

## understand disclosure experiences, influencers, and needs among autistic youth and young adults

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### Background

- Deciding whether to disclose being autistic or one's autism-related needs at work is mentally taxing and involves calculated considerations.<sup>1</sup>
- Canadian autistic youth and young adults are understudied regarding how they navigate disclosure and what they need to support disclosure decisions, as well, the potential role of gender on disclosure.

### Objectives

To explore and understand the workplace disclosure experiences, influencers, and needs among Canadian autistic youth and young adults and compare across genders.

### Methods

#### Data Collection

- Generic qualitative design with six online focus groups (two-to-five participants per group), using Zoom web-conferencing software.
- Used the COM-B (Capability, Opportunity, Motivation, Behaviour) Model<sup>2</sup> to guide focus group questions.

#### Participants

- Eligibility Criteria:** Aged 15-29, had autism diagnosis, paid employment experience, no comorbid visible disabilities, lived in Canada, and spoke English fluently.

#### Sample (n = 23):

Mean age = 22.8 years

13 men, 8 women, 1 transman, 1 transwoman

10 employed part-time, 2 full-time, 11 unemployed

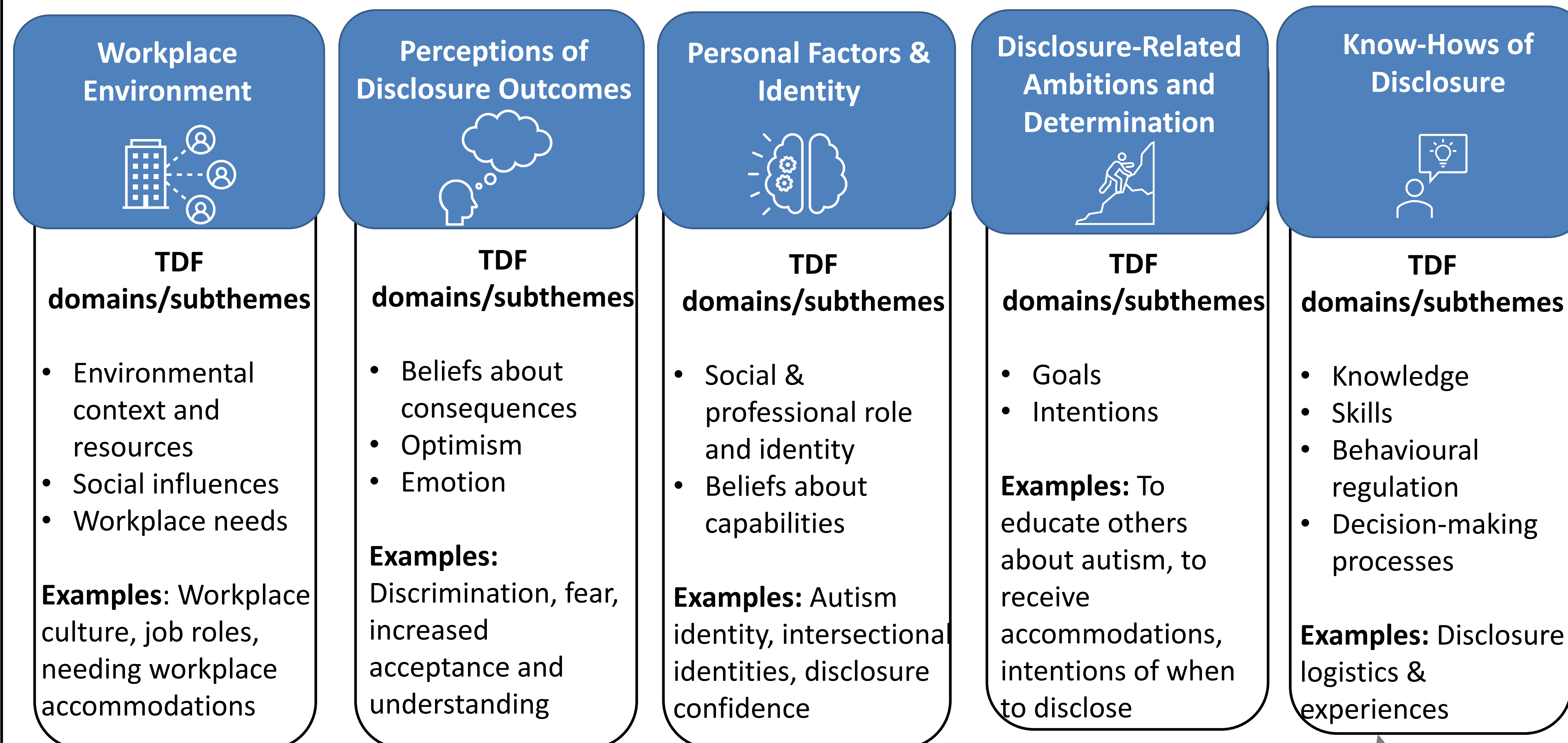
#### Analysis

- Deductive thematic analysis, on NVivo 12, using the Theoretical Domains Framework.<sup>3</sup>

### Results

- Participants discussed the role of, and disclosure needs around concepts from 13 of 14 TDF domains, organized into five themes.
- The TDF domain of environmental context and resources was discussed the most and optimism was discussed the least.

#### Disclosure influencers, needs, and experiences related to the theoretical domains framework



"The company I work for has a great set of values, is constantly recognized as a top employer in X, Y, and Z, and has a group specifically for employees who are disabled."

"I would worry about being fired or having my shifts reduced."

"It's almost easier to disclose the fact that I'm gay...then to say hey, I'm autistic."

"Being an advocate or trying to start that conversation in your organization is a worthwhile reason to disclose."

"This is interesting because I didn't really consider that these were options before, a lot of these times to disclose."

#### Gender Differences

**Disclosure frequency:** More women in our study discussed their preference to choose non-disclosure or disclose informally rather than disclose formally, compared to men.

**Identities:** Women spoke more to whether autism was part of their identity, confusions around their autistic identity, and a later autism diagnosis. Transgender participants spoke to greater comfort disclosing being transgender than autistic.

**Disclosure goals:** Disclosure goals for men centralized around workplace accommodations, whereas women spoke more to increasing autism understanding.

### Discussion

- Results provide newfound understandings into the vast, highly individualized disclosure needs of autistic youth and young adult.
- This work can inform future research, practice, and development of tools, supports, and interventions to support autistic youth and young adult clients.

#### Limitations

- Participants self-disclosed their autism.
- Excluded those who did not have access to technological devices and/or internet and did not speak English.
- Only 23 participants and in Canada – broader applicability should be approached with care.

#### Future Directions

- Explore, in greater depth, the role of gender and other intersectional identities on disclosure decisions.
- Develop tools/supports (e.g., decision-aid) for autistic youth and young adults with components informed by behaviour-change strategy categories, which link to the TDF domains.
- Targeting employer level factors via industry-specific training to increase autism knowledge and create inclusive environments that foster disclosure conversations.
- Disseminate findings across professionals who support autistic youth and young adult clients.

#### References

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