Training Part C Early Intervention Providers to Screen for Autism Spectrum Disorder

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INTRODUCTION: Evidence documents that the American Academy of Pediatrics’ (AAP) recommendation that all children be screened for Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) at 18 and 24 months has not been widely adopted by the medical community. Given that early screening and diagnosis are critical for obtaining targeted interventions which promote improved outcomes for children with ASD, other resources for early screening should be considered. Early intervention (EI) providers work with high-risk children through Part C of IDEA and are in a unique position to monitor their development and serve as an initial point of contact in detecting those who are at risk for ASD. Yet, EI providers have varied training backgrounds that affect their views regarding screening, assessment, diagnosis, and management of ASD.

PURPOSE: The purpose of this study was to determine EI providers’ knowledge and attitudes toward ASD prior to and following an ASD-specific training tailored to the needs of EI providers.

METHODS: The ASD Knowledge and Attitudes Survey (ASK-Q) was administered to 31 EI providers representing several disciplines (e.g., speech-language pathology, occupational therapy, physical therapy, early childhood unified). This paper-based survey was given prior to and following a one-day, 8-hour training designed to provide EI providers with ASD-specific information and training tailored to meet their needs. Participants’ responses to the ASK-Q were then analyzed to determine if the participants’ knowledge of ASD improved following the workshop.

RESULTS: Prior to the training, participants’ correct responses averaged 86.2% across all survey statements. Following the workshop, participants’ correct responses were 94.3%. One of the largest changes in participant knowledge was on the statement, “Genetics plays an important role in the development of autism”. Prior to the training, 18 agreed, following the training 30 agreed.

CONCLUSION: Results indicated that the professionals’ overall knowledge of ASD improved after attending the training. Results also provided evidence that EI providers had a high level of knowledge prior to the training and that this level was enhanced after attending the workshop. This supports the literature recommending that EI providers be trained and supported in conducting ASD-specific screenings to assist with the early identification of ASD.