

SCHOOL TRANSITION EXPERIENCES OF CHILDREN WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

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Objectives: Transitions in childhood are a part of the normative process of development. These transitions involve various shifts that occur as children grow and develop, e.g., starting school, changing to a new school at certain ages, etc. For children with developmental disabilities (DD) and/or autism spectrum disorder (ASD), transitions can be particularly challenging and this can affect the quality of life of the child and family. Children with DD/ASD may go through school transitions more frequently due to challenging behaviours, lack of funding and support, and parental frustration with the school (Bjornsson & Perry, 2023). The purpose of this research is to address the following questions; (1) Do children/youth with DD/ASD go through more transitions than typically developing (TD) children? (2) Which child characteristics (i.e., age, gender, maladaptive behaviour, adaptive skill level, and diagnosis of ASD vs DD) are related to the number of transitions? (3) Is the number of transitions related to parents' perception of the child's quality of life (QoL)?

Method: This study is a secondary analysis of survey data collected through the Great Outcomes for Kids Impacted by Severe Developmental Disabilities (GO4KIDDS) project which was a large CIHR-funded team grant. The sample consisted of 211 children with DD (about half with ASD also) and 210 typically developing (TD) peers as a comparison group. Participants ranged from age 3 to 21, with an average of 11 years. Including a large range of ages is an asset to this project in order to include transitional experiences throughout school age. Nine transition experiences were included in the GO4KIDDS survey (e.g., transition to new school, transition out of high school) as well as items related to specific individuals (e.g., loss of a good EA or teacher). Child adaptive and maladaptive level was based on the Scales of Independent Behavior Revised (SIB-R; 1996). Child's age, gender, and diagnosis were based on a parent report and a composite measure of parents' perception of the child's happiness, achievement of potential, and friendship quality was used to operationalize child QoL (Ncube et al. 2018).

Results: Results are pending secondary data analysis which will include an independent t test for question 1 to test the hypothesis that DD/ASD children have more transitions than the Comparison group. Correlations and t tests will be used to explore the relation of child characteristics to number of transitions to address question 2, and likely an ANCOVA will be needed for question 3 regarding child QoL in relation to transitions (covarying for predictors found in question 2 analyses).

Discussion: Specific themes expected to arise from the data that may be related to child characteristics are regarding losing a valued teacher or educational assistant, transitioning in/out of several schools and possible suspensions/expulsion (e.g., for difficult behaviour). The results of this proposed study could have significant implications for families of children with DD/ASD, schools, and service providers as they interact within the education field. A better understanding of the effects of school transitional experiences can be utilized to improve the quality of life of those impacted.

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