**THE KNOWLEDGE AND SELF-EFFICACY OF HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONALS REGARDING AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER ACROSS ONTARIO: A CROSS REGIONAL STUDY.**

1) Objectives: ASD’s prevalence rate is rising and is described as one of the fastest growing disabilities in children. Concerns have been raised pertaining to lack of information about services (Rhoades, Scarpa, & Salley, 2007), differences in age of diagnosis (Jo et al., 2015), and health care professionals' knowledge specific to geographic regions (Ouellette-Kuntz et al., 2009). A diagnosis can be made reliably by the age of two years old, but a diagnosis does not typically happen until the age of four, potentially interrupting treatment at a critical developmental period where treatment can be more effective (Daniels & Mandell, 2013). To the researcher’s knowledge, there is a paucity of research in physicians’ knowledge and self-efficacy in Ontario and this study assesses physicians’ knowledge and self-efficacy. The research questions that will be explored are, what do Ontario physicians know about ASD treatment and diagnosis? Furthermore, what contributes to increased knowledge and self-efficacy across disciplines?

2) Method: Participants will consist of medical professionals such as family physicians, pediatricians, psychiatrists, developmental pediatricians, and emergency physicians. 40 participants from northern Ontario and 40 participants from southern Ontario will be recruited.

Phase one of the research will involve the distribution of The Healthcare Professional Questionnaire (HPQ) which is adapted from the Health Care Student Questionnaire (Isaacs, Minnes, Burbidge, Loh, & Versnel, 2012; Minnes, Isaacs, Burbidge, Loh, & Versnel, 2012), and The Knowledge about Childhood Autism among Health Workers (KCAHW) Questionnaire (Bakare, Ebigbo, Agomoh, & Menkiti, 2008). Quantitative Analysis will be conducted to compare differences in: Regions (Northern vs southern Ontario), professions, and knowledge across disabilities. Phase two of the research will be comprised of a semi-structured interview. Participants will be invited to participate in the interview which will take approximately 40 minutes to conduct. An example of a sample question from the semi-structured interview is: Have you been exposed to ASD during your medical practice? How? Qualitative analysis will be used to analyzed the data retrieved from the interview using thematic analysis which will identify recurring themes and evaluate similarities and differences.

3) Results: No results have been made as of yet as the study is ongoing. Some data should be analyzed by April. Based on previous literature, the researcher expects to see a lack of knowledge and self-efficacy of medical professionals in Ontario. However, due to the increased prevalence and awareness of ASD specifically, some professionals may report higher knowledge and self-efficacy regarding ASD as compared to some of the other disabilities.

4) Discussion/Conclusions: This study will help to inform medical school curricula especially concerning which areas in Ontario may need additional training. Additionally, the findings will assist physicians in gaining the education needed to improve self-efficacy and knowledge. Furthermore, this study will increase awareness of ASD in general and what services are available. Lastly, it will help to uncover what areas of education were most helpful and what experiences resulted in the greatest awareness of ASD.

**Nathaniel Davin: Laurentian University,** **ndavin@laurentian.ca**

**Dr. Shelley Watson: Laurentian University,** **swatson@laurentian.ca**

**Dr. Kelly Harding: Laurentian University,** **kharding@laurentian.ca**

**Golnaz Ghaderi: Laurentian University, gghaderi@laurentian.ca**