Survey of Psychological Training in Autism and Intellectual Disability

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Study Team

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Background

Psychologists provide critical services to the autistic and intellectually disabled communities

- Diagnostic evaluations/psychological assessments
- Developmentally focused interventions
- Mental health interventions
- Academic/vocational planning

Steinbrenner et al., 2020

Increasing Need for Services

+

Shortage of Trained Providers

→

Growing Healthcare Inequity
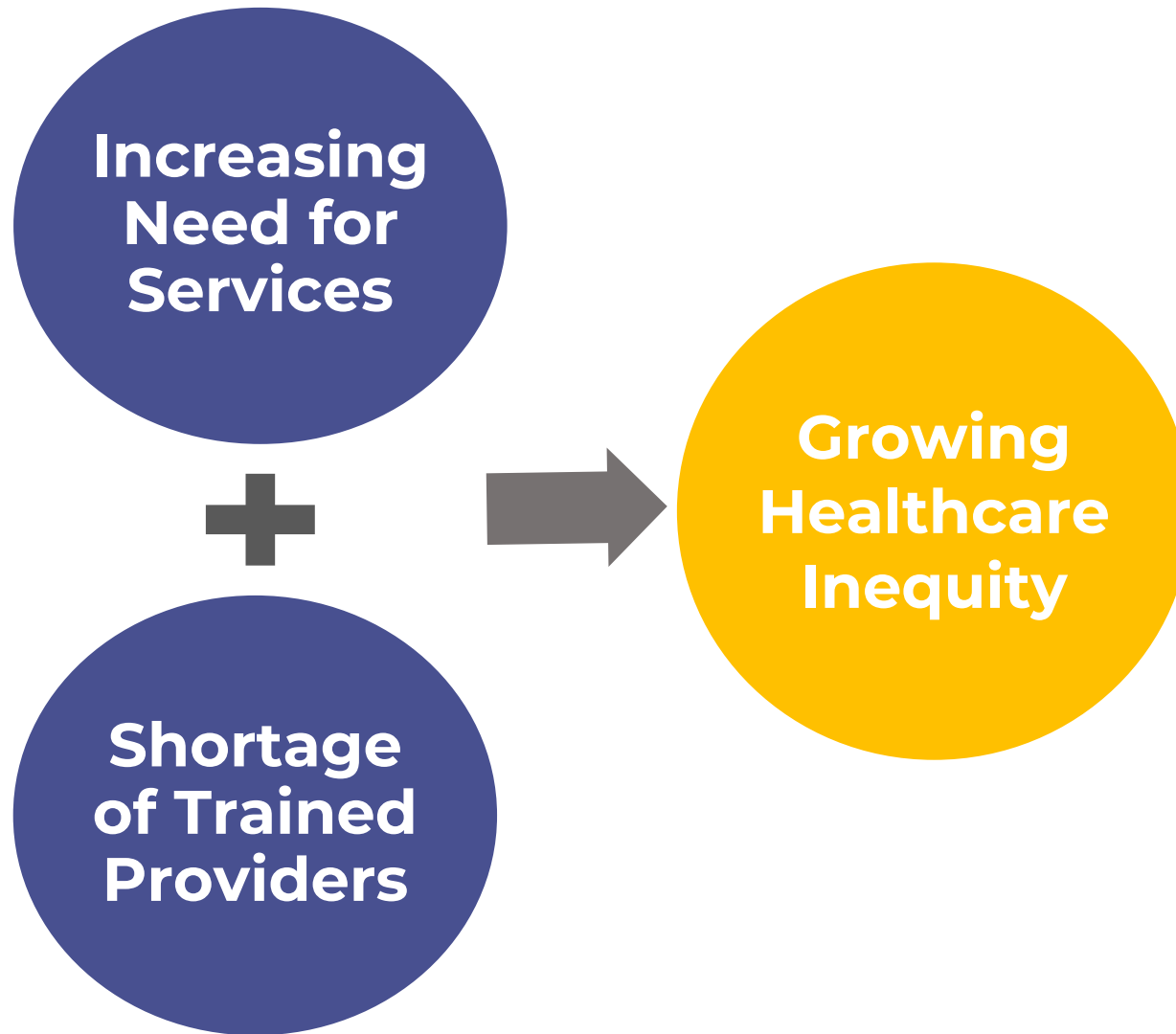
Maenner et al., 2020;
Zablotsky et al., 2015

