Nov 7th, 3:00 PM - 4:00 PM

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Early Interventions Providers’ Knowledge of Evidence-based Practices for Working with Children with Autism

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Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is developmental disability that is associated with social communication deficits and repetitive or restrictive behaviors. Research has systematically identified evidence-based strategies for working with individuals with ASD. It has demonstrated the importance of early intervention. There is, however, limited research on early intervention providers’ (e.g., speech-language pathologists (SLPs) and developmental specialists (DS)) knowledge of evidence-based strategies for working with individuals with ASD. To further explore this issue, we conducted an online survey that examined the ASD knowledge of early intervention DSs and SLPs in the state of NM. The survey included a demographics section, a section on self-reported knowledge and training needs, and a 24-question direct knowledge assessment of evidence-based strategies. A total of 111 participants completed at least part of the survey and 87 completed the entire survey. Results indicated that broad topics with the lowest overall knowledge assessment scores amongst SLPs and DSs were: dealing with challenging behaviors and addressing social communication skills. The broad topics with overall lowest self-rating scores were: dealing with challenging behavior and using different instructional formats. SLPs had higher average self-ratings and a higher average percentage correct on the knowledge assessment than DSs. Specific strategies with low percentages correct on the knowledge assessment amongst both groups were discrete trial teaching and naturalistic intervention (instructional formats), differential reinforcement and functional behavior assessment (strategies for addressing challenging behavior), and using the picture exchange system, and speech-generating devices (social communication strategies). Providers did have strengths related to knowledge of general instructional strategies (e.g., modeling, prompting). Results suggest that early intervention providers would benefit from further training in strategies related to decreasing challenging behavior, using augmentative and alternative forms of communication and implementing different instructional formats such as naturalistic intervention. These findings have important implications for professional development and training programs.