

Community Participation and Executive Functioning in Autistic Young Adults



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BACKGROUND

Autistic Young Adults (AYAs)

- The transition into young adulthood is a crucial, but challenging period for autistic individuals
- Autistic adults have lower community participation rates than non-autistic adults^{1,2}

Gaps in Literature

- Little is known about the full range of community participation in AYAs² and the contributing factors such as executive functioning
- A few studies have explored the relationship between executive functioning and community participation in autistic youth, but not in adulthood³

OBJECTIVES

- Describe community participation in AYAs
- Examine the association between executive function and community participation in AYAs

METHODS

- Autistic young adults without intellectual disabilities (ID) (ages 18-29; N=35)
- Recruited from a prior study and an autism agency website
- Screened with the Social Communication Questionnaire⁴ or the Social Responsiveness Scale-2 Adult Self-Report⁵.

Table 1. Demographics

Baseline Characteristics	Mean (SD) or n (%)
Age, years	22.49 (2.77)
Race*	
Asian	4 (11.8%)
White	25 (73.5%)
2+ Races	5 (14.7%)
Female	17 (48.6%)
Co-Occurring Conditions	
Anxiety Disorder	9 (25.7%)
ADD/ADHD	11 (31.4%)
Bipolar	3 (25.7%)
Depression	6 (17.1%)

*one participant did not respond

Temple University Community Participation (TUCP)⁶

- Measures importance and participation of community activities in the past month
- Self-reported questionnaire
- 28 items across productivity, social, and recreation

Participation

- Participants engaged in the activity once in the past month

Importance

- Activity rated as important or not

Breadth

- The extent to which individuals participated in important activities

Sufficiency

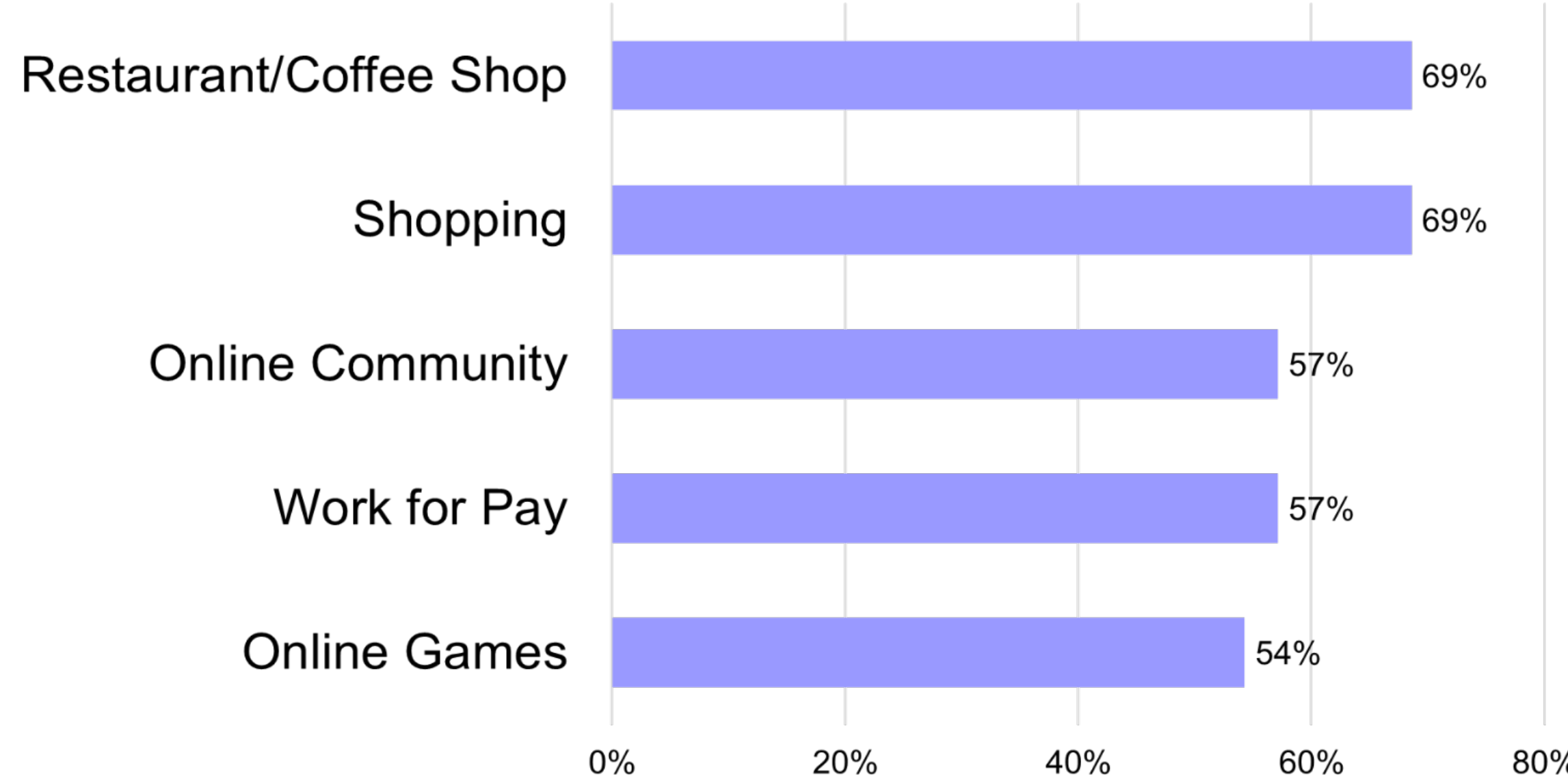
- The extent to which individuals felt satisfied with their participation in important activities

Behavior Rating Inventory of Executive Function (BRIEF-A)⁷

- Measures executive functioning skills in the everyday environment
- Self-reported or informant-reported questionnaire
- 75 items, 9 sub-scales
- Global Executive Composite (GEC)**
 - All subscales of BRIEF
- Behavioral Regulation Index (BRI)**
 - Inhibit, shift, emotional control, self-monitor
- Metacognition Index (MI)**
 - Initiate, working memory, plan/organize, task monitor, organization of materials

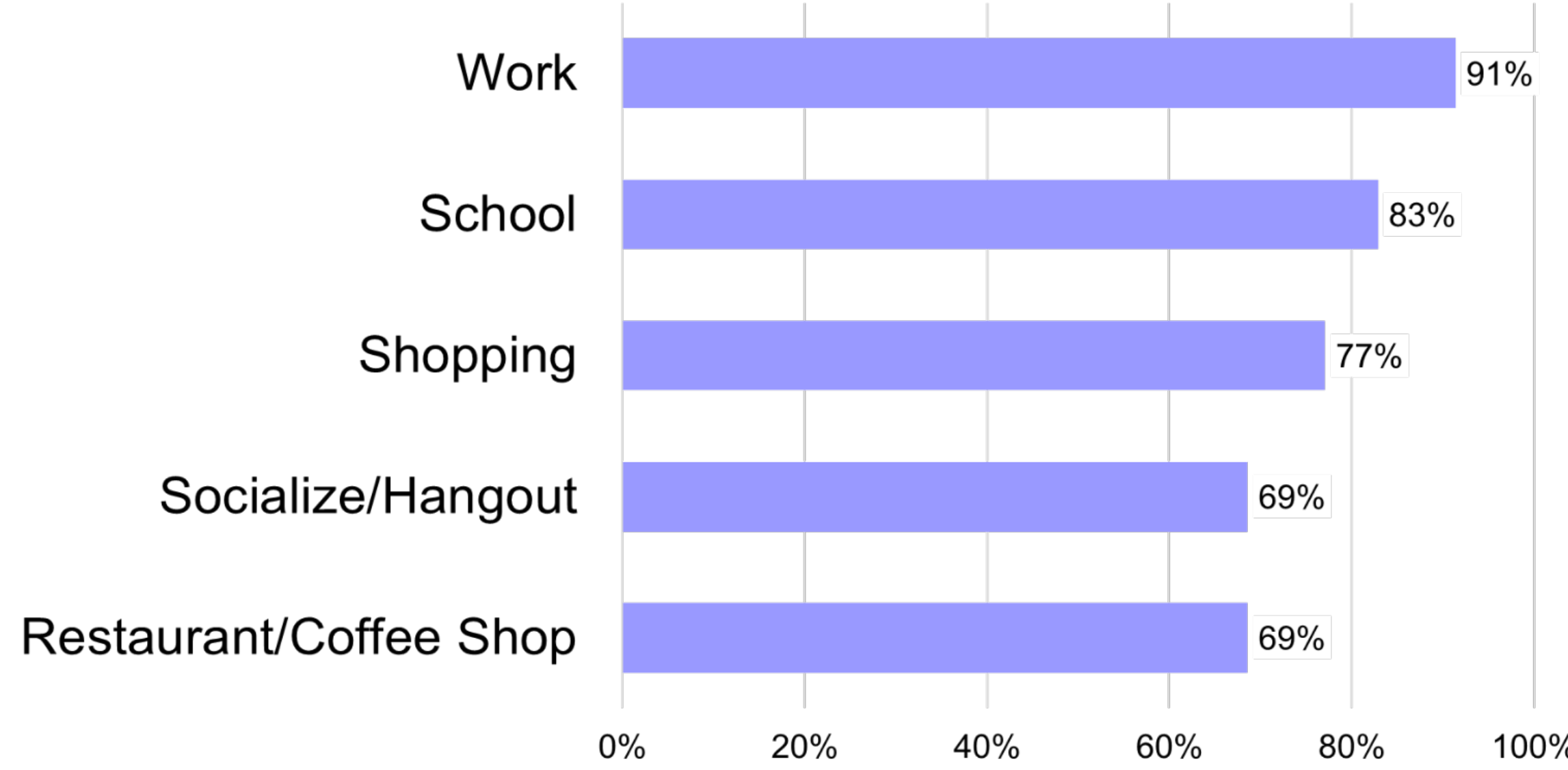
RESULTS (Objective 1)