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Limited Training

- In 2015, 15% of counseling/clinical programs offered course related to ID
  - 45% of graduating students felt competent to offer services to the ID community
- In 2021, school psychology programs offered .1 courses in autism
- In 2023, 27% of clinical psychology programs employed a faculty member with expertise in autism

Dai et al., 2023; Grasser et al., 2015; Ruark et al., 2021

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Study Aims

Aim 1: To examine current autism/ID training opportunities in psychology programs

Aim 2: To examine attitudes about autism/ID training and services

Aim 3: To identify barriers and resources to improving autism/ID training

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Research Strategy

- Surveyed:
    1) Directors of Clinical Training at APA psychology programs
    2) Psychology graduate students beginning internship
- DCT's received links to complete online surveys via email
- DCTs forwarded survey links to graduate students
- Surveys
    - Quantitative/Qualitative items
    - Co-developed with community advisory board
- Data collected November 2024-January 2025

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Participants

Directors of Clinical Training (DCT; n=43)

- 79% PhD program, 19% PsyD program, 2% both
- 30% clinical, 28% school, 2% counseling, 5% multiple tracks, 35% unknown
- 33% child-focused, 39% adult-focused, 28% adult and child
- 21% LEND

Psychology Students (n=55)

- 78% PhD program, 18% PsyD program, 4% unknown
- 33% clinical, 9% school, 3% counseling, 5% multiple, 50% unknown
- 33% child-focused, 31% adult-focused, 36% adult and child
- 11% LEND

Current Training Opportunities - DCTs

- Autism/ID coursework: 0 courses (61%), 1 (27%), 2< (12%)*

- Autism Practica: 0 practica (21%), 1-2 (47%), 3< (33%)

- ID Practica: 0 practica (30%), 1-2 (49%), 3< (21%)

- Number of Expert Faculty: 0 Faculty (28%), 1-2 (47%), 3< (26%)

   * # of faculty predicted amount of coursework (p<.05)

Current Training Opportunities - Students

- Autism/ID coursework: 0 courses (62%), 1 (20%), 2< (18%)

- Autism/ID Practica: 0 practica (67%), 1< (33%)

