

## Introduction to Volume 16, Issue 2: Behavioural interventions in Autism

People with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) experience significant impairments in adaptive behavior and elevated rates of challenging behaviour. Behaviour interventions are the accepted evidence-based standard for treating challenging behaviour and teaching adaptive behaviour to children with ASD. Behavioural interventions that target improvements in adaptive behaviour and reductions in problem behaviour are among the most studied issues in field of developmental disabilities, and ASD in particular, given the known impact of these interventions on the quality of life of the individuals who receive them, as well as that of those who support them (e.g., family, friends, and professionals). Further, accurate and consistent measurement of challenging behaviour and adaptive skills is pivotal to both clinical work and research.

In this issue devoted to assessment and intervention for adaptive skills and challenging behaviour, we present information on novel practices and findings within Canada and abroad. In particular, work in the province of Ontario (Canada) is prominent, as several clinicians and researchers are engaged in timely and rigorous research in this field.

In the first paper, Adrienne Perry and Rosemary Condillac describe an innovative behavioural service delivery model for parents of preschoolers with autism waiting for Intensive Behavioural Intervention (IBI) services. The Preschool Parent Training Program was offered by the Treatment, Research, and Education for Autism and Developmental Disorders (TRE-ADD) in Toronto (ON) to 27 families. Their results showed that the program resulted in increased knowledge of behavioural principles for parents, without increasing stress or affecting family harmony. Parents also reported high levels of satisfaction with the program, but stated that they were not confident about their ability to continue the program at home, unaided. In addition, the results showed that children also benefitted from the program in that they experienced increases in several areas of skill. Though acknowledging the limitations of the program, the authors discuss the potential for its use on an interim basis for families awaiting IBI services.

In the second paper, Nancy Freeman and Adrienne Perry present their work related to establishing the effectiveness of IBI for young children with autism in a large, less-prescribed community setting – whereas most work to date has been conducted in small, model programs. The outcomes of 89 preschool-aged children receiving services from the Toronto Preschool Autism Service (TPAS) are described. They found that children who participated experienced significant improvement in autistic symptoms, cognitive and adaptive behaviour, and rate of development. In fact, some

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of the children achieved outcomes similar to those seen in model programs. Better outcomes were experienced by children with medium to higher initial levels of functioning, younger age at program entry, and who received IBI for a longer period of time. The results of this study are important as they illustrate the effectiveness of IBI in community settings, under less-than-ideal conditions.

In their paper, Ksusha Blacklock and Adrienne Perry examine the technical validity of a set of benchmarks developed for the Ontario IBI program to assist in monitoring children's progress and to facilitate clinical decision-making. They used a case-study approach based on file review of six children for whom the relevant data needed to evaluate the proposed benchmarks was available. Their results indicated that current clinical records contained the majority of information needed to evaluate the five steps of the benchmark process, providing preliminary support for the benchmarks as tools for helping clinicians make transparent, consistent, evidence-based decisions regarding children's progress in the Ontario IBI program.

In the fourth paper, Archana Raj and Kiran Kumar Salagame focus on parents, and in particular on the effect of a sensitized model of coaching on the self-efficacy of parents of children with autism. While studies have found that parent training or coaching is an important part of successful interventions targeting management of challenging behaviours or facilitation of social interaction, few studies have investigated the impact of different parent coaching models on parental self-efficacy or sense of competence. In this study, the participating organization's usual coaching model was compared to a more sensitized coaching model that included increased opportunities for modeling, rehearsal, and feedback among a sample of mothers of children with autism; the self-efficacy of parents upon completion of coaching was compared. The results supported the use of a more sensitized coaching model, as significant increases in task-specific self-efficacy were noted. Future work is needed that expands the work to include larger samples and that evaluates whether improvements in self-efficacy are maintained over time.

In their work, Kendra Mitchell, James Reaume, Kaleigh Regehr, and Maurice Feldman evalu-

ate the training and generalization effects of a group social skills training program with parent training in a community behavioural support service. Three adolescents with Asperger Syndrome or High-Functioning Autism met weekly for a total of twelve 2-hour training sessions, while their parents attended concurrent training sessions. The authors found that group social skills training and parent training were both associated with increased generalization of targeted social skills across behavioural and social validity measures, and that these increases were maintained at a 3-month follow-up. Therefore, there is support for the use of group social skills training programs with added generalization enhancement strategies.

Rebecca Shine and Adrienne Perry provide a brief report based on their work investigating the relationship between parental stress and intervention outcomes among children with autism. The stress levels of 151 mothers was examined at the beginning IBI in relation to the children's rate of progress and outcomes at the time of exiting the IBI program. The authors hypothesized that higher levels of parental stress at the beginning of the program would be significantly related to lower levels of adaptive functioning among children upon exit from the program; though findings were not statistically significant, the trend observed was in the direction predicted. The authors offer insight into the reasons for this, and suggest directions for future research.

IBI is also the focus in the study conducted by Mary Konstantareas, Andrea Rios, and Calida Ramnarace. In particular, this study investigated the relationship between cooperation and language and social competence among children with autism attending an IBI program. Their results showed that the children's ability to cooperate at the time of entry to the program was related to cooperation skills at exit, as well as to receptive language skills, social interaction, and play and leisure skills. These results are discussed in terms of their relevance to IBI training.

Odette Weiss, Adrienne Perry, and Kerry Wells evaluated the usefulness of the Maladaptive Behavior Domain of the Vineland Adaptive Behavior Scales II among a sample of 117 children with Autism or Pervasive Developmental

Disorder – Not Otherwise Specified. Scores on the Maladaptive domain were examined in relation to the children’s age, gender, adaptive skills, cognitive ability, and severity of autism, all of which have been found to be related to maladaptive behaviour in previous work. However, their results were inconsistent with the existing research, calling into question the validity of this domain scale, in its current form, for use in this population. Directions for future work are provided.

Last, Myra Sugar, Mary Konstantareas, and Glenn Rampton also make use of the Vineland Adaptive Behavior Scales II to investigate the adaptive profiles of 40 individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder. They found that the individuals in their sample functioned best in Daily Living Skills, and least well in Socialization; skills related to Communication fell somewhere in between. These results replicate the well-known challenges in this population, and are discussed in terms of their relevance to our understanding of this condition and implications for practice.