Figure 1. Top 5 Participated Activities



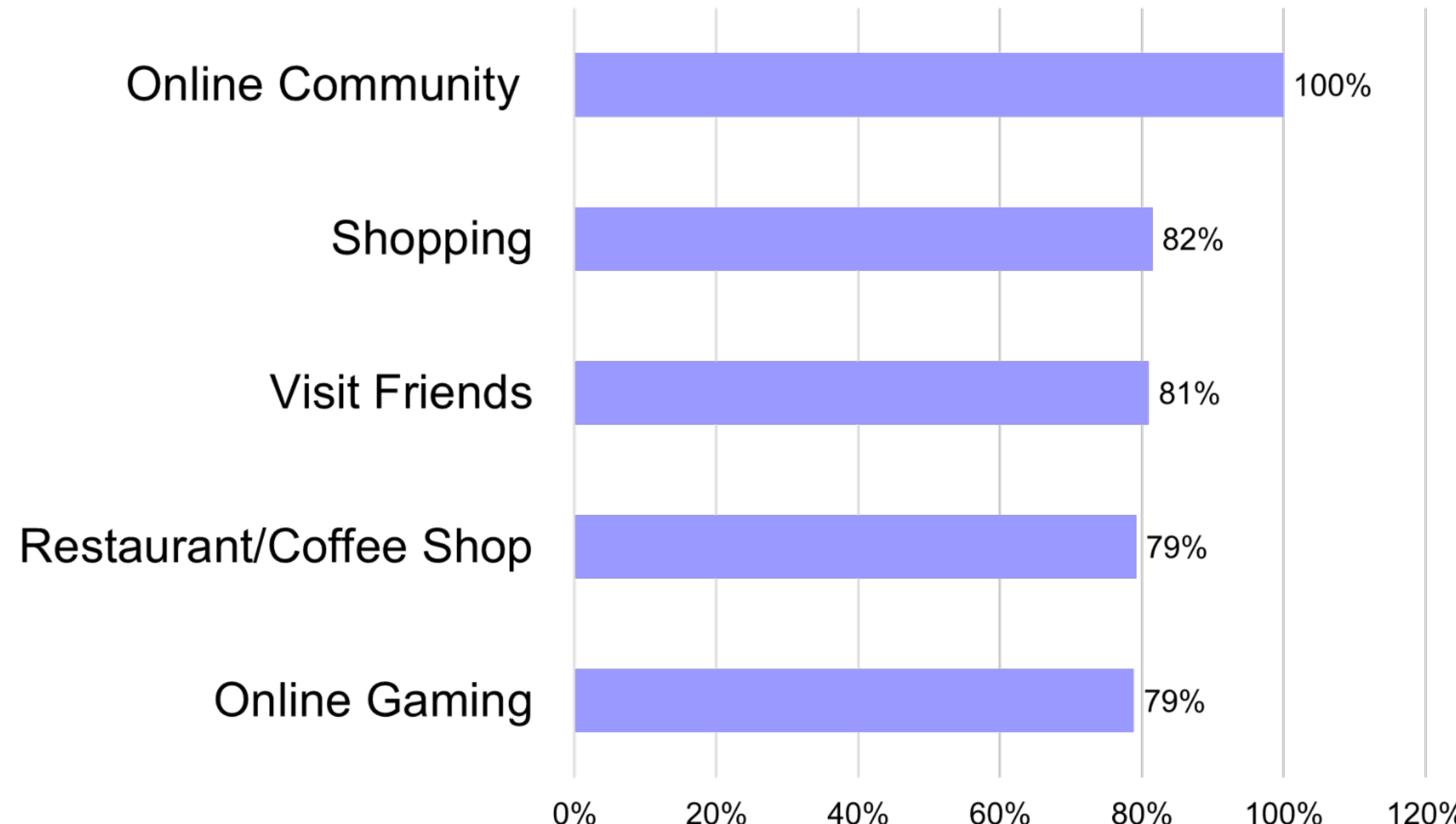
- About 70% of adults participated in going to a restaurant and shopping in the past month
- The five least participated activities were going to the theater (11%), engaging in organized sports (9%), watching sports events (9%), zoo (9%), and civic duties (3%)

