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Understanding and Enhancing the Job Interview Experience for Autistic Adults through Mixed-Method Co-Design and Extended Reality Simulations

Background:

Autistic adults face significant challenges in securing employment, largely due to traditional job interview processes that fail to accommodate their unique needs. Many hiring practices prioritize neurotypical communication and social interaction styles, creating barriers that contribute to lower employment rates, heightened anxiety, and poor mental health outcomes for autistic individuals. While job coaching and virtual training programs exist, there is a lack of accessible, evidence-based, and personalized tools tailored to support autistic job seekers.

This study uses a mixed-method, participatory action research approach to co-design and evaluate an Extended Reality Job Interview Training (XR-JIT) program. In the first phase, autistic adults and human resource professionals will participate in mock interviews, focus groups, and co-design sessions to identify key challenges and develop recommendations for inclusive hiring practices. In the second phase, these insights will inform the development and pilot testing of XR-JIT, an immersive, interactive training tool designed to enhance interview success and reduce anxiety.

This project, centered on patient-oriented research (POR) principles, ensures that the perspectives and lived experiences of autistic job seekers shape its development. Anticipated outcomes include practical guidelines for inclusive hiring, an innovative XR-based training tool, and improved employment accessibility for neurodivergent individuals. The findings will inform vocational rehabilitation, employer education, and policy development, fostering a more equitable and supportive hiring environment.

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Bio

Pariya Parchini is a Ph.D. in Rehabilitation Science from the University of Alberta, specializing in neurodiversity-inclusive rehabilitation, assistive technology, and patient-oriented research. With a background in occupational therapy and cognitive rehabilitation science, she has extensive experience working with autistic individuals, their families, and community organizations in clinical and research settings. Her research integrates qualitative and quantitative methodologies, participatory action research, and extended reality (XR) applications to address employment barriers for neurodivergent populations. Guided by principles of equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI), her work ensures that research outcomes are practical, accessible, and directly beneficial to autistic individuals. Pariya is committed to translating research into practice to improve employment outcomes for neurodivergent individuals. Her work fosters inclusive hiring practices through interdisciplinary collaboration and patient engagement and promotes greater accessibility in workplace environments.