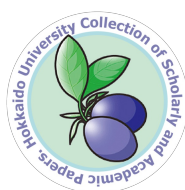




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Mini Review

Risk Factors for Autistic Burnout:

A Literature Review of Over-adaptation and Other Related Psychological Constructs

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ABSTRACT

Over-adaptation, characterized by excessive conformity to environmental demands at the expense of internal needs, is associated with psychological stress and maladjustment. In Japan, it is identified as a risk factor for mental health issues in autistic workers, who often engage in significant effort to adapt despite challenges in interpersonal interactions and social communication. This tendency can lead to mental health problems and diminished quality of life. Recent studies focused on the similarity between the outcomes of over-adaptation and autistic burnout, which manifests as exhaustion, skill loss, and heightened sensory sensitivity. Japanese research literature posits that over-adaptation may contribute to autistic burnout in workplace. However, there is limited English-language research on this connection, possibly reflecting cultural and societal disparities in terminology used to express the conditions of over-adaptation. This review examines Japanese research literature on over-adaptation among autistic workers, compares it to related constructs such as perfectionism, camouflaging, and adaptive morphing in English-language research, and investigates the underlying factors and mechanisms. By conducting this comparative analysis, this article seeks to enhance understanding and provide insights into mitigating the impact of over-adaptation and other related constructs contributing to autistic burnout, ultimately aiming to improve the quality of life for autistic workers.

Key Words : autistic burnout, over-adaptation, camouflaging, adaptive morphing, autistic workers

INTRODUCTION

Over-adaptation, defined as excessive conformity to environmental demands at the expense of suppressing internal needs, often leads to psychological stress and maladjustment (Hirokawa, 2021; Ishizu, 2006). In Japan, it has been identified as

a risk factor for mental health challenges among autistic workers (Chida, 2015; Shiga, 2015; Sugiyama & Takahashi, 1994). Recent literature has also indicated that individuals with autistic traits are especially prone to over-adaptation, frequently exerting excessive effort to adapt to environmental demands despite difficulties in interpersonal inter-

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actions and social communication (Chida & Okada, 2021; Honda, 2018; Sugiyama & Takahashi, 1994; Yokota et al., 2011). Consequently, mental health issues resulting from over-adaptation significantly affect the quality of life for autistic individuals (Yokota et al., 2018).

Recent literature on autistic burnout reveals parallels with the outcomes of over-adaptation (Chida, 2015; Chida et al., 2025). According to Raymaker et al. (2020), autistic burnout is characterized by a combination of exhaustion, skill loss or regression, and heightened sensory sensitivity or intensification of autistic traits. Japanese research literature suggests that over-adaptation may contribute to autistic burnout, particularly among autistic workers (Chida et al., 2021; Keating et al., 2024). These shared characteristics underscore the likelihood that autistic burnout is a direct consequence of over-adaptation in autistic workers.

Despite the significant role of over-adaptation in the mental health of autistic workers, there has been not much English research literature addressing this topic. This discrepancy may reflect cultural and societal differences in the terminology used to express the conditions of over-adaptation in Japanese and English research literature (Chida & Okada, 2021; Chida et al., 2021; Keating et al., 2024). To address this gap and foster a deeper understanding, this article aims to: (1) review Japanese research literature on over-adaptation in autistic workers; (2) compare it with related constructs such as perfectionism (Turner, 2024), camouflaging (Hull et al., 2017; Lawson, 2020), and adaptive morphing (Lawson, 2020) from English research; and (3) explore the factors and mechanisms of over-adaptation and related constructs contributing to autistic burnout in autistic workers. Through this comparative analysis, the article seeks to enhance understanding and provide practical insights to mitigate the impact of these factors, ultimately

improving the quality of life for autistic workers.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Articles and materials were collected for this study via Google Scholar, J-STAGE, CiNii Research and ResearchGate, using a narrative literature review approach. The articles reviewed were published between 2012 and June 1, 2024. During the search process, the following key words were used: *autism* or 自閉症, *over-adaptation* or 過剰適応, and *employment* or 就労. Out of the 78 articles (74 in Japanese and four in English), 15 articles were selected based on their relevance to the research topic. Some references within the reviewed articles were also examined for additional insights.

