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Review

Toward a technology of treatment individualization for young children with autism spectrum disorders

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Abstract

Although the etiology of autism spectrum disorders (ASD) and early development of the ASD are not yet well understood, recent research in the field of autism has heavily emphasized the importance of early intervention (i.e. treatment before the age of 4Â years). Currently, several methods have been demonstrated to be efficacious with some children however no treatment completely ameliorates the symptoms of ASD or works for all children with the disorder. The heterogeneity and developmental nature of the disorder make it unlikely that one specific treatment will be best for all children, or will work for any one child throughout his or her educational career. Thus, this paper examines early research validating different technologies for individualizing treatment. A discussion of current research on pre-treatment characteristics associated with

differential outcomes in treatment, including child, family, and practitioner variables; and how specific intervention techniques address each of those pre-treatment characteristics is provided. The ultimate goal of this line of research is to enable practitioners to prospectively tailor treatments to specific children and increase the overall rate of positives outcomes for children with autism. Research that furthers understanding of how to match clients with efficacious treatments will decrease the outcome variability that characterizes early intervention research at present, and provide for the most efficient allocation of resources during the critical early intervention time-period. This type of research is in its infancy, but is imperative if we are to determine a priori which treatment method will be most effective for a specific child.

Research highlights

â–º Treatment for autism spectrum disorders (ASD) must be highly individualized due to the heterogeneity of the disorder. â–º Well-designed programs that have systematically combined evidence-based interventions report good outcomes. â–º Specific methods of combining evidence-based practices have not been examined scientifically. â–º Research is needed that helps match child, parent and system characteristics with efficacious treatments to decrease outcome variability.

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Keywords

Autism spectrum disorder; Early intervention; Individualization; Treatment; Evidence-based practice

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