

**Title:** Concordance Between Observer- and Parent-rated Parent Engagement in Community Early Intervention Sessions for Autism

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**Introduction:** Parent engagement in child services holds a significant role in the quality and effectiveness of care (Haine-Schlagel & Walsh, 2015). Understanding parent engagement in community early intervention (EI) services is vital as primary caregivers (including parents) play a key role in supporting positive child developmental outcomes (Vernon et al., 2012). Indeed, most evidence-based early interventions for autism involve parent coaching (in which the parent is trained to use intervention strategies; Schreibman et al., 2015), and active parent involvement is federally mandated in IDEA Part C early intervention services. However, relatively little is known about perceptions of parent engagement in EI services. Gaining insights into different perceptions of engagement, including parents' own perceptions, may be key to understanding perceptual barriers to ongoing engagement (e.g. clarity about treatment; differing expectancies between therapists and parents; Becker et al., 2017). Multi-rater assessment may also support accurate characterization of parent engagement in EI services (Haine-Schlagel & Walsh, 2015; Stratis & Lecavalier, 2014). This current study aims to: (1) describe levels of parent engagement across parent and observer ratings, and (2) assess the concordance between parent and observer ratings.

**Method:** Participants ( $N=49$  parents, 53.1% Latino; 36.7% White, Non-Latino; 10.2% Other) were drawn from *Project IMPACT for Toddlers*, an evidence-based, naturalistic developmental behavioral intervention aimed at empowering parents to enhance their child's social and communication skills (Stahmer et al., 2020). Participants were recruited from publicly funded early intervention services in California through eight community Part C agencies. Two measures were used to assess parent engagement: the Parent Participation Engagement Measure (PPEM) Observational Coding System (Haine-Schlagel & Martinez, 2014) and the PPEM Parent Report survey (Haine-Schlagel et al. 2016). Using PPEM Observational Coding System, parents' engagement was measured by trained coders after reviewing videorecorded early intervention sessions. Coders assigned ratings on a 7-point Likert scale to five items assessing aspects of parent engagement (e.g. asking questions, participation in session activities). Using the PPEM Parent Report, parents rated their session engagement through 4 monthly surveys. Parents rated five items assessing parents' participation in their most recent intervention session on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Not at all) to 5 (Very Much). A Pearson correlation was run to assess the linear relationship between observational ratings and the PPEM Parent Report ratings survey.

**Results:** Overall, parents reported high levels of engagement in sessions (total PPEM Mean= 4.21 out of 5, SD = .61; range: 2.06 to 5.00). Observer ratings fell in the low/moderate range on average (Mean = 2.86 out of 6; SD = .81; range: 1.00 to 4.33). Parent and observer reports of parent engagement were not significantly correlated with one another ( $r = .117$ ,  $p = .435$ ).

**Discussion:** Findings suggest that there is low alignment in parent and observer perceptions of parent engagement. These findings highlight the importance of including multi-rater assessment to accurately capture varying viewpoints of parent engagement. Parents largely perceive themselves to be highly engaged when observers do not suggest that there may be perceptual barriers that impact treatment engagement (i.e., clarity about what is means to engagement in treatment; Becker et al., 2017). Future research may more explicitly explore these perceptual barriers to engagement, as well as assess whether alignment differs for therapist report of parent engagement.

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