



NEEDS OF YOUTH WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER (ASD) IN THE HEALTH CARE SETTING

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Introduction: Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a developmental disability characterized by difficulties with social communication and repetitive and restrictive behaviors patterns (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 1 in 59 8-year-old children were diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in the United States in 2014 (Baio et. al., 2018). These rates constitute a 150% increase in the prevalence of ASD from 2000 to 2014 (Baio et al., 2018). As the prevalence of ASD continues to increase, interactions of children with autism with the medical environment also increase. Further, children with Autism have a higher rate of comorbidities compared to typically developing children, making them more likely to have frequent contact with the medical environment (Kohane et al., 2012). Thus, the awareness of ASD among professionals in healthcare settings is essential for the successful experience and accessibility to healthcare for youth with ASD. The purpose of this study is to identify the needs, challenges, and accommodations youth with ASD face during health care visits from the perspective of health care professionals.

Method: For this research study, Health Care Professional's (HCP's) in Utah were surveyed. A total of 184 surveys were completed by a variety of HCP's (including physicians, nurses and medical assistants). Participants were recruited through distribution of online survey links to newsletters and groups of Utah Health Care Professionals. Participants were asked demographic questions in addition to being surveyed regarding their experience, exposure, facility policies and training with patients with ASD.

Results: Data analysis showed that 94% of HCPs reported having treated a patient with ASD, however, only 55% of providers had received training specific to the care of this patient population (see Figure 1). Despite the prevalence of ASD, 85% of health care providers indicated that their facility did not have policies in place for treating patients with Autism (see Figure 2). In addition, only 44% of medical professionals surveyed reported being extremely or very confident in interactions with this patient population (see Figure 3). With training, medical professionals were significantly more confident when treating with patients with autism ($F(1,175) = 46.47, p. < .001, \eta^2 = .21$) (see figure 4).

Conclusions: The majority of Utah medical professionals surveyed reported having treated patients with ASD, but frequently lacked training and confidence treating this population. These results expand previous findings that with more training, medical professionals feel more confident treating patients with Autism in health care environments.

Figure 1: Medical Professionals' Exposure and Training on Treating Pediatric Patients with Autism

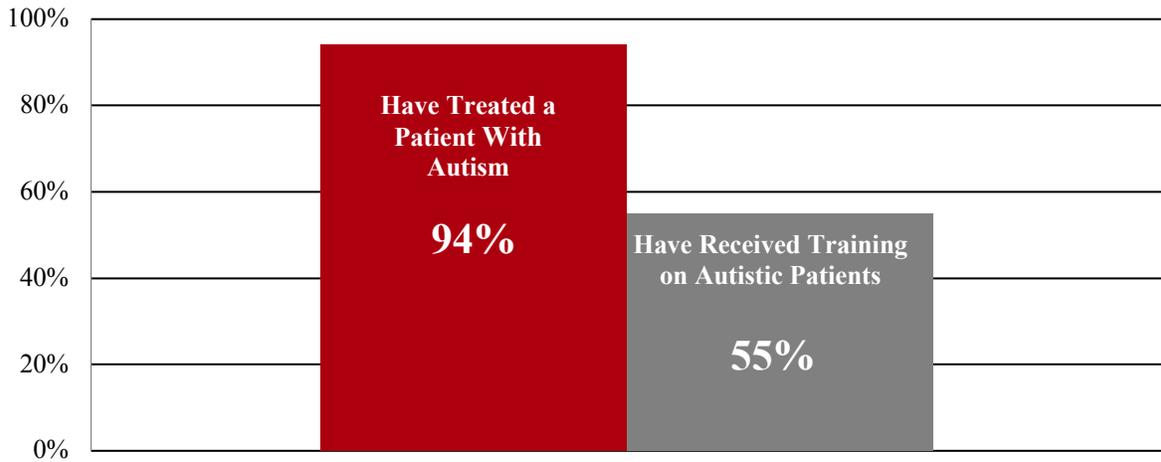


Figure 2: Health Care Facilities Policies in Place for Patients with Autism

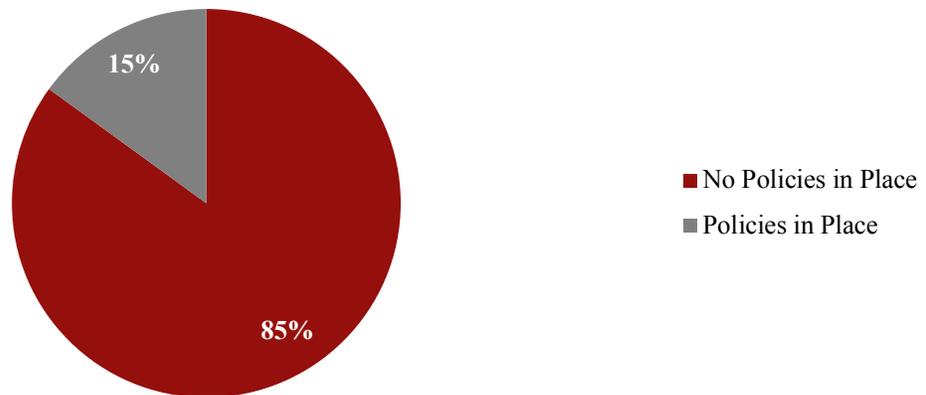


Figure 3: Medical Professionals' Confidence When Working with Patients with ASD

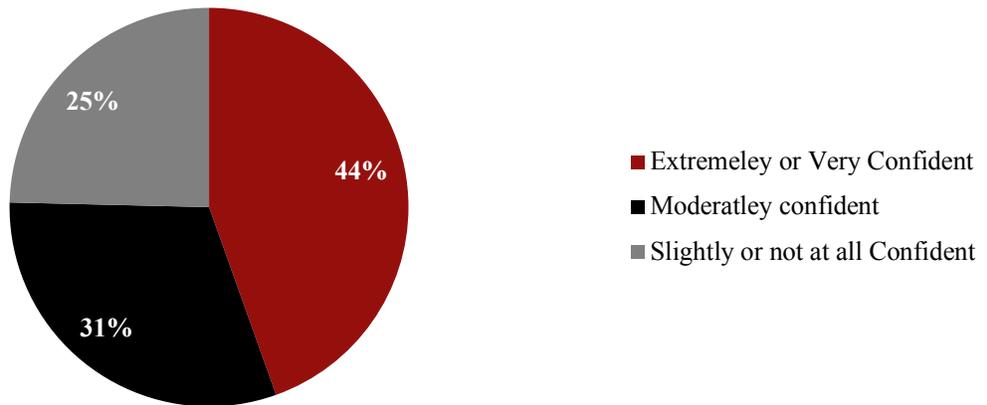


Figure 4: Confidence Level of Medical Professionals

