

Autism Spectrum Disorders and Specific Learning Disabilities: Parental Perspectives of Special Education Services

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Introduction

- Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is the number one diagnosis that leads parents into due process hearings with schools. Children with ASD typically experience difficulties in reciprocal social interaction, verbal and nonverbal communication, and stereotyped and repetitive behaviors. These symptoms can vary in severity from mild to severe, with the severity of the disorder typically determining which services are provided. Parents may become frustrated with the “appropriate services” in an educational setting, and attempt to gain “optimal” special education for their child invoking the right of mediation and, if necessary, due process.
- There are several factors that impact the level of parental satisfaction with their child’s special education services. One of the most influential is the parents’ overall relationship with the school. This includes parents’ level of involvement in the Individual Education Plan (IEP) process, amount and quality of communication between school and home, and how special education services are delivered.

Purpose

Few comparisons have been done on parental perceptions of special education services of differing diagnoses. This study specifically compares ASD, a low-incidence disorder in schools, to specific learning disability (SLD), a high incidence disorder in schools, to see where there may be different areas of concern for parents. In addition, it is important to see how parents are feeling about their child’s special education services, regardless of their child’s diagnosis. School districts may be able to use this information to better inform their future programming.

Method

Participants

- 17 parents of children with autism and 17 parents of children with specific learning disabilities were selected from three rural school districts. Of the 34 surveys sent out, 6 parents of children with autism participated and 7 parents of children with specific learning disabilities participated.

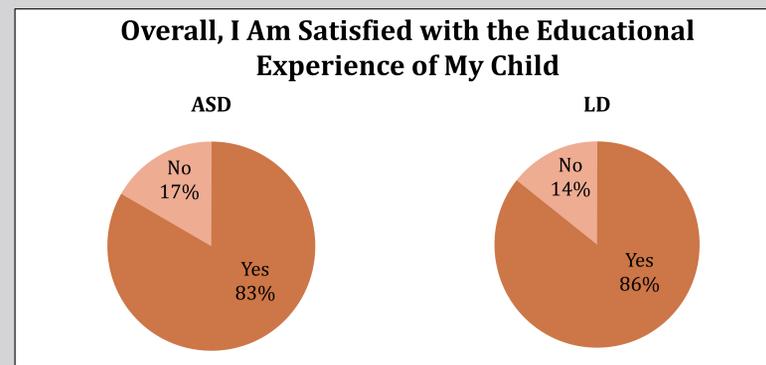
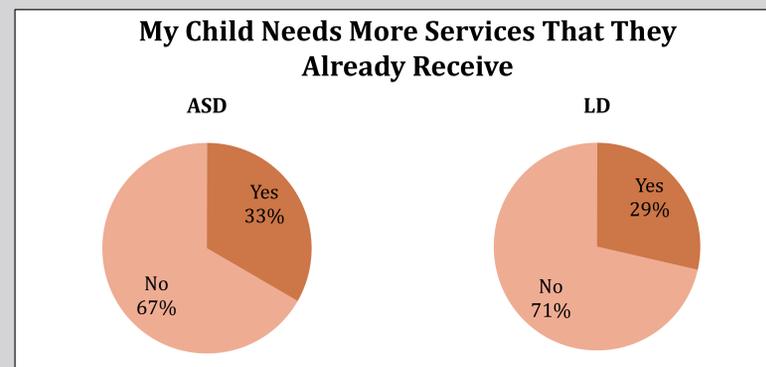
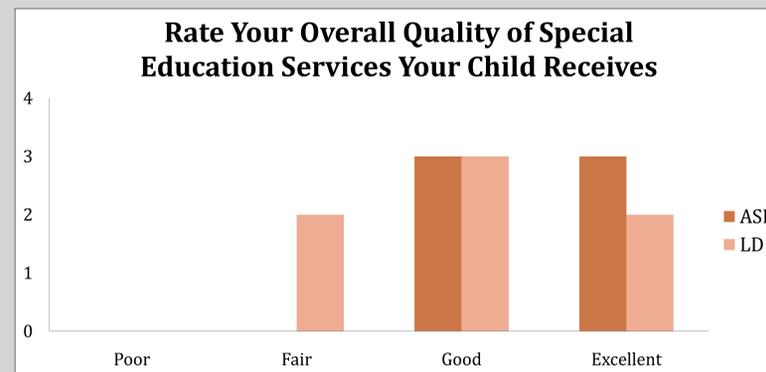
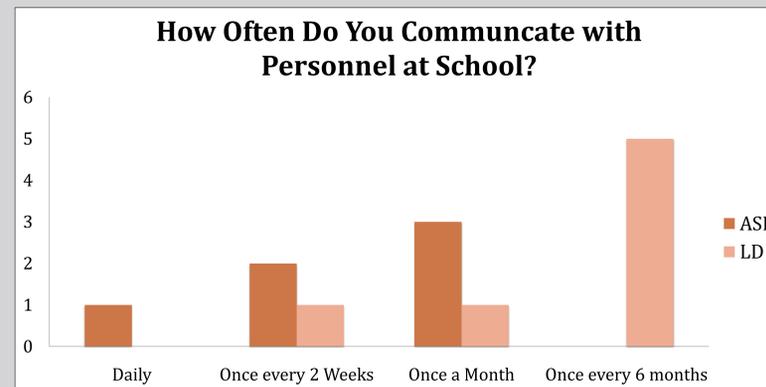
Instrument

- The first author developed a 22-question survey. Parents were asked to complete multiple choice and Likert-scale questions about their perceptions of their child’s placement and special education services, communication with school personnel, knowledge of their child’s Individual Education Plan (IEP), and overall satisfaction with school personnel and services.

Procedure

- Cover letters and surveys were mailed to the participants. Follow-up postcards were sent a week after the initial mailing, thanking those who had responded and reminding those who had not.

Results



Discussion

- Previous research has indicated that parents of children with ASD have a lower rate of satisfaction than parents of children with other disabilities, largely because of the greater amount of services needed and more service providers involved. However, the current study found strong similarities between parental ratings of parents of children with ASD and ratings of parents of children with SLD.
- Of the 34 families surveyed, 38% responded. Respondents indicated that the quality of special education services their child receives ranges from Fair to Excellent. Parents of children with ASD appear to communicate more frequently with school personnel than parents of children with SLD. Few parents indicated that their child needs more services that they already receive, and a large majority (85%) are satisfied overall with their child’s educational experience.
- The current study has the following limitations: (1) a low response rate, and (2) the sample included only parents from 3 rural districts, which may not reflect parental ratings from other school districts.

Acknowledgements

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