

Report by:

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I am a third year Doctoral student in the Clinical-Developmental Psychology program at York University, under the supervision of Dr. James Bebko. I have attended IMFAR for the past 4 years with great enthusiasm. This conference has been an important venue for both my clinical and research training in Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD). IMFAR provides developing scientist-practitioners an opportunity to network with other students, professionals, and researchers within the multidisciplinary field of ASD. This further allows for the establishment of collaborative partnerships across the country and continents. For example, through IMFAR, Dr. Bebko and I have partnered with Drs. Noens and van Berckelaer-Onnes at the University of Leiden, Netherlands, where they are currently using some of our research protocols to examine the symbolic cognitive development of children with ASD. Such collaboration offers opportunities to learn about research methodology, design, and theoretical foundations used within other autism research programs.

This year, I presented initial analyses of my dissertation research, titled "Evaluation of Child and Treatment Variables Related to Communication Outcomes Using the Picture Exchange Communication System," as well as research conducted by the Research Evaluation Team with Autism Ontario, titled "Evaluation of Autism Ontario's Realize Community Potential Program." These presentations contribute to the development of communication skills needed to disseminate research findings

PhD – Clinical Development
Psychology
York University

to a multidisciplinary field, including the lay population.

Finally, IMFAR provides a venue to exchange latest scientific findings and gain a better understanding of the nature, causes, and treatments for ASD. As a scientist-practitioner in training, it is critical to develop knowledge of how to translate research findings into clinical practice in order to best support families and individuals with ASD. This year's conference reflected increased awareness of comorbid psychopathology (e.g., anxiety, depression, and ADHD) within the ASD population. Dr. T. Charman presented on "Comorbid Behavioural Psychopathology and Autism Severity: Same or Different?" Using the Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Assessment, he demonstrated that approximately 70% of children with ASD met DSM-IV-TR criteria for an additional disorder. Further, he found that IQ and adaptive behaviour were related to symptoms of ASD but not comorbid psychiatric symptoms. Typical risk factors, such as socio-economic status, maternal depression and parent education, were not related to psychopathology in ASD. Dr. Charman suggested that the development of autism and comorbid disorders may arise from different etiologies. He also raised questions around assessment and diagnosis, including whether ASD should be exclusionary criteria for the diagnosis of other disorders.

This research paralleled an increased need for interventions that target comorbid symptoms of anxiety and depression in ASD. There were

IMFAR 2009

several posters examining the use of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) for individuals with ASD. Dr. J. Reaven demonstrated that a modified group CBT approach, "Face your Fears," was effective at decreasing symptoms of anxiety above that of traditional CBT. Reaven suggested several modifications to treatment, such as high involvement of parents,

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use of video modeling, and multiple-choice format for worksheets.

In summary, IMFAR provided an excellent avenue to exchange research findings and foster research partnerships. Thank you to Autism Ontario for their continued support of research and professional development in the field of autism.