- # of Autism/ID Assessments: Range 0-132; Median=6

- # of Autism/ID Treatment Cases: Range 0-75; Median=5

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Attitudes

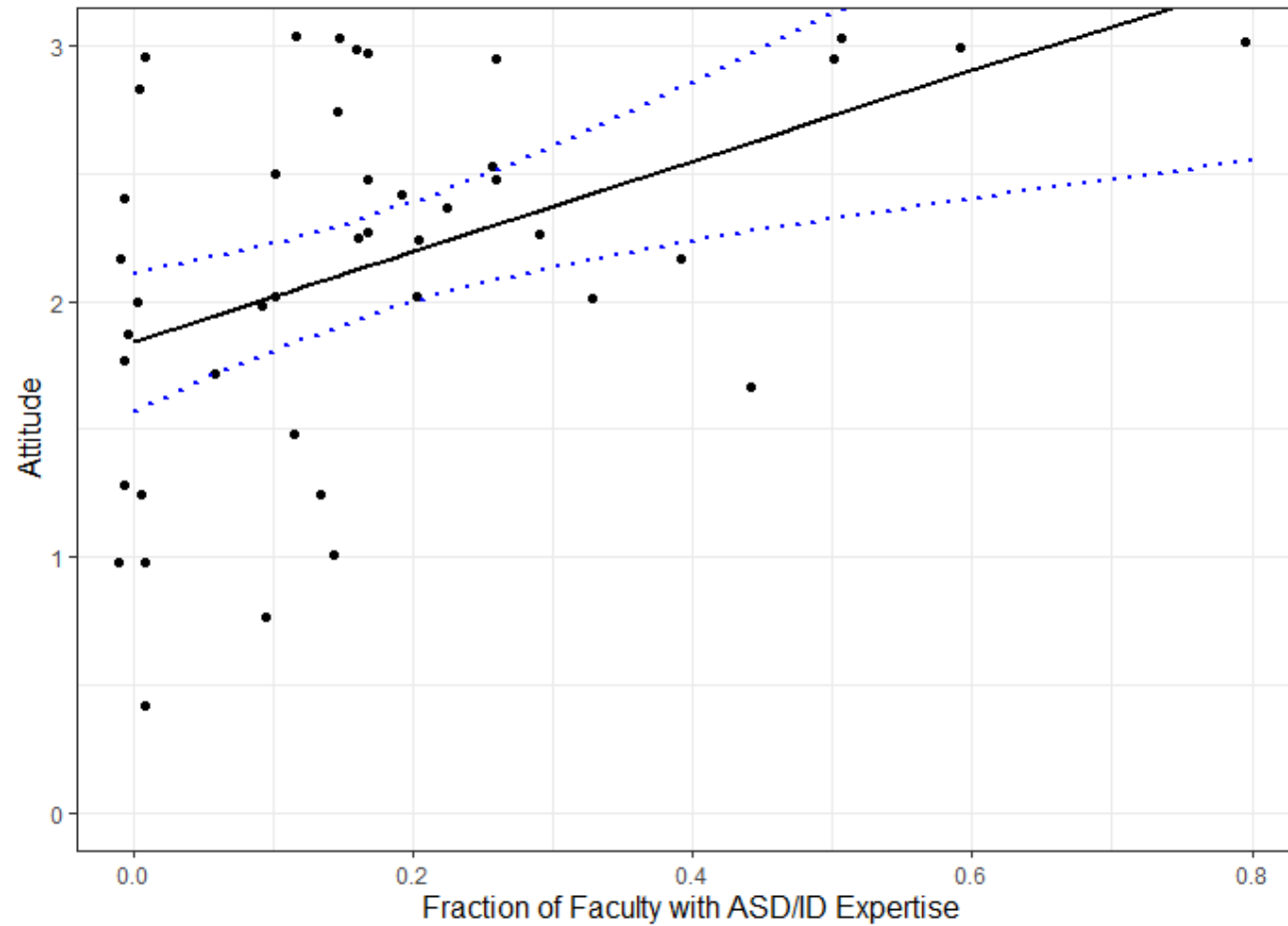| Training in autism/ID should be…	DCTs	Graduate Students
Required for all	34%	53%
Not a core competency, but basic training is needed	10%	16%
Only an elective specialty	24%	16%