Furthermore, to compare related constructs in English-language research literature, additional searches were conducted using keywords such as “perfectionism,” “alexithymia,” “boundaries,” “autistic traits,” “autistic burnout,” “camouflaging,” “passing,” and “adaptive morphing” via Google Scholar and ResearchGate. As a result, 15 articles related to the over-adaptation of autistic workers were selected for review.

This study aimed to clarify the relationship between autistic burnout, over-adaptation, and related constructs. To achieve this, the terms ‘background factors’, ‘risk factors’, ‘preconditions’, ‘harmful facilitators’, ‘preventive factors’, and ‘response strategies’ were explored together with the term ‘autistic burnout’ through a literature search. The obtained data were then systematically tabulated, analyzed, and summarized in a conceptual diagram.

RESULTS

As shown in Table 1, out of 15 journal articles and materials, three significant themes were iden-

tified: definition, research topics, and case studies emerged in relation to over-adaptation in autistic workers in Japan. In addition, a further three major research topics were identified from the literature (see Table 1): (1) work-related over-adaptation (Chida, 2015), (2) over-adaptation due to life events and transitions, prevention and treatment

(Yokota et al., 2018), and (3) background factors of over-adaptation (Honda, 2018). The literature review on over-adaptation in autistic workers in Japan revealed a paucity of descriptions concerning the mechanisms of how work-related over-adaptation occurs and its impacts.

Table 1 Research topics associated with over-adaptation in autistic workers in Japan

Themes	Contents
Definition	<i>Definition used to explain the conditions of over-adaptation in autistic individuals</i> (Ishizu, 2006; Hirokawa, 2021)
Research topics	<i>-work-related over-adaptation</i> (Chida, 2015) <i>-over-adaptation due to life events and transitions</i> (Yokota et al., 2018) <i>-autistic traits as background factors of over-adaptation</i> (Honda, 2018)
Case study	<i>-work-related over-adaptation</i> (Sugiyama & Takahashi, 1994) <i>-camouflaging</i> (Hachiya, 2020) <i>-life events and transitions</i> (Yokota et al., 2011) <i>-interpersonal relationship</i> (Honda, 2018)

Conversely, the English-language research literature review on constructs related to over-adaptation and autistic burnout revealed coping strategies that autistic workers may choose, with tremendous effort and cost to their mental health (see Table 2). Autistic people may use these strategies to reduce and avoid stressful situations, successfully navigate social expectations, and enhance their

overall well-being (Hull et al., 2017; Livingston & Happé, 2017). In summary, these constructs such as adaptive morphing, passing, camouflaging, masking, compensation, and disability management share many aspects with the notion of over-adaptation. These terms are used to describe similar conditions and experiences for over-adaptation in autistic workers in Japan.

Table 2 Related constructs and definitions as coping strategies in response to stressors frequently experienced by autistic people

