

Lionel Favret

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LSU Health Science Center, New Orleans, LA

Dr. Megan Maher, MD

LSUHSC, Department of Psychiatry

“Applied Behavior Analysis Therapy in Louisiana: Barriers to Care”

BACKGROUND: Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a neurological and developmental disorder that influences one’s ability to learn, communicate, and interact with their surroundings. In the United States, ASD affects 3.2% of children aged 8 years with males being more affected than females. In Louisiana, the prevalence of autism is 1.9%. The rate of ASD diagnosis has steadily increased in recent years, likely due to improved detection of autism. Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) is a mainstay therapeutic intervention that is commonly utilized in ASD patients. Rooted in behaviorism, this treatment utilizes positive and negative reinforcement to guide patients toward behavioral goals. Evidence suggests that early intervention is key in improving outcomes for children with ASD. Many facilities in Louisiana utilize ABA services; however, there are concerns regarding the availability of these services in many areas. Common barriers to psychological services for children identified in the literature include waitlist length, time to receive services, availability of certified behavioral technicians, turnover rate of technicians, and language barriers. The purpose of this study is to conduct a community needs assessment to identify the extent to which these barriers for ABA services apply across different areas of Louisiana.

METHODS: ABA providers in Louisiana were selected from a list created by AmeriHealth. Two providers from the ten Louisiana Public Health Regions were randomly selected to participate. The selected facilities were asked to complete a phone interview and provide answers to a pre-determined set of questions involving waitlist times and length, number of therapists, therapist turnover rate, patient capacity, and patient age range. The data gathered was used to observe trends across the ten Louisiana Public Health Regions.

RESULTS: ABA providers often covered services across multiple parishes and public health regions in the state. Results from this needs assessment will provide information on the availability of ABA and highlight differences in the barriers to care among the ten public health regions. This study is on-going, but preliminary data shows variable distribution of ABA providers across parishes in Louisiana, with many parishes in Northern Louisiana having no ABA providers.

CONCLUSION: Result from this needs assessment may be used to highlight some of the obstacles that both parents and clinicians face when caring for children with ASD. They may also demonstrate areas within Louisiana that may benefit from more ABA facilities to help mitigate some of these barriers. Future directions could focus on comparing barriers in Louisiana to those of other states within the U.S.

Introduction:

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a neurological and developmental disorder that influences one's ability to learn, communicate, and interact with their surroundings. In the United States, ASD is estimated to affect 1.67% of children aged 8, with boys three times as likely as girls to be identified with ASD [1]. In Louisiana, the prevalence of autism is 1.9%. The rate of ASD diagnosis has steadily increased in recent years, likely due to improved detection of autism. ASD is a treatable condition that requires intensive, individualized therapy to address communication, language development, social skills, and adverse behaviors. Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) is a mainstay therapeutic intervention that is commonly utilized in ASD patients. Rooted in behaviorism, this treatment utilizes positive and negative reinforcement to guide patients toward behavioral goals. Evidence suggests that early intervention is key in improving outcomes for children with ASD. Many facilities in Louisiana utilize ABA services; however, there are concerns regarding the availability of these services in many areas. Common barriers to psychological services for children identified in the literature include waitlist length, time to receive services, availability of certified behavioral technicians, turnover rate of technicians, and language barriers. The purpose of this study is to conduct a community needs assessment to identify the extent to which these barriers for ABA services apply across different areas of Louisiana.

Louisiana is divided into ten Local Governing Entities (LGEs), which are responsible for delivering health services at a local level.

Methods:

ABA providers in Louisiana were selected from a list created by AmeriHealth. Two providers from the ten Louisiana Public Health Regions were randomly selected to participate. Phone interviews were conducted to obtain information about waitlist times, waitlist length, number of therapists available, and language accommodations. The data gathered was used to observe trends across the ten Louisiana Public Health Regions.

Results:

Conclusion:

References:

[1] Dietz PM, Rose CE, McArthur D, Maenner M. National and State Estimates of Adults with Autism Spectrum Disorder. *J Autism Dev Disord*. 2020 Dec;50(12):4258-4266. doi: 10.1007/s10803-020-04494-4. PMID: 32390121; PMCID: PMC9128411.

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