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Background

- Individuals with developmental disabilities (DD) experience a greater number of preventable illnesses and mental health problems than the general population (Ouellette-Kuntz, 2005).

- Little is known about the psychological or social variables that are linked to poor physical health in children with severe DD.

- The current study examined how psychological variables (child happiness, presence of ASD) and social/contextual variables (service use, and parent mental health) are related to overall child health.

Hypotheses

- Child happiness will be related to child health

- Children with ASD will be more unhealthy than children with only DD

- Children who are rated as healthy by parents will use fewer health services than children rated as not healthy

- Physical and mental health problems will be correlated

- Poor child health will be related to poor parent mental health

Method

Great Outcomes for Kids Impacted by Severe Developmental Disabilities (GO4KIDDS) is an ongoing research project examining the health, wellbeing and social inclusion of children with severe DD. The current study used data collected from a GO4KIDDS' basic survey completed by parents of children with severe DD from across Canada.

Participant Characteristics:

- 168 parents (89% mothers) ranged in age from 25-65 years (M=42.27, SD=6.90)
- 76% of parents were married or common-law
- 168 children ranged in age from 5-19 years (M=10.81, SD=3.66)
- 71% Male
- 51% noted as having an Autism Spectrum Disorder

Measures:

- The Basic Survey asks brief questions about: Age, gender, medical problems, parent ratings of child health, health service use, child happiness, severity of child mental health problems
- Parent mental health
 - Kessler 6 (K6; Kessler et al., 2002)
- Family crisis and distress
 - Brief Family Distress Scale (BFDS; Weiss & Lunsky, 2010)

Results

Figure 1. Compared with other children the same age, how healthy is your child?

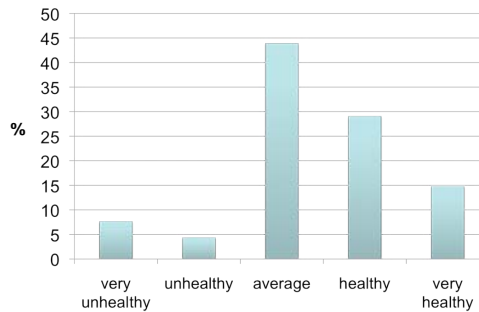


Figure 2. Mean number of times children with ASD and DD accessed health services

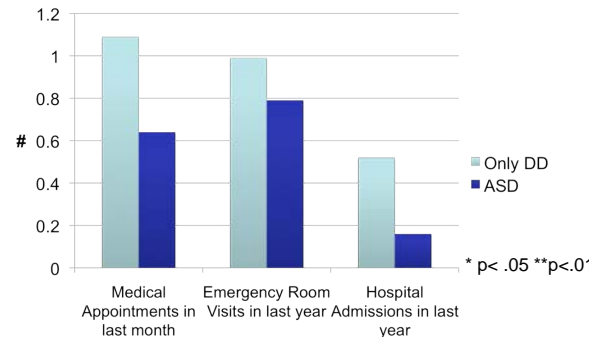
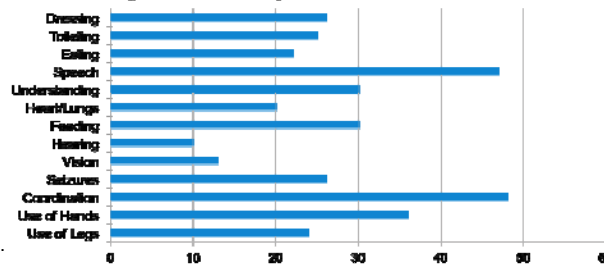


Figure 3. Percent of youth with serious difficulties



- Children with ASD did not differ in parent-reported health ratings compared to children with only DD, $t(166) = .28, p = .78$.

- 46% of all children went to the Emergency Room in the last year (20% had been at least twice)

- 15% of all children were admitted to hospital in the last year

- 26% of all children have Seizures; 8% have Heart Problems; 10% have Asthma

Table 1. Correlations between Child Health, Age, Mental Health, Happiness, Health Service Utilization, Parent Age, K6 and BFDS scores

Child Health	
Child Variables	
Child Age	-.07
Child Mental Health	-.02
Child Happiness	.17*
Social/Contextual Variables	
Medical appointments	-.31**
Emergency Room Visits	-.25**
Hospital Admissions	-.21**
Parent Age	-.08
Parent Mental Health	-.23**
Family crisis and distress	-.18*

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

Discussion

- There was no significant difference in health ratings between children with ASD and children with only DD.

- Contrary to expectations, children with only DD had more medical appointments and hospital admissions as compared to children with ASD.

- While children's physical health was not related to children's mental health, there was a significant correlation between health and child happiness.

- Children's physical health was also related to parent mental health.

- As expected, children with higher ratings of health used fewer health services than children rated as not healthy.

- Future research could address how other psychological and social factors relate to the physical health of children with severe DD including parent physical health and socioeconomic status.