Reviewer's report

Title: Service use, unmet needs, and barriers to services among adolescents and young adults with autism spectrum disorder in Poland

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Reviewer: Elizabeth Young

Reviewer's report:

Comments

Background was well written, gave good context to ASD population in Poland and how services are administered. Great to have a context that is not north American.

Methods -

Polish Autism Survey - authors gave good background about the efforts to recruit participants from service providers, social media and press.

Overall low number of adults with ASD and they were mostly high functioning. Wondered if there was any other way researchers could have recruited this cohort to make the numbers more similar to the adolescents. (64 vs 311). The sample for adults with ASD may not be representative of population and also weighted very heavily to high functioning and had already a psychiatric comorbidity.

In contrast, the 311 adolescents who seem more representative (almost 50-50 high to lower functioning, and 60-40 split with comorbid psychiatric diagnosis). The characteristics of the adult group (esp high comorbid psychiatric comorbidity) directly lead to their need for more psychologic and psychiatric services. Would this be better as two separate papers describing both groups separately given the difference in the cohorts from the onset in terms of mental health and IQ?

Results -

interesting, well laid out, good use of table 2 and table 3. Clear in terms of services used, requested and perceived barriers
Discussion -

Confirmed rates of service use to be 2/3, with 1/3 excluded. Discussed which were the top services needed by each age group and the top barriers including availability and affordability.

While this is a good summary, I would encourage authors to dive a bit deeper and provide more of an interpretation of their results.

While it is clear that mental health services including psychology and psychiatry would be needed in the adult ASD group with high prevalence of comorbid psychiatric diagnosis, can the authors explore this more? Why the high comorbidity for mental health? What would these services look like? How would they be different for ASD than general population? Is this an ASD specific need in Poland or is it that nationally there is a paucity of mental health services? In Poland, which sector do these services belong to - how much can health care providers do, what other parts of the system need to step up to provide these or are these up to parents and private agencies? How expensive are these services in Poland? Which then would put the barriers of availability and affordability more into context?

The authors touch on the paucity of services in Poland in medium and small cities but again situating this in the context of all services in Poland would be helpful similar to the mental health services. Is this an ASD specific issue or a general health care issue. Also that this is not surprising as access for rural areas is a problem globally.

For discussion I would have liked the authors to discuss which service needs were surprising, and which correspond with the literature in other parts of the world? What can Poland do to address these unmet needs? What have other countries done?

Limitations -

were clear but again I would comment on how specific the adult population became in terms of higher functioning and high comorbidity with mental health. And how does that compare with other population studies specifically for Aspergers? Maybe they all have high prevalence for mental health and as such it is representative after all?

Conclusion -

well informed by the data.
Are the methods appropriate and well described?
If not, please specify what is required in your comments to the authors.

Yes

Does the work include the necessary controls?
If not, please specify which controls are required in your comments to the authors.

Yes

Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the data shown?
If not, please explain in your comments to the authors.

Yes

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I recommend additional statistical review

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