**EXAMINING THE ACTIVITY PARTICIPATION AND FRIENDSHIPS OF YOUNG CHILDREN WITH I/DD**

**Azin Taheri1, Adrienne Perry1, & Patricia Minnes2**

**York University1, Queen’s University2**

**Objectives:** There is growing evidence for the importance of activity participation for individuals with I/DD (e.g., Patterson & Pegg, 2009; Weiss et al., 2003). Despite the benefits, individuals with I/DD are often excluded from taking part in social activities. In addition, individuals with I/DD are known to have a restricted social network (Amado et al., 2013). However, those with I/DD do want to participate in more social activities and to have more friends (e.g., Cummins & Lau, 2003). Most research on activity participation has focused primarily on adults and higher functioning children with disabilities, often those with physical or medical disabilities (e.g. King et al. 2003; Law et al. 2006). Although there is research on older children (e.g., Solish et al., 2010; Taheri et al., 2016), there is a gap in the literature about the activity participation and friendships of younger children with I/DD. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine participation in this population by examining the frequency of participation, types of peers, and barriers to participation. In addition, this study explored the quantity and type of friendships for this group of children.

**Method:** GO4KIDDS and HELPS Inc projects were two parallel projects examining the health, well-being, and social inclusion of children with disabilities and the experiences of their families. 290 Canadian parents of children (age 3-8 years) with I/DD completed the GO4KIDDS and HELPS Inc surveys. Parents reported on the frequency of participation for seven activities. When participation did occur, they were asked with whom. When participation did *not* occur, they were asked about barriers. They also reported on their child’s number of friends and whether or not the friends had I/DD.

**Results:** The majority of children *did not* participate in most activities. Fewer than 10% participated more than once a week. However, when they did participate, it was often with typically developing (TD) peers. For 3 of the activities, when participation did occur, over 80% reported that parents supported participation. Barriers to participation were: *child not able, child not interested*, and *not allowed or invited*. *Logistical reasons* (cost, distance)and *unavailability* were less commonly reported. In terms of number of friends, 34% were reported to have no friends. Of those who had friends, 63% had only TD peers.

**Discussion/Conclusions:** The findings suggest that young children with I/DD rarely participate in activities and 34% were reported to have no friends. However, it is encouraging that when participation does occur, it is usually with TD peers. These findings are encouraging because it implies that children with I/DD are accepted and included by other children and their parents. When participation did take place, it most often occurred with the support of parents, which may not be surprising given the young age of the children. In addition, reasons relating to the child and lack of support were most frequently reported as barriers to participation. With a better understanding of these barriers, service providers can implement effective intervention strategies to enhance social inclusion.

**Correspondence:**

Azin Taheri

York University

azint@yorku.ca

Adrienne Perry

York University

perry@yorku.ca

Patricia Minnes

Queen’s University

minnesp@queensu.ca