DCT Attitudes

Percentage Rating
Important/Very Important

- Autism assessment – 82%

- Autism treatment – 77%

- ID assessment – 84%

- ID treatment – 75%
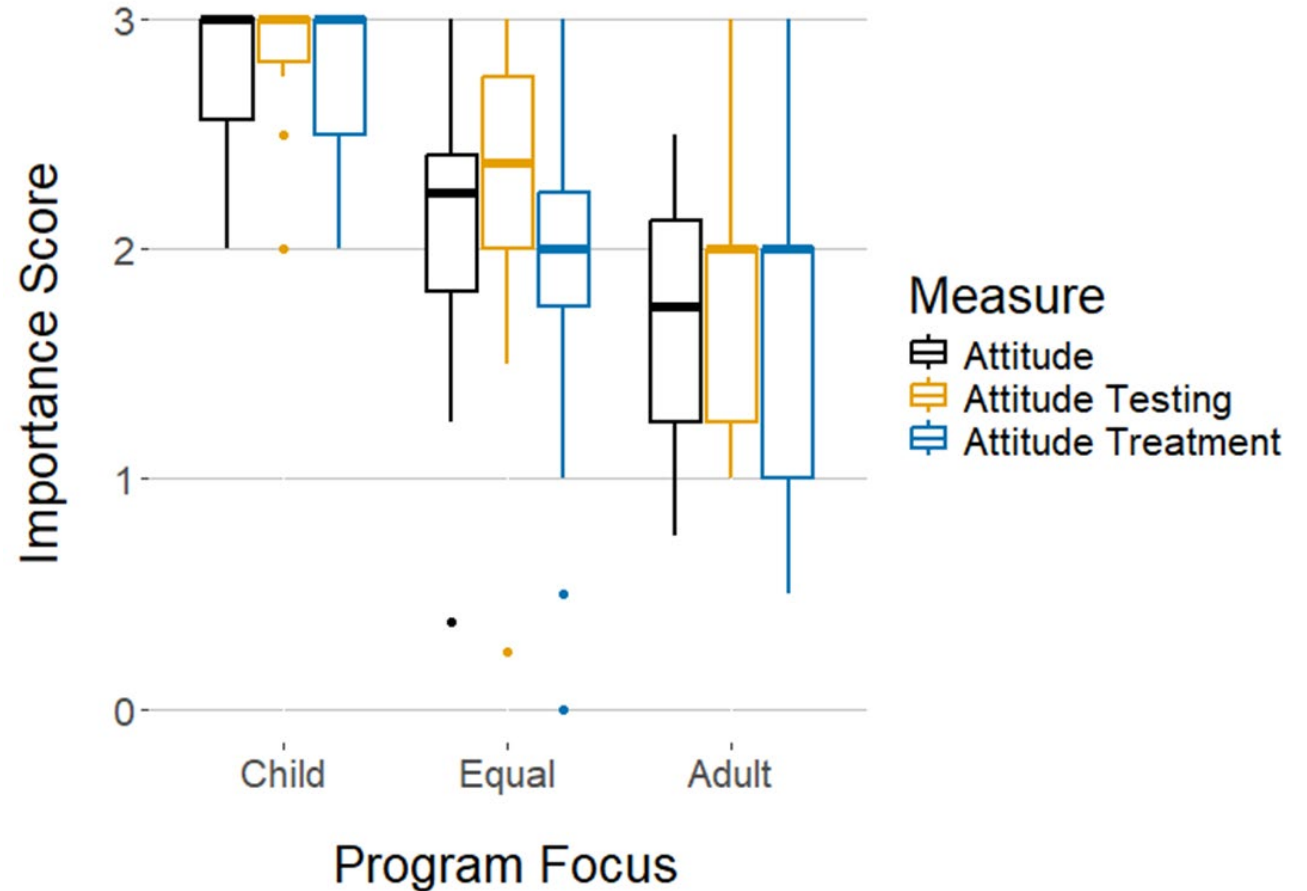
DCT Attitudes

Spearman correlation ρ = 0.48

Student Attitudes

*Knowledge – 50% No-Basic knowledge (autism and ID)

*Comfort – 50% Very-Slightly uncomfortable (autism and ID)

*Expectation for future clinical practice with autism/ID:

      Very Little (18%)

      Somewhat (31%)

      A fair amount (31%)

      A great deal (20%)

      *Associated with # of assessments completed (p<.05)

Training Barriers	DCTs	Students
Not enough time due to APA requirements	38%	40%
Faculty attitudes/Not enough faculty with expertise	24%	10%
Training too expensive (e.g., ADOS training)	11%	13%
Low student interest	8%	13%
Lack of training sites (practica/LEND)	5%	9%

Type of Training Materials Requested	Graduate Students (N = 55)	DCTs (N = 43)
More practicum options	49%	53%
Live/real-time lectures	60%	44%
Online videos	42%	51%
Clinical vignettes	55%	51%
Reference list/Reading package	24%	40%
Online courses	31%	40%
Local conferences	20%	26%
Opportunities to mentor/socialize with autistic/ID individuals	35%	35%
Connection to local LEND programs	N/A	42%

Positives

Gains in course offerings (15% vs. 39%) and faculty (27% vs. 73%)

Autism and ID training equivalent

Most DCTs report that autism/ID training is important

Over half of students believe autism/ID training should be core competency

82% of students expect to work with autism/ID community

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Areas of Need

More coursework, practica sites, assessment/treatment opportunities needed

Adult focused programs = lower perceived importance of training

50% of students reported discomfort and no-basic knowledge

Barriers: APA training requirements, faculty, training expense (ADOS)

Thank you for your attention!

Many thanks to the and graduate students who participated in this project!

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