

# WORKTOPIA EXCHANGE

Exchanging **knowledge**

Exchanging **learnings**

Exchanging **ideas**

TIDBIT #6  
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## THE BIGGER PICTURE MENTAL HEALTH AND OTHER FOUNDATIONAL FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE WORK READINESS

### WHAT WE KNOW

Worktopia aims to learn more about Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and employment. Job preferences and work skills focus on employment, but they are only part of a larger picture related to job readiness. Other foundational factors like mental health, well-being and self-esteem are also important, and are essential for workplace success.

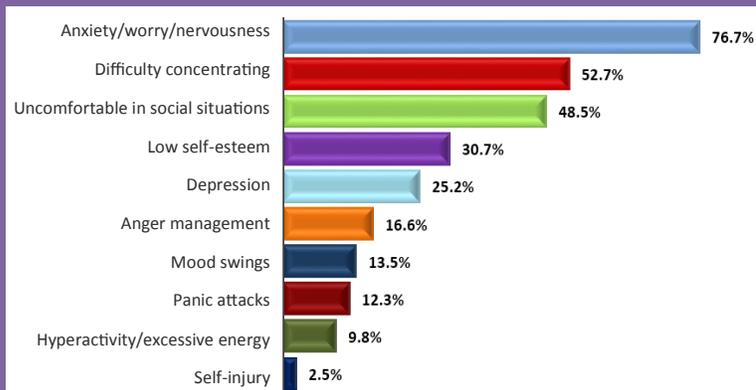
Mental health is a significant concern in Canada with approximately 20% of us experiencing a mental illness or addiction in a given year; 50% in our lifetime<sup>1</sup>. For adults with ASD, rates of mental health issues are even higher<sup>2</sup>.

### WHAT WE ARE LEARNING

On the Worktopia application form, participants were asked about their potential experience related to 10 mental health concerns. Figure 1 below lists the specific mental health concerns probed, and illustrates the percentage of participants who endorsed each item.

FIGURE 1

#### Potential Experience with Mental Health Concerns



Based on Worktopia data collected from the EmploymentWorks Canada program.

**44%**  
Endorsed 3+  
mental health  
concerns

Of the 163 participants who completed the program, 72 individuals endorsed 3 or more mental health concerns and their scores were significantly lower on measures of self-esteem and well-being compared to those who endorsed less than 3 items.

<sup>1</sup> <http://evidencenetwork.ca/mental-health>

<sup>2</sup> Lake, J., Perry, A. & Lunskey, Y. (2014, September 3). Mental health issues for individuals with high functioning autism spectrum disorder. Retrieved from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/25276425>

While participants in Worktopia showed significant positive changes in self-esteem, mental health and well-being, the degree of change was actually larger for those with 3 or more mental health concerns, compared to those with fewer. The groups did NOT differ in age, gender ratio, proficiency on daily living skills and understanding of single word vocabulary.

### FEEDBACK FROM PARTICIPANTS AND PARENTS

Survey and qualitative data collected from the participants and their parents at the end of the program support findings related to growth in participants confidence and self-esteem.



We are learning that participating in the program, irrespective of mental health concerns, positively influences important foundational factors and pre-employment skills.

### IDEA EXCHANGE

We remain interested in what happens to participants' mental health, well-being and self-esteem when the program concludes.

#### What we want to continue to learn:

- To what extent do participants access community supports, particularly those related to mental health and well-being?
- What ongoing or other resources would be helpful?
- Do participants stay connected?
- Is momentum on the employment pathway maintained or advanced with better mental health?

▶ If you are interested in sharing more about your post program experiences, please call 1.888.733.7976 or e-mail [info@worktopia.ca](mailto:info@worktopia.ca).

**Working together to develop evidence informed practice for improved outcomes related to employment.**

