

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Civilian

Service Delivery Outcomes in ASD: Role of Parent Education, Empowerment, and Professional Partnership

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SUMMARY: Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) have significant and complex service needs that often go unmet. This study seeks to understand service disparities in this population by investigating the relationship between socioeconomic status (as measured by parent education), parent empowerment (sense of control gained by parent's ability to successfully utilize skills, knowledge, and resources) and quality of parent-professional (service provider) relationship. Findings show a positive relationship between education and number and satisfaction of services received.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Parents in the study indicated that they received less than 50% of the family and child services available to them.
- Parents with higher education reported higher numbers of services, higher satisfaction with services, and higher service adequacy (ratio of total number of services received over number of services needed).
- Parents with higher education reported having higher quality partnerships with their service providers, which explained their high ratings of service adequacy.
- Parents with higher levels of empowerment had the lowest ratings on service adequacy even when compared to parents with low quality partnerships and low levels of empowerment.

IMPLICATIONS FOR MILITARY PROFESSIONALS:

Military professionals could:

- Attend trainings to improve understanding of the impact and stressors ASD places on a family
- Collaborate with local community organizations to increase access to family and child services for military families with a child who has ASD

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Facilitate training sessions on improving parent-professional relationships in the ASD community for Service members with a child that has ASD
- Develop support groups for Service members with a child that has ASD to encourage resource sharing among peers

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Promote the development of a resource sharing network for military families that have a child with ASD
- Recommend the revision of health policies to include support for attaining access to ASD services for military families

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METHODS

- Participants were recruited through online postings on various platforms including newsletters and listservs, flyers that were distributed to local schools and parent events, and partnerships with local advocacy agencies.
- Data were collected through a digital survey using qualtrics. Parents were also given the option to request physical copies of the surveys.
- Parents were asked to identify their highest level of attained education in the survey. Their responses were used as a measure of their socioeconomic status.

PARTICIPANTS

- Participants were 249 parents with a child with ASD between 3 years to 20 years old.
- Parents in this study were primarily mothers (76%) and White (83%). Most were either divorced (40%) or married (33%) and had either a four-year college degree (49%) or some college (31%).
- Majority of the children in this sample had been diagnosed with ASD (68%) or autistic disorder (23%).
- The severity of symptoms for majority of the children was rated as mild (45%) or moderate to severe (43.4%).

LIMITATIONS

- Majority of the sample participants in the study were White and had high levels of educational attainment (some college). This limits the ability to generalize the findings to diverse populations.
- Measures in this study utilized self-reports from participants, which limits the study as these self-reports measured participants' perception of the quality of services rather than the actual quality of service.
- Participants' rating of the quality of partnership with service provider did not distinguish between the different types of service providers. Therefore, it is difficult to identify whether specific types of service providers promote higher or lower quality partnerships.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Expand the study to include ethnically diverse families with different levels of educational attainment
- Refine the study to explore the relationship between specific types of services and parent-service provider relationship
- Gather additional data on the relationship between empowerment and service adequacy

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