Constructs	Definition and Explanation
fatigue management and stress management	-includes load reduction such as designated time off/breaks, withdrawing from social activities, and cancelling activities (Raymaker et al., 2020). -includes maintaining good health, such as exercises and activities that promote tension relief (Raymaker et al., 2020).
adaptive morphing (Lawson, 2020)	-is a natural response, not of deceit, but one that is biological for survival and not necessarily consciously chosen. -is a state that attempts to hide them from harm, enabling them to stay and feel safe.
passing (Goffman, 1986, Lawson, 2020; Petrolini et al., 2023)	-is the management of undisclosed intimate information about oneself to avoid disadvantage. -Autistic camouflaging can be conceptualized as a form of passing as non-autistic people. -is connected to the notion of autism related stigma.
camouflaging (Hull et al., 2017; Lawson, 2020; Petrolini et al., 2023)	-describes the actions of autistic individuals who, in trying to fit in with social situations, such as in families, schools, and workplaces, maybe obscuring their true selves. -is a strategy that involves masking autistic traits and compensating in social situations.
masking (Lawson, 2020; Petrolini et al., 2023)	-appears to be used more commonly among the autistic community. -infers an intention and ability to deliberately hide the difficulties of autistic people in social situations.
Compensation (Livingston & Happé, 2017)	-refers to the processes of improved behavior in autistic people, despite underlying disabilities. -Shallow compensation is applied “to navigate the social world superficially (p.735)”. -Deep compensation, which allows for relatively flexible social understanding, might not necessarily lead to mental health problems.
Disability management (Raymaker et al., 2020)	-refers to the strategies that autistic people use to compensate for their challenges in non-accommodating environments.
over-adaptation (Ishizu, 2006)	-is an attempt to conform as much as possible to the demands and expectations of the environment, even if it means suppressing internal needs to an unreasonable degree.

The English-language research literature review on autistic burnout and related constructs also revealed various constructs and four themes were identified: background factors, coping strategies,

environmental factors, and autistic burnout as outcome. The findings were then systematically tabulated for the purpose of future research implication (see Table 3).

Table 3 References to over-adaptation and related constructs and themes in the English research literature

Constructs	Definition and Explanation
Background factors	personal traits: <i>perfectionism</i> (Turner, 2024), <i>alexithymia</i> (Higgins et al., 2021; Mantzalas et al., 2021) autistic traits: <i>cognitive rigidity, sensory sensitivity</i> (English et al., 2021), <i>boundary-related difficulties</i> (Raymaker et al., 2020)
Coping strategies	adaptive morphing (Lawson, 2020); passing (Goffman, 1986; Lawson, 2020; Petrolini et al., 2023), camouflaging, masking (Hull et al., 2017; Lawson, 2020; Petrolini et al., 2023), compensation (Livingston & Happé, 2017); disability management (Raymaker et al., 2020); over-adaptation (Hongo et al., 2024; Keating et al., 2024); fatigue management and stress management (Raymaker et al., 2020)
Outcome	autistic burnout (Arnold et al., 2023; Higgins et al., 2021; Mantzalas et al., 2021; Mantzalas et al., 2022; Mantzalas et al., 2024; Raymaker et al., 2020; Raymaker et al., 2022)
Environmental factors (World Health Organization, 2001)	(1) Mismatches between external demands and abilities in autism - <i>demands exceeding capacity of autistic individuals</i> (Higgins et al., 2021) - <i>mismatch between expectations and abilities</i> (Arnold et al., 2023) <i>Ableism</i> (Arnold et al., 2023), <i>life-change stress</i> (Raymaker et al., 2020); <i>social interaction, cognitive and/or sensory overwhelm and overload, work demands</i> (Higgins et al., 2021); <i>lack of self-advocacy and/or negotiating their own limits with external demands</i> (Raymaker et al., 2020); <i>Unaccommodating environments include community/interpersonal settings, socio-political structures and systems, and workplaces</i> (Arnold et al., 2023)
	(2) Barriers to autism support and inclusion - <i>Lack of autism awareness, accommodation, and/or appropriate support</i> (Mantzalas et al., 2021) - <i>Perspective disconnect; lack of consideration and lack of support</i> (Arnold et al., 2023, p. 1910) - <i>Barriers to support</i> (Raymaker et al., 2020) <i>gaslighting/dismissal</i> (Raymaker et al., 2020); <i>misunderstanding by and of others</i> (Higgins et al., 2021); <i>discrimination and stigma</i> (Lawson, 2020; Mantzalas et al., 2021); Raymaker et al., 2022); <i>lack of understanding regarding trauma-informed approaches and mental health support</i> (Raymaker et al., 2022)

