Beliefs Inform Practice: Different Perspectives on ASD Interventions

Jessica Miguel, Shana Cohen

Parent involvement in their child’s education is necessary to support children with disabilities in their educational settings (Duquette et al., 2011; Rosenbaum et al., 1998). However, Latino families often face challenges (i.e. language barriers, access to knowledge) that shape parental advocacy efforts (Cohen, 2013). Also, among Latino populations parent beliefs have been found to center around educación, a code of ethics and framework for academic achievement. These barriers and cultural differences are important, given research that suggests efficacy of autism intervention increases when it is integrated into day to day routines and family activities (Bernheimer & Weisner, 2007; Kashinath et al., 2006). The purpose of this study is to understand how Mexican-heritage parents, whose children have autism spectrum disorders (ASD), are viewing intervention activities throughout their day to day activities. We also explore how parents classify intervention activities within a social cultural perspective (Keogh et al., 1997).

Method: We conducted Experienced Sampling Method (ESM) over the course of seven days among 32 Immigrant Mexican parents (Mean age=36) whose children (Mean age=6.3, 32 males) have ASD (Csikszentmihalyi & Larson, 1992). Over the course of the seven days parents received text messages, at random, 5 times a day between the hours of 7:00 AM to 9:00 PM. Each text message contained a link to an online survey. Prior to ESM enrollment parents received a 30-minute tutorial on enrolling and responding to the survey. The ESM survey included questions asking what activities they and their child were currently engaged in, whether it was an intervention activity or not, how the parent and child perceived the efficacy of their current activity, and the emotional state of the parent. Using SPSS this data was examined two ways, first, we described the activities (n=36) that were classified by the researchers as formal therapy activity (i.e. participating or observing therapy) and second, we described the activities (n=188) that parents self-classified as part of an intervention.

Results: For the first set of results, 36 out of 721 activities were considered formal intervention activities as defined by the researchers, of which 33 activities were categorized by parents as part of the intervention. Notably, only 12 out of the 32 participants were. Within these categorizations (n=17) 47.2% indicated that they were Participating in Therapy (i.e. working with a therapist), whereas 19.4% (n=7) indicated they were either Observing (i.e. writing about therapy) or Preparing for Therapy.

For the second set of results we were interested in what activities were categorized by mothers as intervention activities. A total of 188 responses were recorded out of a possible 721 and 30, out of the 32 participants, were represented. Within the activities that mothers classified as intervention activities the top response with 19.7% (n=37) was General Caregiving which includes disciplining the child or researching autism resources. The second response with 18.6% (n=35) was Engaging in Academics. This set of activities included art activities, reading, or learning numbers. The third activity with 13.8% (n=26) was mother’s Self Care which included showering, sleeping, eating, or observing.

Discussion: This study indicates that intervention classification is different between Mexican-heritage parents and traditional, clinical, definitions of autism intervention. These findings can be used to inform how standardized autism interventions can be more seamlessly integrated into the daily routines and activities of families, in order to provide better outcomes for Mexican-heritage populations. Future research could investigate the efficacy of intervention programs that utilize socio-cultural perspectives, in order to best inform how to integrate cultural models into standardized intervention activities.

References/Citations: