African American descent with ASD. However, children from ethnic minority backgrounds tend to receive their diagnosis later. A sequential explanatory mixed methods study was used to explore the relationship between symptom severity, functional difficulties, and age at diagnosis for ASD, as well as to describe the functional challenges encountered by preschool-aged children with ASD of African American descent. Data consisted of analysis of the 2009-2010 National Survey for Children with Special Healthcare Needs and locally-conducted interviews with parents. No significant relationships were found between age at diagnosis and symptom severity or degree of functional challenges. Qualitative themes provided insight into the diagnosis process and functional challenges, as well as home, school, and community barriers and supportive strategies. More research and focused interventions are needed to address racial and cultural implications for delays in ASD diagnosis.

The mean age for diagnosis of ASD is reported to range from 38 to 120 months of age. Parents have been said to notice challenges with earlier age of ASD diagnosis. However, children from ethnic minority backgrounds tend to receive their diagnosis closer to 2 to 3 years of age. In a recent study, Jo et al. (2015) found a continued tendency of children from non-Hispanic Black and Hispanic backgrounds who were reported to have mild to moderate ASD to have been diagnosed at a later age. However, they also found that children with more severe symptomatology, such as language regression, received their ASD diagnoses closer to 2 to 3 years of age.

Mixed Methodology: A sequential explanatory approach was used to gain insight into the diagnostic disparities and adaptive functioning challenges of African American preschool-aged children with ASD.

Quantitative Results

Table 1
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent variable</th>
<th>Wald F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ASD Severity</td>
<td>.428</td>
<td>.733</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Functional Challenges</td>
<td>.144</td>
<td>.866</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. R² = .005

No significant relationship found between ASD severity or degree of functional challenges with earlier age of ASD diagnosis. Mean age of ASD diagnosis: 6 years old.

Discussion

Quantitative analysis indicated that age at diagnosis was not found to be related to ASD symptom severity or degree of functional challenges reported by parents. On the contrary, qualitative findings based on responses provided by parents during interviews indicated various functional and environmental factors that led these parents to seek out an early diagnosis for their children’s developmental delays, with communication being their primary concern. Participants in the qualitative interviews were able to obtain an ASD diagnosis between the ages of 2 and 4. In a recent study, Jo et al. (2015) found a continued tendency of children from non-Hispanic Black and Hispanic backgrounds who were reported to have mild to moderate ASD to have been diagnosed at a later age. However, they also found that children with more severe symptomatology, such as language regression, received their ASD diagnoses closer to 2 to 3 years of age.

Conclusion

More research is needed that includes minorities as representative samples to determine associated factors with diagnostic delays. Targeted awareness campaigns and screening processes need to be developed and implemented that are racially and culturally sensitive to ethnic minority populations.

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References