DISCUSSION

Based on the literature review on over-adaptation (see Table 1) and the literature review on coping strategies for autistic people in English-language research literature (see Tables 2 and 3), we conceptualized the pathway leading to autistic burnout. The pathway is illustrated in a conceptual diagram (Figure 1) and consists of four processes: “background factors,” “coping strategies and environmental factors (as both protective and risk factors),” and

autistic burnout as “outcome.” The solid lines represent causal links identified in the literature review, while the dashed lines indicate hypothesized constructs and links based on our clinical observations of autistic workers in Japan. As shown in Figure 1, the findings suggest that the risk of autistic burnout can be mitigated by (1) helping autistic workers identify and adopt more proactive coping strategies and (2) identifying and reducing harmful factors while facilitating beneficial factors to prevent the onset. This framework provides employment support professionals with valuable tool to guide autistic

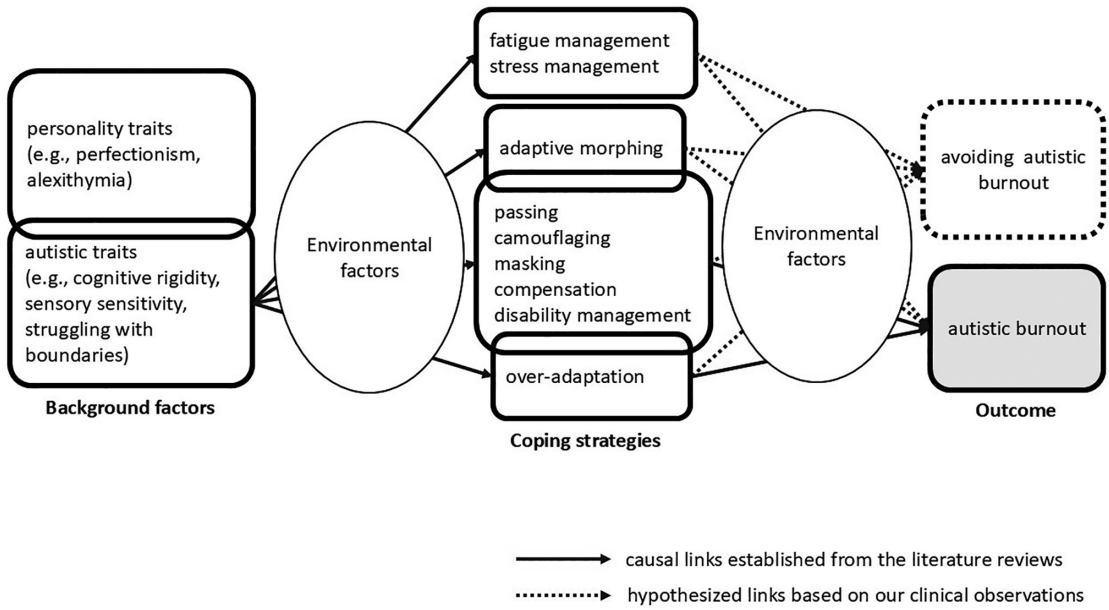


Figure 1 Risk factors and associated constructs for autistic burnout

workers in recognizing risks and understanding their mental health challenges during their counseling and consultation sessions.

Two domains were identified as environmental factors (see Table 3): (1) mismatches between external demands and abilities in autism (Arnold et al., 2023; Higgins et al., 2021; Raymaker et al., 2020), and (2) barriers to autism support and inclusion (Arnold et al., 2023; Higgins et al., 2021; Lawson, 2020; Mantzalas et al., 2021; Raymaker et al., 2020; Raymaker et al., 2022). Additionally, the study identified a lack of autism awareness and support as factors that impede the reduction of the stressors and amplify the stress experienced by autistic people (Raymaker et al., 2020). After thorough consideration of the clinical observations in Japan, it is evident that there are many harmful facilitating factors that were identified as environmental factors in Table 3. Moreover, the study highlighted the occurrence of miscommunication and misunderstand-

ing between autistic and non-autistic individuals, a phenomenon referred to as “perspective disconnect” (Arnold et al., 2023, p. 1910). In order to validate the findings, anecdotal and qualitative research is necessary, particularly exploring the lived experiences of autistic workers who have experienced autistic burnout episodes in Japan. Furthermore, conducting longitudinal and quantitative research in Japan is crucial. Such research, by applying a scale to assess autistic burnout and related constructs in autistic workers in Japan, is essential.

