

research snapshot

summarize | mobilize



Use Of Early Intervention For Young Children With ASD Across Europe

What is this research about?

Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) require early and intensive interventions. The most common interventions are speech and language therapy and behavioural therapies. The researchers examined whether the amount and type of intervention received, differed according to where the children with ASD lived. They also investigated the relationship between the child's age, gender, verbal ability, time since diagnosis, and the intervention use, and if use was related to their parent's education level.

What did the researchers do?

This study recruited 1,680 parents of children with ASD, up to 7 years of age, in 18 European countries, divided into four regions: Northern, Eastern, Southern, and Western Europe. The parents completed a survey that asked them about the type and number of hours of intervention their child received weekly. They grouped the types of interventions into two categories:

- 1) speech and language therapy, and
- 2) behavioural, developmental, and relationship-based interventions.

They also collected information on the parents' education level, how long ago their child had received an ASD diagnosis, and the child's verbal ability.

What you need to know:

Early interventions are crucial and children tend to only begin receiving interventions a year after being diagnosed. Factors that make it less likely for families to access early interventions for children with ASD include low parental education level and a delayed diagnosis, highlighting the need for early diagnosis and parent supports in navigating services so that early interventions are equally accessible to all.

What did the researcher find?

Almost 1 in 10 children were not receiving any interventions. Children in Northern Europe received less interventions than children in the other regions, and children in Southern Europe received the highest amount. Children of parents with a lower education level (i.e. high school or less) were 1.8 times less likely to receive interventions, especially behavioural, developmental, and relationship-based ones, than children of parents with more education. In addition, children who had been diagnosed less than a year prior to survey completion were 2.3 times less likely to be receiving interventions than those who had been diagnosed over a year prior to the survey.

The most common intervention type was speech and language therapy. For behavioural, developmental, and relationship-based interventions, children of parents with a high school level education or less were 1.5 times less likely to receive those services. Those types of interventions were also more

commonly used by children with lower verbal ability and younger children compared to older children or those with higher verbal ability. It is notable that the sample of parents who completed this survey were more educated on average compared to the general population, which suggests that the gap in intervention use would be even wider overall.

How can you use this research?

This research was undertaken in order to inform policy makers who make decisions about funding services and training professionals. Since children of parents with less education received less service, researchers need to further explore if this is due to prohibitive costs or a lack of knowledge about how to access treatments, or other factors. Also, it is crucial that healthcare professionals are trained to provide early diagnoses and treatment of ASD. Parent supports in navigating and accessing services earlier would help reduce the time from diagnosis to treatment that was found.

About the Researchers

This study was funded by the European Science Foundation as part of the Cooperation in Science and Technology (COST) Action 'Enhancing the Scientific Study of Early Autism (ESSEA)' network, led by Erica Salomone of King's College, UK, and included 34 researchers from 23 European countries. More information about the COST-ESSEA network and their research can be found at <http://www.cost-essea.com/>.

Citation

Salomone, E., Beranová, S., Bonnet-Brilhault, F., Briciet Lauritsen, M., Budisteanu, M., Buitelaar, J., et al. (2015) Use of early intervention for young children with autism spectrum disorder across Europe. *Autism*, 20 (2), 233-249.

Keywords

Autism, Early Intervention, Parents, Early Diagnosis

This research summary was written by Mira Goldstein for the Chair in Autism Spectrum Disorders Treatment and Care Research. This research summary, along with other summaries, can be found on our [blog](#) and at asdmentalhealth.ca/research-summaries

About the Chair

The Chair in Autism Spectrum Disorders Treatment and Care Research is dedicated to studying ways to improve the mental health and well-being of people with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) and their families in Canada.

The Chair is funded by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research in partnership with Autism Speaks Canada, the Canadian Autism Spectrum Disorders Alliance, Health Canada, NeuroDevNet and the Sinneave Family Foundation. Additional support was provided by York University.

For more information, visit the Chair in Autism Spectrum Disorders Treatment and Care Research website at asdmentalhealth.ca

Partners

