



Queries

An Occasional Paper

Compiling States' Approaches to Current Topics

Screening and Early Identification of Autism Spectrum Disorders

Compiled by Evelyn Shaw & Deborah Hatton
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In response to interest from the National Professional Development Center on Autism Spectrum Disorders (NPDC-ASD), NECTAC queried Part C and Section 619 Coordinators regarding screening measures, diagnostic instruments and procedures, and trends in identifying young children with ASD under the age of five years. NECTAC collaborated with the NPDC-ASD to develop and refine a series of questions and then to conduct an on-line survey during a two week period in November 2008. Individual states are not identified in this report.

Responses were received from a total of 33 respondents in 27 states/jurisdictions scattered throughout the United States and the Pacific. Of these respondents, 14 were Part C program coordinators, 12 were Section 619 program coordinators, and 7 indicated that they represented both programs. Twelve states had respondents from both Part C and preschool coordinators.

The findings of this informal survey are intended only to provide information to the National Professional Development Center on ASD and to Part C and Section 619 program coordinators regarding the current status of screening and diagnosis of ASD among children ages birth to five years. The findings are not purported to be representative of results that would be obtained from all states and jurisdictions.

First, respondents were asked to identify the screening measures/tools that were being used within their states to screen young children for ASD. Respondents could select all that applied from a list of measures typically used for screening young children for ASD that are shown in Table 1. Respondents in 89% (n = 24) of the states that participated noted that the Ages & Stages Questionnaire: Social Emotional (ASQ-SE; Squires et al., 2002) was used to screen for ASD. Respondents in 81% (n = 22) of the states that participated used the Modified Checklist for Autism in Toddlers (M-CHAT; Robins et al., 2001). Most respondents (n = 25, 93%) indicated that more than one screening tool is being used in their states.

Table 1. Screening Tools used with Children Five Years and Younger

Use of Autism Screeners in Participating States and Jurisdictions		
Measure	States/Jurisdictions (N=27)	Percent of Participating States/Jurisdictions
Ages & Stages Questionnaire: Social- Emotional (ASQ-SE)	24	89
Modified Checklist for Autism in Toddlers (MCHAT)	22	81
Checklist for Autism in Toddlers (CHAT)	11	41
Checklist for Autism in Toddlers-23 (CHAT-23)	10	37
Autism Behavior Checklist (ABC)	10	37
Pervasive Developmental Disabilities Screening Test II (PDD ST II)	9	33
Asperger Measures*	7	26
Communication & Symbolic Behavior Scales-Developmental Profile (CSBS-DP)	5	19
Other	13	48

*Asperger Measures include the Childhood Asperger Syndrome Test (CAST), Gilliam Asperger's Disorder Scale (GADS), and Asperger Syndrome Diagnostic Scale (ASDS)

Next, respondents were asked to identify the instruments/procedures used to diagnose ASD in children under five years of age in their states. Respondents could select all that applied from a list of measures typically used for diagnosing young children with ASD, and almost all respondents indicated that multiple methods were used to diagnose ASD in their states (93%, n = 25). Respondents from two states did not identify any tools for diagnosing ASD in children ages five years and younger, and respondents from two states noted that they “did not diagnose ASD in Part C.” As can be seen in Table 2, the majority of respondents indicated that the Childhood Autism Rating Scale (CARS; Schopler et al., 1988) and Autism Diagnostic Observation Schedule (ADOS; Lord et al., 2000) were being used to diagnose ASD in children under five years of age in their states. In addition, some respondents indicated that the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual, American Psychiatric Association (DSM IV-TR, 2000) is being used to diagnose ASD in children under five years of age. A category for “other” was also available and included a text box for describing the instrument or procedures.

Table 2. Tools for Diagnosing ASD in Children under Five Years

Use of Autism Diagnostic Instruments in Participating States and Jurisdictions		
Measure	States/Jurisdictions (N=27)	Percent of Participating States/Jurisdictions
Childhood Autism Rating Scale (CARS)	21	78
Autism Diagnostic Observation Schedule (ADOS)	17	63
Diagnostic and Statistical Manual-IV (DSM-IV)	15	56
Autism Diagnostic Interview-Revised (ADI-R)	7	26
International Classification of Diseases-10 (ICD-10)	5	19
Other	7	26

The third survey question asked respondents if their states have a targeted campaign or initiative aimed at screening and early identification of ASD in children five years and younger. Nine of the 27 states reported having such an initiative (33%).

