Introduction

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a developmental condition that occurs in all racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups and can cause significant social, communication, and behavioral challenges.

1 in 44 American 8-year-olds have a diagnosis of ASD, a 23% increase from just two years ago. Although rates of ASD have steadily increased, the average age of diagnosis has not changed in the past two decades.

There is ample evidence that early intervention can make a significant positive impact on development and outcomes for children with ASD, however, an official diagnosis is often required to gain access to intervention services.

While most children can be reliably diagnosed by age 2, the average age of diagnosis remains above 4 years old and is even higher for children from lower-income, ethnic-racial minority, and rural backgrounds.

With the majority of our nation's children under 5 years old enrolled in a weekly nonparental care arrangement, early childhood centers have the potential to play a vital role in supporting early identification and intervention efforts for ASD at a systems level.

Method

Surveys
1. Autism Knowledge, Beliefs, and Self-Efficacy Questionnaire
   - 83 item measure
   - 4 parts
   - Knowledge and Beliefs
   - Early Signs
   - Autism Features
   - Self-efficacy
   - Mix of Likert-scale, matching, and free response questions
   - ~20 minutes to complete online

2. Demographics and Background Information Questionnaire

Recruitment
- “Snowball” sampling
- Social media
- Email outreach

Early Childhood Educators Needed for Survey Research

Preliminary Results

Results are limited as this research is currently in the data collection phase.

Recruitment Data
- 42 participants consented
- 28 completed survey
- 7 responses are “in progress”

Preliminary Survey Results
- Knowledge and Beliefs
  - Mean = 119.2, SD = 11.48
  - Max = 157
- Early Autism Signs
  - Mean = 33.8, SD = 5.21
  - Max = 40

Participant Metrics (n=28)
- 100% women
- 0 participants under age 26
- 86% have a student with special needs in their class
- 68% have referred a student for developmental testing
- Self-Efficacy
  - Mean = 35.9, SD = 2.73
  - Max = 42
- 10% “No Knowledge” response rate
- Most endorsed response on efficacy survey

Purpose

Goals
- Assess early childhood educators' knowledge about early signs and symptoms of ASD
- Assess early childhood educators' self-efficacy in addressing concerns related to child development with caregivers
- Explore relationships between
  - ASD knowledge
  - Self-efficacy
  - Demographic factors
  - Professional experience

Discussion

Preliminary analysis reveals this group of early childhood educators have
- Variable ASD knowledge (SD = 11.48; SD = 5.21)
- Similar levels of self-efficacy (SD = 2.73)

Participant level analyses will be run to explore relationships between demographic factors and professional experience on ASD knowledge and self-efficacy.

Although 64% of participants endorsed completing special training or educational courses related to developmental conditions/delays...
- 89% expressed interest in professional development on this topic AND
- 62% strongly agreed that they could benefit from additional training in this area

This demonstrates there is both a need and a desire for further training and support for early childhood educators on topics related to developmental conditions.

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Academic References


