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# Problem behaviors in ASD: Comparing parent and professional concerns

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## Abstract

Parents and professionals working with individuals on the autism spectrum face many challenges meeting their social and communication demands, adapting to their changes, and providing conducive environments for their physical and emotional well-being. A survey assessed the information needs of parents and professionals. Results revealed that parents and professionals shared similar concerns on most of the categories.

## Background

Literature indicates that parents and professionals differ in their perceptions and concerns regarding children's cognitive, emotional, and communication characteristics (e.g. Stone & Rosenbaum, 1988).

**Parents' concerns** (e.g. Kasari & Sigman, 1997; Davis & Carter, 2008)

**Professionals' concerns** (e.g. Quintero & McIntyre, 2011).

- |                                      |   |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| 1. Impairments in social relatedness | 1. Difficulty adapting to social situations                   |
| 2. Impairments in communication      | 2. Academic/literacy issues                                   |
| 3. Presence of maladaptive behaviors | 3. Problems engaging effectively with peers in the classroom. |

## Purpose

1. Identify the pressing needs and concerns of parents and professionals involved with individuals with autism.
2. Determine the concern areas that need additional support and intervention.

## Method

- A survey targeting parents and professionals in Northwest Ohio assessed their information needs in March, 2011.
- In this study, responses to the open-ended question, "What behaviors are you most concerned about" in the survey were analyzed. Quantitative results presented in Ha, Hewitt, & Weinberg (2011).

## Method continued...

- Three coders analyzed the data independently and identified 15 themes. The themes included:
 

1. Sensory	6. Academics	11. Emotional
2. Motor	7. Attention deficit	outbursts
3. Noncompliance	8. Restricted interests	12. Organization
4. Aggression	9. Social issues	13. Mental health
5. Self-stimulatory behaviors	10. Communication	14. Personal care
		15. Other
- 33% of the data was used to determine coding reliability.

## Results

		Percentage of Responses (Number of Responses)				
		Sensory	Motor	Non Compliant Behaviors	Aggressive Behaviors	SIBS/Stim/Repetitive
Family		3.73% (18)	1.24% (6)	6.43% (31)	10.58% (51)	7.88% (38)
Professionals		7.59% (22)	1.03% (3)	6.9% (20)	6.21% (18)	6.9% (20)
		Academic/Literacy	Attention Deficit/Impulsive	Rigidity/Restricted Interest	Social Interactions	Comm. and Lang.
Family		1.45% (7)	7.05% (34)	4.36% (21)	15.15% (73)	8.51% (41)
Professionals		3.1% (9)	6.9% (20)	5.52% (16)	13.45% (39)	8.97% (26)
		Organization	Tantrums/Outbursts	Emotional/Mental Health	Personal Care	Other
Family		3.53% (17)	5.19% (25)	11% (53)	5.81% (28)	8.09% (39)
Professionals		1.72% (5)	9.66% (28)	6.55% (19)	4.48% (13)	11.03% (32)

  

	Number of Participants	Number of Responses
Family	155	482
Professionals	80	290
Total	235	772

- Coding Reliability: 98% (range 80%-100%)
- The average difference between family and professionals is 2%
- The smallest difference between family and professionals is 0.16% (Academic/Literacy)
- The largest difference between family and professionals is 4.47% (Tantrums/Outbursts)

Response Examples				
Sensory	Motor	Non-compliant behaviors	Aggressive behaviors	SIBS/Stim/Repetitive
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sensory processing (auditory, tactile, proprioceptive)</li> <li>Balance</li> <li>Sensory integration dysfunction.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Physical delay</li> <li>Co-ordination</li> <li>Fine motor issues</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lack of motivation, task avoidance</li> <li>Difficulty with authority, manipulation, lying, arguing</li> <li>Running away</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Physical Abuse</li> <li>Verbal Abuse</li> <li>Stealing food</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>self-abuse- hitting head, scratching neck, biting fingers</li> <li>sensory stimulation- arm/hand flapping, spinning</li> <li>object obsessions- holding straws, lining up toys</li> </ul>
Academic/Literacy	Attention deficit/impulsive	Rigidity / Restricted Interest	Social interactions	Comm. and Lang.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Difficulty with written expression</li> <li>Difficulty with math</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lack of focus/concentration</li> <li>Easily distracted</li> <li>Impulsive/hyperactive</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Trouble transitioning</li> <li>Fear of change</li> <li>Strict routines</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Dislikes crowds</li> <li>Interpersonal relationship struggles, self-involved and self-centered</li> <li>Understanding "unwritten" social rules. Poor sportsmanship/sore loser</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lack of functional communication, difficulty communicating thoughts and feelings</li> <li>Echolalia/Perseverations</li> <li>Understanding gestures and facial expressions, perspective taking</li> </ul>
Organization	Tantrums/Outbursts	Emotional/Mental Health	Personal Care	Other
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Time management problems</li> <li>Difficulty with decision making/problem solving</li> <li>Difficulty differentiating between fantasy and reality</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>meltdowns</li> <li>crying</li> <li>rage</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Anxiety</li> <li>Depression</li> <li>Difficulty regulating emotional response</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Personal hygiene problems.</li> <li>Trouble potty training.</li> <li>Sleep disturbances</li> </ul>	These items did not fit into other categories or did not describe a behavior. e.g.: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cognitive impairments</li> <li>Gets teased at school</li> <li>No strategy works consistently</li> </ul>

## Discussion

- Both groups reported highest concerns on social interaction.
- The present findings indicate that parents and professionals share a substantial overlap in their identification of critical need areas.
- Limitations:
  - The data were gathered from a larger study who original purpose did not focus specifically on the behavioral concerns of parents and professionals
  - The data were gathered from an open ended question which may have resulted in erroneous interpretations of qualitative data.
- Future research should focus on gathering more explicit data to compare the behavioral concerns of parents and professionals who live and work with persons with ASD.

## Conclusion

Parents and professionals concurred on the behavioral concerns demonstrated by the children they live with/work with. While these findings contradict previous research (e.g. Stone & Rosenbaum, 1988), these results are encouraging in that they suggest parents and professionals are aligned in terms of their views on problem behaviors, and thus will more likely be able to successfully work in collaboration toward the overall development of the individual with ASD. While differences on directions to go may exist, shared recognition of the problem is a first step to shared goals for solving it.

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