

## **Investigating the Role of Demographic Factors on Social-Communication and Play Scores for Autistic Children Before Intervention**

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Background: Autism spectrum disorder, or ASD, is a neurodevelopmental disorder that can impact everyday functioning through difficulties in social communication and interaction and restricted, repetitive behaviors. The current study investigated children involved in an ASAP intervention trial and associations between how demographic factors and social-communication and play skills. Methods: Researchers measured instances of social interaction, requesting, and joint attention during observational recordings. We compared social-communication and play scores with participants' parent education, parent income, or race. Results: The One-Way ANOVAs indicated that there was a statistically significant relationship between race and joint attention, with white children scoring lower in this category than non-white children. There was also an unexpected negative relationship between income and social-communication skills and play skills. A linear regression between income and structured play assessment (SPA) scores shows a smaller but expected positive relationship. Limitations: Future research should account for the nesting effect from randomization of classrooms instead of individuals. Conclusions: Results from these studies in public schools can help identify areas that need increased autism resources to improve diagnosis and treatment outcomes. More research is needed on a representative sample to effectively improve the personalization of ASAP intervention strategies and to further the intervention's general application.