These environmental factors may provide some insights for coworkers and employers to apply reasonable accommodation for autistic workers. The information on these two domains (see Table 3) can guide employers and coworkers in assessing workloads and work environments, fostering autism-friendly workplaces, and providing appropriate accommodation to autistic workers.

CONCLUSION

This study examined Japanese research literature on over-adaptation among autistic workers and compared it to related constructs such as perfectionism, alexithymia, adaptive morphing, passing, camouflaging, masking, compensation, and disability management in English research literature. The comparative analysis investigated the underlying factors and mechanisms behind these constructs. By conducting this comparative analysis, the study aimed to enhance understanding, to provide insights into mitigating the impact of over-adaptation and other related constructs contributing to autistic burnout, and to ultimately improve the quality of working life for autistic individuals.

The obtained data were systematically tabulated (see Table 2 and Table 3), analyzed, and summarized in the conceptual diagram (see Figure 1). The study identified forms of over-adaptation and related psychological constructs contributing to autistic burnout and developed a conceptual diagram illustrating the pathways leading to autistic burnout, along with protective and risk factors. This conceptual diagram is intended to improve the quality of life for autistic workers and can serve as a framework for understanding autism supports for employers, supporters, autistic individuals themselves, and their families. As employment support professionals, we must strive to provide services that are appropriate and supportive for autistic workers, minimizing stress and intrusiveness. The developed conceptual diagram allows us to evaluate services and workplace supports to ensure they respect autistic workers' identities and do not force them to change who they are. As the scarcity of research on mental health issues in autistic workers in Japan, the further studies in this area are needed. By conducting workplace assessment based on the two domains in environmental factors (see

Table 3), employers and coworkers can gain a better understanding of the mental health challenges faced by autistic workers.

The study also highlighted the occurrence of miscommunication and misunderstanding between autistic and non-autistic workers, a phenomenon referred to as "perspective disconnect" (Arnold et al., 2023, p. 1910). In the workplace, it is crucial to address and understand this gap in perspectives and perceptions, address the issues that arise from this gap, enhance understanding of autism awareness, and make suitable considerations in the workplace. This study was examined based on a literature review, and the findings are consistent with our clinical experiences, but they are only hypotheses. Further research is necessary to elucidate the mechanisms that result in over-adaptation and autistic burnout, so as to evaluate the effectiveness and applicability of Figure 1. In addition, research should incorporate the lived experiences and narratives of individuals who have experienced autistic burnout, as these personal experiences can offer valuable insights for reducing miscommunication and misunderstanding between autistic and non-autistic workers.

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Autistic Burnout のリスク要因についての文献研究

— 過剰適応とその関連概念に着目して —

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要 旨

過剰適応とは、内的適応を犠牲にして環境要求に過度に従う現象であり、強い心理的ストレスを引き起こす要因とされる。わが国では自閉症の就労者におけるメンタルヘルス問題のリスク要因として以前から知られている。職場適応の過程で、本人の限度を超えた多大な努力を強いられることで、重篤な精神的問題につながる可能性がある。近年わが国の研究では、過剰適応の結果と autistic burnout の類似性が注目されている。一方、英語圏では過剰適応の概念は取り上げられることはなく、社会文化的背景からこれ以外の類似概念が使われている可能性が高い。本稿では、過剰適応と英語圏の関連概念（完璧主義、カモフラージュ、適応モーフィングなど）を比較し、autistic burnout に至るリスク要因を探った。また、「視点の断絶」と呼ばれる現象も浮き彫りにすることで、就労支援における支援者の理解や配慮のあり方について議論した。

キーワード：ASD特有のバーンアウト、過剰適応、カモフラージュ、適応モーフィング、ASDの就労者