Figure 2. Top 5 Important Activities



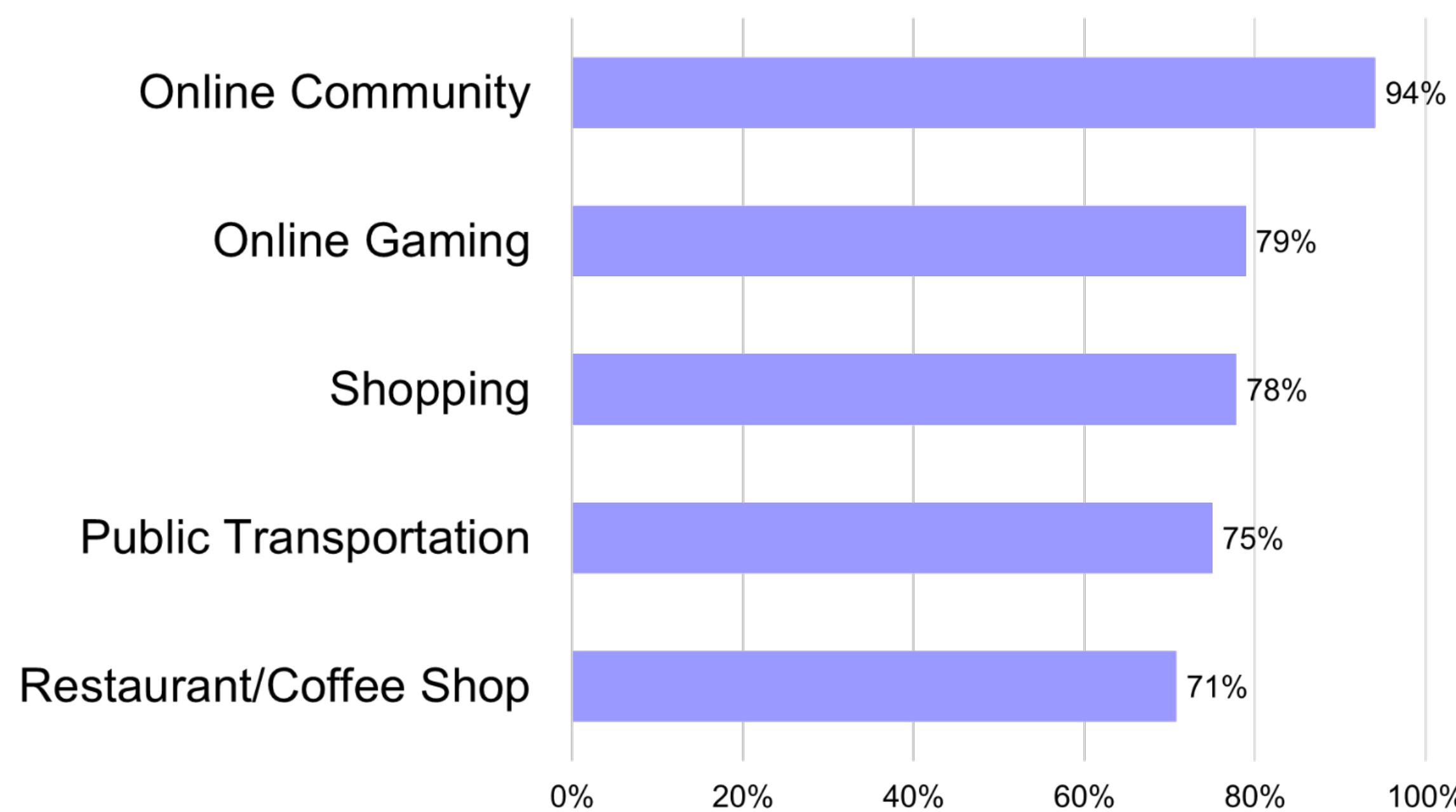
- Going to work and school were activities commonly considered important by AYAs.
- The five activities least considered important are beauty spa/salon (34%), community activity (26%), movie theater (26%), place of worship (23%), and watching a sports event (20%)

Figure 3. Breadth



- Many AYAs considered the five activities above to be ones they participated in and were important
- The five activities with the least breadth of participation are leisure/life-skills classes (24%), theater (21%), organized sports (20%), zoo (18%), and civic duties (8%)

Figure 4. Sufficiency



- Many AYAs considered these activities important and felt that they participated enough
- The five activities individuals felt that they did not sufficiently participate in are library (29%), watching sports events (29%), engaging in organized sports (27%), gym (26%), and leisure/life-skills classes (14%)

RESULTS (Objective 2)

Table 2. Pearson's Correlation Analysis Between BRIEF-A and TUCP

	Participation	Importance	Breadth	Sufficiency
Behavioral Regulation Index (BRI)	-0.299	-0.035	-.337*	-0.278
Metacognition Index (MI)	-0.304	-0.081	-0.323	-0.313
Global Executive Composite (GEC)	-0.33	-0.07	-.356*	-0.329

*correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

- Table 2 shows the significant negative correlations between TUCP breadth ratio and BRI ($r = -0.337$) and GEC ($r = -0.356$) grouping scales of BRIEF
- AYAs who reported lower breadth in TUCP showed higher executive function challenges
- AYAs with executive function difficulties participated less in their important activities

CONCLUSIONS

- Results showed discrepancies between the perceived importance and participation in specific activities (e.g., work, school, leisure/sport activities): many AYAs did not participate in activities they considered important and/or did not participate "enough" in activities considered important
- Negative correlation between participation breadth and BRI was consistent with the previous findings in school-aged autistic individuals³
- Findings emphasize support needs for AYA's community participation and suggest the importance of executive functioning in their participation

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