

# Characterizing Therapeutic Service Utilization Among Florida Autistic Children & Adults: Demographic Differences & Trends Over Time (2012–2020)

Amber M. Angell, PhD, OTR/L<sup>1</sup>, Susmita Datta, PhD<sup>2</sup>, Guangjin Luo<sup>2</sup>, Camille Parchment<sup>1</sup>, Erica Shoemaker, MD<sup>1</sup>, Timothy Reistetter<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>University of Southern California, Los Angeles, California, United States; <sup>2</sup>University of Florida, Gainesville, Florida, United States; <sup>3</sup>UT Health San Antonio, Galveston, TX, USA

DOI: [10.5014/ajot.2023.77S2-PO243](https://doi.org/10.5014/ajot.2023.77S2-PO243)

Date presented: April 22, 2023

Primary Author and Speaker: Amber M. Angell, [aangell@usc.edu](mailto:aangell@usc.edu)

**PURPOSE:** The purpose of this study was to establish contemporary patterns of therapeutic service utilization (occupational and physical therapy) among the Florida autistic population. Therapeutic services may support community participation of autistic individuals, but access to these services appears to decrease with age. There is a lack, however, of recent research investigating these trends.

**DESIGN:** This retrospective observational study is a secondary data analysis of healthcare claims data using the OneFlorida Data Trust. We hypothesized that among autistic individuals, therapeutic service utilization decreases with age.

**METHOD:** For the OneFlorida population aged 3–64 with an autism spectrum disorder diagnosis, we included utilization for N=92,253 patients with any therapeutic encounter in the measurement period (2012–2020). We defined therapeutic utilization as the number of ambulatory visits with a primary provider specialty code for occupational or physical therapy. We treated age at first encounter and year as independent variables, and number of utilizations as dependent variables. Controlling for covariates (sex, urbanicity, race, and ethnicity), we conducted a mixed-effect Poisson model.

**RESULTS:** Holding all other explanatory variables fixed, therapeutic service utilization decreased with age and year ( $p < 0.0001$ ). Physical therapy was less frequently utilized than occupational therapy ( $p < 0.0001$ ). Overall therapeutic utilization was less in males vs. females ( $p < 0.0001$ ) and greater in urban vs. rural areas ( $p < 0.0001$ ). Utilization was less for patients identified as non-Hispanic/non-Latinx ( $p < 0.0001$ ).

**CONCLUSION:** Therapeutic service utilization decreased with age and measurement year for the Florida autistic population. Changes in clinical practice and healthcare policy may explain changes over time.

**IMPACT STATEMENT:** Provider referrals and autism insurance mandates may help to sustain therapeutic service utilization beyond childhood for autistic individuals.

## References

- Song, W., Shea, L., Nonnemacher, S. L., Brusilovskiy, E., Townley, G., & Salzer, M. S. (2022). Community participation comparison between adults on the autism spectrum and adults in the general population. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 52, 1610–1621. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-021-05059-9>
- Tomchek, S., LaVesser, P., Watling, R., & DeLany, J. (2010). The scope of occupational therapy services for individuals with an autism spectrum disorder across the life course. *The American Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 64(6), S125–S136. <https://doi.org/10.5014/ajot.2010.64S125>
- Oliveira, K. S. C., Fontes, D. E., Longo, E., Leite, H. R., & Camargos, A. C. R. (2021). Motor skills are associated with participation of children with autism spectrum disorder. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-021-05318-9>
- Ohl, A., Schelly, D., Brown, D., Schulze, N., Smith, M., & Davies, B. (2020). A survey of occupational therapy services provided for adults with autism spectrum disorder. *The Open Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 8(2), 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.15453/2168-6408.1620>