

A079 HSCI

Improving Nutrition for Children With Autism Spectrum Disorder: A Mixed Method Study of Caregivers' Experiences

Abstract

Many elementary school-aged children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) struggle with severe food selectivity. Severe food selectivity is defined as accepting ten or less foods into a regular diet. Children diagnosed with severe food selectivity may struggle to receive the recommended daily amount of necessary nutrients. Elementary school-aged children are in a crucial developmental period where adequate nutrient intake is necessary for overall health and growth. With such a high percentage of individuals with food selectivity and autism, the need to outline effective feeding strategies is critical to ensure these children avoid risk for nutritional deficits. With this risk, parents' perspectives are crucial in developing, executing, and maintaining strategies to ensure children receive adequate nutrients.

Purpose

The purpose of the study is to understand how the mealtime experience of mothers are affected by children with ASD and food selectivity.

Methodological Approach

This will be a mixed-methods study using a survey providing both quantitative and qualitative data. Participants will include parents and caregivers of children ages 5-12 with a medical or educational ASD diagnosis. Participants will be asked to answer several open-ended and multiple-choice survey questions regarding caregiver experiences of mealtimes with children with ASD.

Findings

Data collection is in process and findings will be presented in the final poster. Our quantitative data will be ordinal data that will be graphed in rank order to show the number of participants that use each strategy (a-e) in question four on the survey. Our qualitative data will be the written responses to the survey.

Contributions to Discipline

It is important for occupational therapists to understand the parents' lived experiences in order to provide the best interventions for Autistic children with severe food selectivity and education for their parents.

Professional Writing

We anticipate submitting this research to a peer reviewed journal.