



Summary of Autistic Adults' Experiences of Diagnostic Disclosure in the Workplace: Decision-Making and Factors Associated with Outcomes

This document was submitted by Thayla-Mae Bradley and Anna Melissa Romualdez at the Centre for Research in Autism and Education (CRAE), IOE, UCL's Faculty of Education and Society.

This resource was designed based on following paper:

Romualdez, A. M., Walker, Z., & Remington, A. (2021). Autistic adults' experiences of diagnostic disclosure in the workplace: Decision-making and factors associated with outcomes. *Autism & Developmental Language Impairments*, 6, 1-12. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/23969415211022955>

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Bradley, T., & Romualdez, A. M. "Summary of Autistic Adults' Experiences of Diagnostic Disclosure in the Workplace: Decision-Making and Factors Associated with Outcomes" CRAE, UCL. From: Romualdez, A. M., Walker, Z., & Remington, A. (2021). Autistic adults' experiences of diagnostic disclosure in the workplace: Decision-making and factors associated with outcomes. *Autism & Developmental Language Impairments*, 6, 1-12. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/23969415211022955>

AUTISTIC ADULTS EXPERIENCES OF DIAGNOSTIC DISCLOSURE IN THE WORKPLACE: DECISION-MAKING AND FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH OUTCOMES

AUTHORS

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INTRODUCTION

- Employment rates for autistic individuals is lower in comparison to other disability groups in the UK.
- Previous research has indicated that disclosing an autism diagnosis at work has mixed responses. It can bring about positive workplace change, but may also cause discrimination and stigma. However, it is uncertain what factors determine either outcome.

AIMS

- To identify the factors associated with positive and negative disclosure outcomes.
- Explore what determines whether an autism diagnosis is disclosed or not.

METHODOLOGY

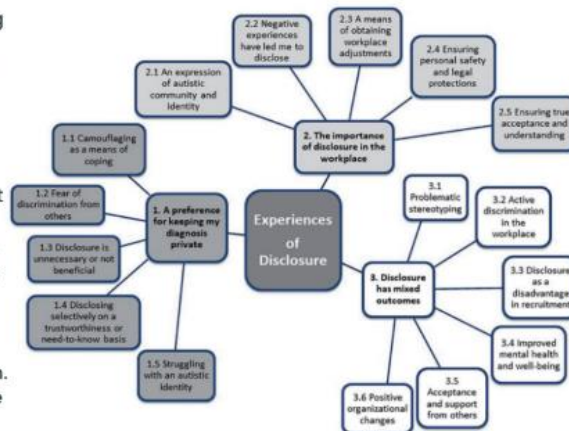
- Interviews were conducted with 24 autistic adults who were currently, or had been, employed in the UK.
- Interviews were analysed using Braun and Clarke (2019) Thematic Analysis.

RESULTS

- Three themes were found regarding disclosure experiences; 1) a preference for keeping a diagnosis private; 2) the importance of disclosure in the workplace; 3) disclosure has mixed outcomes
- 9/24 keep, or have kept their diagnosis private - causing individuals to mask their symptoms.
- Three factors were identified that affected disclosure outcomes: understanding of autism, adaptations, and organisational culture.

DISCUSSION

- Participants showed a preference for keeping a diagnosis private due to the fear of discrimination, failure to come to terms with diagnosis, or worries over using their diagnosis as an excuse to alleviate job demands.
- Disclosure is important to promote organisational change and prevent stigma. It can also ensure legal protections and allow for workplace adjustments for areas such as working hours and locations, as well as other sensory alterations (e.g., offering noise-cancelling headphones).
- Disclosure outcomes depend on employer and co-worker prior understanding of autism. Increased knowledge correlated with positive outcomes.



CONCLUSION

- The findings were the same as those of previous studies - that the decision to disclose an autism diagnosis is extremely varied depending on the perceived benefits and the reactions of those being informed.
- Negative outcomes of disclosure include discrimination, stereotyping and disadvantages in recruitment.
- Positive outcomes include improved mental health and wellbeing, acceptance and support from others and workplace adjustments.
- Taking a more proactive approach on diversity by training employees and employers should strive to create more inclusive workplaces where autistic employees are supported in making the personal choice to disclose.
- The research is limited due to its small sample size who were predominantly White, meaning the study did not represent the entire population.
- The first UK-based study to explore the factors associated with decisions to disclose a diagnosis and can benefit individuals and entire organisations.