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Objective: With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, many families face barriers in accessing critical services for their children. However, there is a disproportionate impact on families of children with Neurodevelopmental Disorders (NDDs), particularly those who are dependant on receiving regular services. The current study investigated how service delivery has changed for children and families with NDDs during the COVID-19 pandemic, to identify which groups are most at risk for service disruption and negative outcomes, and to provide actionable recommendations for community agencies that provide early interventions for future pandemics.

Participants and Methods:

Data was collected in the fall and winter of 2020/2021 during the Covid-19 pandemic. Families were recruited from a local service provider in British Columbia whose Early Years Support services delivery model was changed to online delivery during the pandemic. Children had a diagnosis of NDD or were on the waitlist for an assessment. Overall, 26 families participated in a semi-structured interview that asked about their experiences of receiving services for their children during the pandemic. Of these families, 20 subsequently completed online questionnaires that asked about their parenting stress levels and their children's behaviour throughout the pandemic. Families of a range of compositions were drawn from different ethnicities (30% white, 25% South Asian, 20% Filipino, and the remaining 5% identified as Indigenous, African or East Asian). The mean age of children was 3.80 years (SD = 0.72).

Results: From the survey, we found that 58% of parents reported higher than average levels of mental health and behavioural challenges in their children during the Covid-19 pandemic. In addition, 45% of parents reported higher than average parenting stress levels. Qualitative interview data indicated that most parents reported positive experiences with receiving services during the Covid-19 pandemic and reported feeling supported even with social distancing measures. However, families also

reported increased stress levels and isolation, particularly those who have children with Autism Spectrum Disorder, who rely on early funding (0-6 years) and early services. One of the themes that emerged from parents who were on the waitlist to receive an assessment was that wait times around assessments were very long, which contributed to parent stress levels. Parents also reported concerns around wait times to access services and difficulty of accessing online services due to internet and connection issues.

Conclusions: The current study identified central themes of stressors and barriers experienced by families and children with NDDs in service delivery. Overall, parents reported satisfaction in changes in service delivery in most ways; however, they also reported stresses and barriers that included wait times, increased isolation, and accessing online services. Actionable steps to reduce family stress include better communication between service providers and families for wait times, and more variability in appointment times. Specific recommendations for current and future pandemics will be expanded on in the poster.

Categories: Autism Spectrum Disorders/Developmental Disorders/Intellectual Disability

Keyword 1: child development disorders

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15 An Investigation of Non-Evidence Based Autism Intervention Representations in the Media

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Objective: This study seeks to describe the context and contents of YouTube videos featuring non-evidence-based practices (NEBPs) for autism spectrum disorder, including recent fad usage of transcranial magnetic stimulation.

Participants and Methods: A sample search of autism intervention-related YouTube videos was conducted to reflect the experience of caregivers researching autism intervention information on

the internet. Exclusion criteria was applied to create a preliminary dataset. The videos were categorized into general evidence-based practice (EBP), non-evidence-based practice (NEBP), and both EBP and NEBP. The NEBP-related videos were then qualitatively described using a priori codes based on the literature regarding signs of pseudoscience, as well as an iteratively developed codebook through a constant comparative method between two independent coders.

Results: Total videos from the YouTube search using the query “Autism Treatment” were capped at 150 videos. Total videos in English were 138. Total discrete videos (non-repeated) were 134. Total NEBP-related discrete videos were 62 (46% of final dataset); Total EBP-related videos were 38 (28.3% of final dataset); and total videos containing both EBP and NEBP as subject matter were 25 (18.6% of final dataset). Of the NEBP-related in the final dataset, the most frequent NEBP which occurred was stem cell therapy (n=26), followed by the Son-Rise program (n=13), Cannabis/marijuana (n=5), transcranial magnetic stimulation/magnetic e-resonance therapy (n=5), neurofeedback (n=1), brain rehabilitation (n=1), suramin (n=2), fecal transplants (n=2), Hyperbaric Oxygen therapy (n=1), Ayurvedic medicine (n=1), virtual reality (n=1), and others. The constant comparative method of coding yielded results specific to videos about NEBPs in autism, including: statements declaring a treatment will be effective, a banner on the YouTube page indicating if the channel is from a reputable source, a parent testimonial, a parent or caregiver display of emotion with respect to treatment efficacy, statements regarding pre-intervention repetitive or challenging behaviors, statements regarding demonstrated effects of the treatment, statements of a definitive cause of autism, statements regarding the severity of the autism in the treatment subject, specific words in reference to autism, including “disease”, “toxin”, or “inflammation”, discussion of the financial aspect of the treatment, and videos with both high and low production values.

Conclusions: The likelihood of a caregiver encountering and watching videos containing NEBP-related material when using a general query to search the internet for information on autism intervention is high. Additionally, videos regarding NEBPs have more engagements (e.g., likes, comments, shares) than videos regarding EBPs, oftentimes by multitudes. The information contained within videos in which an

NEBP is the subject aligns with pre-established warning signs for pseudoscience for autism interventions, however this study also contributes new warning signs through the construction of the iterative codebook. Specifically, statements about treatment efficacy in the absence of cited research, an emotional parent testimony about the individual with autism’s experience with the NEBP therapy, statements regarding behavioral improvements linked to participation in the therapy oftentimes in the context of inflated claims, and clear and confident statements regarding the cause of autism with no cited research.

Categories: Autism Spectrum Disorders/Developmental Disorders/Intellectual Disability

Keyword 1: autism spectrum disorder

Keyword 2: transdisciplinary research

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16 Learning-Related Challenges and their Association with Special Education Receipt and Vocational Outcomes in Autistic Adults

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Objective: Relative to their typically developing peers, autistic individuals experience greater difficulties in domains of functioning that are relevant to learning and adult outcomes, such as sensory sensitivities, anxiety, and social. However, little is known about how difficulties in these domains relate to the receipt of special education services as well as adult outcomes, such as vocational achievement. The current study sought to fill this gap by examining if difficulties in various learning-related domains as ascertained via the Learning Needs Screening Tool (LNST) were associated with historical special education receipt and vocational status.