Title: Examining Differences in Empowerment, Special Education Knowledge, and Family-School Partnerships among Latino and White Families of Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

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Introduction: Although the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) embeds many rights for families, parents often struggle to advocate for their children. Barriers to advocacy may be exacerbated among Latino (versus White) families. Compared to White families, Latino families of children with disabilities face systemic barriers such as special education documents are often not translated into Spanish (Shapiro et al., 2004) and most interpreters do not effectively communicate everything that is said at individualized education program (IEP) meetings (Hughes et al., 2002). Although there is research about systemic barriers among Latino (vs. White) families, less is known about how Latino and White families differ with respect to special education knowledge, family-school partnerships, and empowerment. In this study we examined the differences between White and Latino families of children with ASD with respect to knowledge, family-school partnerships, and empowerment.

Method: Our study included 44 White parents of children with ASD and 55 Latino parents of children with ASD. Both groups of parents were about to complete advocacy trainings; for this study, we used their pre-survey scores (i.e., scores before they participated in advocacy training). White participants were significantly more highly educated than the Latino participants; no other demographic differences existed. Using a MANCOVA, we controlled for educational background and compared the groups with respect to: empowerment (Koren et al., 1992), the quality of the family-school partnership (Summers et al., 2005), and special education knowledge (Burke et al., in press).

Results: Controlling for educational background, Latino (versus White) families of children with ASD demonstrated significantly less empowerment ($F = 41.08, p < .001, ES = 1.91$) and less special education knowledge ($F = 37.34, p < .001, ES = 1.87$). However, there were no significant differences with respect to the child and family subscales of the family-school partnership ($p$’s = .09 and .70, respectively). Among Latino families, there were significant positive correlations between the child subscale of the family-school partnership scale and empowerment ($r = .51, p < .001$) and the family subscale of the family-school partnership scale and empowerment ($r = .38, p = .004$). There was also a positive correlation between child age and special education knowledge ($r = .31, p = .026$). Among White families, there was a positive correlation between the child subscale of the family-school partnership scale and empowerment ($r = .31, p = .047$).

Discussion: This study indicates that there may be significant differences in special education knowledge and empowerment between White and Latino families. Future research and practice should consider interventions that focus on knowledge and empowerment for families of children with ASD.

References/Citations: