

Community Participation in Autistic Young Adults: A Mixed-Method Study

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Autistic young adults (AYAs) have low rates of and poor satisfaction with community participation (CP). A lack of consensus in conceptualizing and measuring CP impedes effectively addressing this issue for this population. Existing quantitative self-report measures may not fully capture the context and nuances of CP for this population. The purpose of this study was to explore CP in more depth through AYAs' perspectives using a self-report measure followed by a qualitative interview. This descriptive mixed-method study included 35 AYAs (18-29 yrs) who did not have intellectual disability. AYAs were recruited from a prior study and an online posting; all had a professional autism diagnosis. AYAs completed the Temple University Community Participation measure (TUCP; online), which includes 28 activities rated on frequency, importance, and satisfaction. Fourteen AYAs participated in a follow-up interview to further understand their responses. TUCP results indicated that work, school, and socializing with people in the community were most frequently considered important (66-91%). In qualitative interviews, AYAs further described reasons why these activities were important: for interacting with people with shared interests, preparing for a career, and managing mental health. While AYAs reported a range of days spent in each activity on the TUCP, interviews revealed that AYAs' CP patterns differed by time of the year, suggesting that self-report measures may not fully reflect AYA's CP. Interview data revealed that AYAs experienced high satisfaction with online CP (about 90%) because they could find people with shared interests and experiences, and experienced less social anxiety and fewer financial barriers. We found that qualitative interviews provided additional valuable information about CP to contextualize the TUCP information. We recommend that OT researchers and practitioners use multiple assessment methods to holistically understand AYAs' CP.

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