

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.

Methods

- The ABA providers in Louisiana were selected from a list created by AmeriHealth [2]. 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.
- Interview topics included: Waitlist times and length, number of therapists, therapist turnover rate, patient capacity, and patient age range.
- Data was gathered in organized in graph form and used to observe trends across the ten LGEs [3].

Results across LGEs

- AmeriHealth noted 117 agencies that provide ABA services in Louisiana.
- LGE 9 had the most agencies providing services for its respective area (Parishes: St. Tammany, Livingston, Tangipahoa, St. Helena, Washington, St. Tammany, West Baton Rouge, East Baton Rouge, Ascension)
- 21 parishes in the state of Louisiana had no agencies.
- The overall response rate for this study assessing barriers to care was low (20%).

LGE	Parishes per LGE	Agencies per LGE	Population per LGE	Agencies per 100,000
1	3	12	429,773	2.79
2	7	16	698,859	2.28
3	7	7	375,259	1.86
4	7	11	599,858	1.83
5	5	11	302,171	3.64
6	8	7	286,384	2.44
7	9	9	518,761	1.73
8	12	12	342,544	3.5
9	5	18	626,271	2.87
10	1	14	427,253	3.27
Louisiana	64	117	4,597,740	2.5

Discussion

- The data for this study will reflect the average of the two agencies contacted within each LGE.
- For all data points, excluding LGE 10, there is data for one of the agencies contacted or there is no data, due to inability to contact the agency.
- The 21 parishes with no ABA facilities are most prominent in LGE 7 (7/9 parishes) and 8 (8/12 parishes). LGE 3 and LGE 4 each have one parish without ABA services.
 - The lack of services in these areas may introduce a barrier of access for families in need of services, requiring them to travel to other parishes or LGEs to receive services for their child.

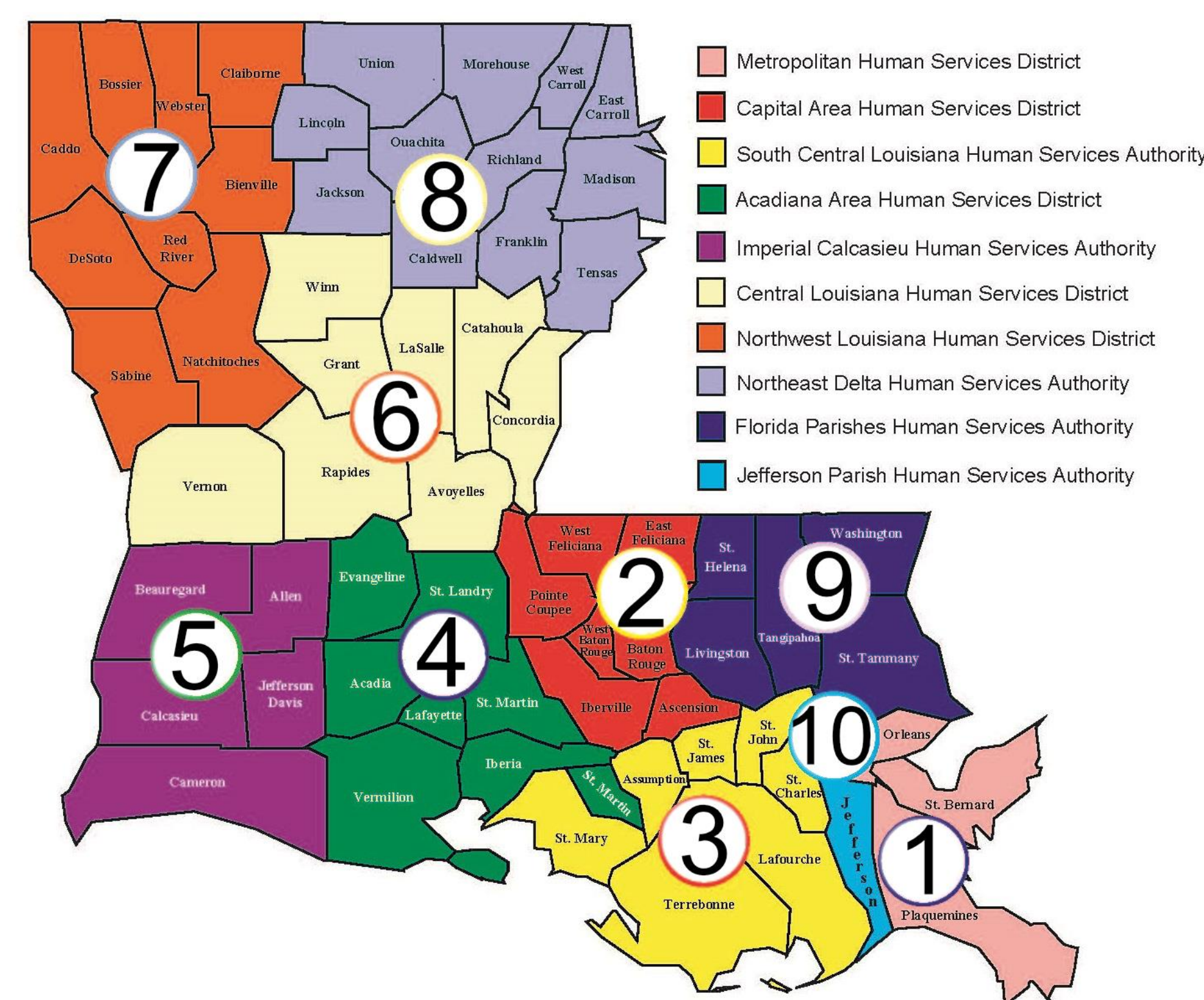
The limitations to this study pertain to data gathering.

- The agencies were available by phone only during their operating hours, making it difficult to schedule a time to speak. To combat this, I opted to send questionnaires to the facilities via email, and I am still awaiting their responses to help me complete their data points.
- Some agencies have multiple sites within and across their LGE. The number of agencies found in each LGE does not reflect the number of sites each agency my have.

Future directions should focus on comparing barriers to ABA services across multiple areas of the United States. Additionally, there may be benefit in learning about why there is a disproportionate amount of ABA services offered in the northern parts of the state.

Early treatment is imperative to helping a child live a fulfilling, well-adjusted life. Another direction may focus on understanding the timeline from diagnosis of ASD to receiving treatment.

Licensed Governing Entities (LGEs) of Louisiana



End of Study Goals:

- Capacity for Patients per LGE
- Waitlist Length per LGE
- Waitlist Time per LGE
- Number of BCBAs per LGE
- Rate of Therapist Turnover per LGE

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References

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