RESEARCH RUNDOWN

Early Learning Rate as a Predictor of Outcomes for Children in an EIBI Program

We examined service data from the St.Amant Autism Programs to learn whether early learning rate and IQ at intake predict outcomes for children with autism spectrum disorder. We found that both early learning rate and IQ predicted changes in autism severity, adaptive behaviour, and IQ after one year of treatment. Faster learners showed slightly greater improvement than slower learners on all outcomes.

What is this research about?

Early intensive behavioural intervention (EIBI) is the most effective treatment for children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Research studies show that IQ and age at intake may predict outcomes in these programs. Few studies have examined early learning rate as a predictor variable, however.

What did the researchers do?

We analyzed archival data for children with ASD enrolled in the St.Amant Autism Programs. We divided children into two groups: Fast Learners (avg. 12.5 new skills/month) and Slow Learners (avg. 3.3 new skills/month). We then compared groups on standardized outcomes of autism severity, adaptive behaviour, and cognition. We also examined IQ at intake as a predictor. We obtained data for 254 children and 87 of these children met the inclusion criteria. Included children had at least one year of program service, intake and year one scores for at least one outcome measure, and learning rate data for both intake and six months.

What did the researchers find?

Early learning rate and IQ at intake predicted outcomes in autism severity, adaptive behaviour, and change in IQ. Only adaptive behaviour was significantly affected by both predictor variables. The Fast Learners group improved slightly more than the Slow Learners group on all outcome measures after one year.

What you need to know:

We studied service data from a community-based autism intervention program to learn whether early learning rate and IQ at intake predict service outcomes. We found that both early learning rate and IQ predicted changes in autism severity, adaptive behaviour, and IQ after one year of treatment. Faster learners showed slightly greater improvements on all outcomes when compared to slower learners. This information may help clinicians to better plan treatment programs and to optimize progress.

Why is it important?

This study adds to the limited research on early learning rate as a predictor variable. We also addressed some limitations of past research. We used a larger sample size, and simultaneously evaluated IQ and early learning rate as predictors. Our findings are significant for clinicians working in EIBI programs with children with ASD. Clinicians who consider predictors at intake may be better able to plan a child's treatment program and ensure optimal progress.

St.Amant
Research · Recherche

Research Team

Maria Pongoski, Department of Psychology, University of Manitoba

Dr. Genevieve Roy-Wsiaki, Department of Psychology, Universite de St.Boniface and University of Manitoba

Dr. C.T. Yu, Department of Psychology, University of Manitoba and St.Amant Research Centre

Morena Miljkovic, Department of Psychology, University of Manitoba and St.Amant Research Centre

* Team members and affiliations may have changed

Additional Resources

Follow St.Amant Research Centre on Twitter @StAmantResearch

Project completed 2017.
Please see: http://stamant.ca/research/our-research/project-summaries/ for more project summaries.