Finally, respondents were asked to identify the current trend for earliest age of diagnosis for ASD in their states by selecting from a list of seven age groupings. They were asked to respond with their perception if they did not have an exact data source. The age groupings included: a) before 18 months; b) 18-23 months; c) 24-35 months; d) 36-47 months; e) 48-59 months; f) 60-71 months; and g) 72 months or older. The respondents from four states did not agree on the ages at which diagnoses were being made, with Part C respondents selecting an earlier age span than the Section 619 participants. For the remaining respondents in the 23 states with consistent ratings, two states and territories (9%) reported that the current trend for the earliest age of diagnosis of ASD was before 18 months old—both respondents identifying this age were Part C coordinators. Nine states (39%) reported that the trend for earliest age of diagnosis was between 18 and 23 months, ten (43%) between 24 and 35 months, and finally two (9%) reported that the earliest age of diagnosis was between 36 and 47 months--both of these respondents were Section 619 coordinators. None of the respondents selected an age span greater than 48 months. Please see Figure 1 for a summary of participating states’ responses.

Figure 1. Perceptions of Current Trends for Earliest Age of Diagnosis of ASD

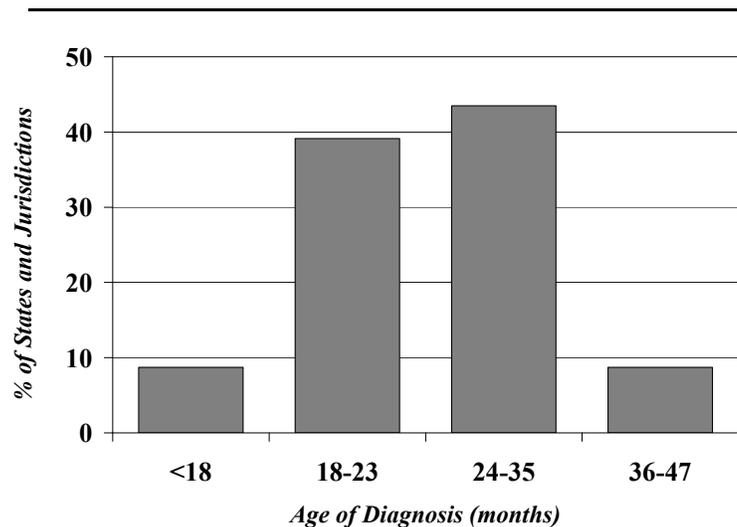
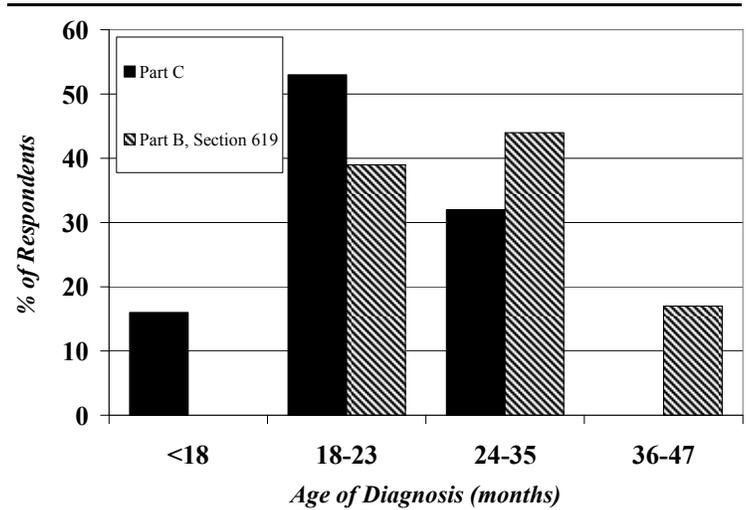


Figure 2 shows how respondents from Part C and Section 619 programs answered this question. The majority of the Part C programs selected younger age spans than Section 619 programs. Most Part C respondents selected 18-23 months as the current trend for earliest diagnosis. Section 619 responses were closely divided between the 18-23 months and 24-35 months age spans for age of earliest diagnosis. This difference may simply be an artifact of the age range for which each program is responsible. What is encouraging to note is there may be a trend toward earlier identification than has previously been reported. The results of this brief query suggest that the participating states are attuned to the need for early identification and diagnosis of ASD. Currently, there seems little consensus regarding tools for screening and diagnosis. Perhaps ongoing research studies on early screening and diagnosis will provide guidance to help states identify evidence-based strategies and tools for this important endeavor.

Figure 2. Perceptions of Current Trends for Earliest Age of Diagnosis of ASD by Program



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