Haynes, 2017). Survey dissemination will further explore these tendencies to shape the program accordingly.

Validation of the Prioritized Needs

The data analysis phase will involve examining subgroups based on income, geography, and ethnicity to prioritize needs. Comparing survey results with data from ADE Miami, FACE, and client reviews will help validate findings. If both data sets align, they will likely highlight similar themes on post-school life challenges for individuals with ASD.

Significant discrepancies between datasets may require additional needs assessment procedures.

Conclusion

The needs assessment will involve collecting new data and synthesizing prior research on employment outcomes for individuals with ASD. Survey data will provide insights into post-school challenges and subgroup needs within the ASD population based on ethnic, geographic, and economic factors. Revalidating these findings will improve accuracy and ensure that service gaps affecting specific populations are effectively addressed.

References

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