

Emergency Preparedness for Children with Autism: A Needs Assessment for a Vulnerable Population

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Center for Bioterrorism and All-Hazards Preparedness (CBAP)

- National training center funded by the federal government – ASPR grant
- Serves as a national resource center in all-hazards preparedness
- Provides free CE/CME
- Partnerships:
 - National Education Strategy Team (NEST)
 - Others



CBAP Mission Statement

The CBAP is dedicated to the interdisciplinary education and training of professionals, health care workers, community groups, and executives at the local, state, and national levels.



CBAP Mission Statement

- The Center is dedicated to:
 - Prevent, protect, respond, prepare for, and recover from hazardous events
 - Emphasize vulnerable, underserved, hard to reach, and disadvantaged populations
 - Serve as a resource center in all-hazards preparedness
 - Perform research related to response, mitigation, and recovery



Background

- Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD)
- One in 150 children in the US (CDC 2007)
- Unique characteristics that may complicate disaster preparedness, response and recovery
- Specific needs that should be addressed before, during and after a disaster
 - Lack of specific materials and resources
 - Limited education/training focusing on special needs



The Baudhuin Preschool

- Internationally-recognized model program for children with ASD
- Designed for children 3 years of age through pre-kindergarten
- Program focuses on cognitive, social-emotional, adaptive, behavioral, motor and communication skill development within a relationship-based environment



Objectives

- Assess the need for education/training
- Develop and implement tailored educational/training program
- Evaluate the educational/training program
 - Parents of children with autism
 - Professionals working with this population



Methodology: Multi-method Design

- Needs assessment
 - Surveys
 - Structured interviews
- Development and implementation of educational/training program
 - Manuals
 - DVDs/CDs
 - Workshops
- Evaluation of educational/training program
 - Surveys
 - Structured interviews/focus groups



Methodology

- Surveys: (Summer and Fall, 2007)
 - 150 parent surveys
 - 80 staff surveys
 - Survey components:
 - Demographics
 - Level of preparedness
 - Preparedness practices
 - Educational/training preferences



Methodology

- Structured interviews
 - Guided questions:
 - to identify experiences in disasters
 - preparedness planning
 - specific needs of children
 - educational/training preferences
 - Program development (in progress)
 - Program implementation (Spring 2008)
 - Program evaluation (Fall 2008)



Results

Demographics

	Parents	Staff
# of respondents (response rate)	65 (43%)	23 (29%)
Sex	89% female	96% female
Age	21-48 years old	18-60 years old
Ethnicity	49% Hispanic 26% Caucasian 15% African American	17% Hispanic 65% Caucasian 9% Other
Level of education	69% college degree or above	87% college degree or above



Results

- Majority of participants believe that one can be prepared for emergencies and that there is a need for preparedness training/education
- 80% of parents and 87% of staff had no previous training in emergency preparedness



Results

Disaster experience

- 60% of parents and 35% of staff have experienced hurricanes
 - Only 23% of parents and 13% of staff felt completely prepared for a hurricane
- Only 9% of parents felt completely prepared at the time they were surveyed
- 68% of parents did not have a family plan
- Only 4% felt completely informed about community resources



Results

Child behavior

- 80% of parents did not report behavior changes in their child after the disaster
- 50% of the staff observed behavior changes after the disaster
- Most commonly observed symptoms:
 - Anxiety
 - Difficulty being separated from their parents
 - Aggressiveness



Results

Disaster planning

- Only 8% of the parents had involved their child in disaster planning
- Only one child was registered with the county emergency office
- None of the children were registered with a special needs shelter



Results

- Awareness of emergency plan at school

	Parents	Staff
Yes	14 (22%)	10 (44%)
No	50 (78%)	
Do Not Know		13 (56%)
Total	64 (100%)	23 (100%)



Results

Perceived education/training preferences

- Location for training:
 - Parents: at the child's school
 - Staff: workplace
- Training providers:
 - Parents: autism specialists, school personnel, and local government agencies
 - Staff: local government agencies, emergency or security personnel
- Format of training: majority preferred live in person or a combination of live and DVD



Conclusions

- There is a need for education/training programs that address the special needs of children with ASD



Conclusions

- Valid approach to:
 - Develop a tailor-made educational/training program to address special needs of children with autism
 - Identify important issues related to emergency preparedness for children with autism including the preferred format for program implementation



Limitations of the Study

- Low response rate for staff
- Lengthy survey
- Study population may not represent children with autism in Florida or in the U.S.



Future Directions

- Develop training program addressing the special needs highlighted by the surveys and structured interviews
- Implement educational/training program
- Evaluate program
- Expand research regarding emergency preparedness for individuals/families with ASD, as well as professionals involved in their care



Questions ?

Thank You !

<http://www.nova.edu/allhazards/>