

Summary of Research Findings

What help families of young children on the autism spectrum to feel like they have benefited from early intervention? Rachele Wicks, Dr Jessica Paynter, and Dr Dawn Adams

Overview

- Lots of children on the autism spectrum receive early intervention services. It is important to not only make sure this is helpful for the child, but to also ensure that the family feels that they learned or gained something from their experience.
- Parent stress, particularly stress that comes from interactions with between parents and children, has an important influence on whether parents feel that engagement with early intervention has been helpful in providing knowledge and support in areas such as knowledge of their child and their rights, advocacy capability, having support systems, and accessing their community.
- While this study provides valuable knowledge about what influences families to feel that they have benefited from engagement with early intervention and how helpful early intervention was to their family, more work is needed in this area.

Why did we do this study?

So far, research looking at early intervention has tended to only really measure changes in the skills and abilities of the children on the spectrum who received the intervention. However, we know that parents and families are really important at helping children to develop skills and abilities, so this research looked at what the family felt they had learned or gained from early intervention. Because we want to know how to help families get the most out of these interventions, we tried to identify things that might increase or decrease what the family felt they learned or gained from the experience.

What did we do?

Question asked

- Do parents of children on the spectrum feel that early intervention is beneficial for the family and see early intervention as helpful in supporting their family's needs?
- What is more important in helping families to feel that they gain the most out of early intervention: child factors (e.g. ability, behaviour, communication), parent factors (e.g. stress, education level) or family factors (e.g. income)?

What we did

- Parents completed a number of questionnaires as part of their first online questionnaire pack for the LASA study. This included a questionnaire called the Family Outcomes Survey – Revised (FOS-R). This asks parents to tell us about the benefits they feel they have gained from early intervention and how helpful early intervention has been for the family.
- We looked at what parents told us about what they had gained from early intervention and how helpful early intervention has been for the family and looked into if this differed based upon the child, parent or family factors described above.

What did we find?

- Most parents said that early intervention had helped them to understand more about their child and helped them to access the community. Most parents said that early intervention was less helpful in informing them of their rights, communicating their child's needs, and in helping them to build support systems.
- How stressed a parent feels was the most important thing that could change how helpful a family has found early intervention. Parents who were more stressed found early intervention less helpful and felt that their family got less benefit from early intervention for their family.
- This stress was more important than child factors (e.g. ability, behaviour) in understanding how helpful a family finds the early intervention they receive

Where are we sharing this study?

This research has been published in the journal- Journal of Early Intervention and is available by putting <https://doi.org/10.1177/1053815119883413> into google.