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## Suzanne Tinsley

Louisiana State University Health, USA

### The correlation of contextual factors and referral source for assessment and diagnosis of autistic spectrum disorder (ASD)

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a neuro-developmental disorder affecting a child’s ability to communicate and socially interact with others. Symptoms of ASD complex, and age of diagnosis can vary widely. Referral for assessment of ASD can be done through a variety of ways, including physician or from the federally funded Early Intervention System – Early Steps. In this study, we assessed the role of contextual factors in the source of referral for ASD assessment.

**Purpose:** To assess possible association between source of referral and race, Parish or maternal prenatal risk factors. Sample: 168 archived client records at regional children’s clinic.

**Methods:** Retrospective chart reviews were conducted looking at race of child, Parish they resided in, maternal prenatal risk factors and type of referral source, pediatrician, family care physician or Early Steps program.

**Findings:** Chi Square Analysis indicated a significant association (.001) between race and referral source. Black children were significantly less likely to be referred for assessment by a physician. No statistically significant relationships were found between referral source and Parish nor maternal prenatal risk factors.

**Conclusion:** Our findings indicate that race may play a role in how children are referred for assessment and diagnosis of ASD. Consistent with previous findings, Early Steps referral has allowed for diagnosis at an earlier age, thus qualifying children for services in an earlier time frame. Timely referral for assessment of ASD is vital as a delay in diagnosis results in loss of important intervention services that can improve the well-being of children with ASD.

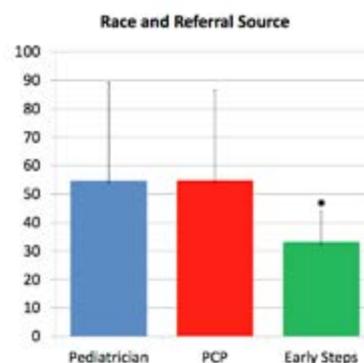


Figure 1: We identified racial differences in the mean (SD) percentage of children diagnosed with ASD across referral sources. While nearly 70% of identified children that were referred from the Early Steps program were African American, that percentage dropped below 50% for pediatricians and primary care physicians (PCP). \*p<0.05

### Biography

Suzanne Tinsley received her Master’s in Physical Therapy from Texas Woman’s University in 1986 and her PhD in Neuropharmacology from Louisiana State University Health Sciences Center-Shreveport in 1999. She is an Assistant Dean in the School of Allied Health Professions at LSU Health – Shreveport. She has joint appointments of Associate Professor in the Department of Rehabilitation Sciences and the Department of Neurology, LSU Health – Shreveport and holds the Richard C. Parks Endowed Professorship in Neurological Rehabilitation. She has presented both internationally and nationally as well as numerous continuing education seminars on the topics of pharmacology and neurologic rehabilitation.

stinsl@lsuhsc.edu