

Family & Provider Perspectives of Neurodiversity

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Objective:

To determine providers' and family perspectives of autism, specifically related to neurodiversity and their general knowledge of autism.

Method:

Thirty-seven parents completed a 20-item survey that assessed family demographics, child characteristics, and attitudes towards autism. Parents were recruited via email from the devGenes Database and had one or more children with autism, were over 18 years of age and fluent in English. Six providers completed a 20-item survey. Survey questions assessed provider demographics, knowledge of autism, experience with autism, and attitudes towards autism. Providers were recruited via email from the University of Iowa Hospitals and Clinics or MercyOne website.

Results/Conclusion:

Both parents (96%) and pediatricians (100%) indicated that they focus on strengths of children with autism, however one-third of pediatricians also indicated they focused on a child's deficits. When considering characteristics of autism as differences, rather than deficits, a larger proportion of parents (84%) relative to pediatricians (33%), viewed characteristics of autism as differences. Most parents (87%) indicated self-stimming behaviors should be accepted and 24% of parents agreed that therapy to address self-stimming behaviors is unnecessary, whereas pediatricians disagreed (50%) or were neutral (50%) towards this statement.

Just over half of parents were aware of the neurodiversity perspective and less than half agreed that it applied to their child. A large percentage of parents (39%) were neutral regarding their attitudes of the neurodiversity perspective of autism, which may be due to lack of knowledge about it. However, most parents (84-96%) showed attitudes of accepting their child and seeing their strengths, aligning with principles of neurodiversity.