

Abstract

Objective: Explore the preliminary outcomes associated with an interdisciplinary sensory friendly vaccine clinic for autistic youth.

Brief Methodology: Single-group pre-post, mixed-methods.

Participants: n = 13 families of children with autism

Results: High levels of satisfaction and acceptability reported.

Conclusion: Interdisciplinary collaborations in implementing sensory friendly healthcare can benefit autistic children and their families.

Background

- Autistic individuals often experience hyper- and hypo-sensitivity to sensory stimuli and poor sensory integration.^{1,2}
- Healthcare visits can be challenging for autistic individuals due to the sensory characteristics of clinical environments.³⁻⁵
- Sensory adaptations within clinical environments and interprofessional collaboration can be beneficial
- Limited research has been conducted related to the experience of autistic children receiving vaccinations in clinical settings.^{3,4,6}

Participants (n = 13)

- Age range = 5-10 years
- Majority of sample: White (n = 9), non-Hispanic (n = 11)
- The most common primary method of communication was spoken language (n = 9), followed by communication device (n = 3).
- Caregivers reported a variety of sensory needs during screening (Figure 1).

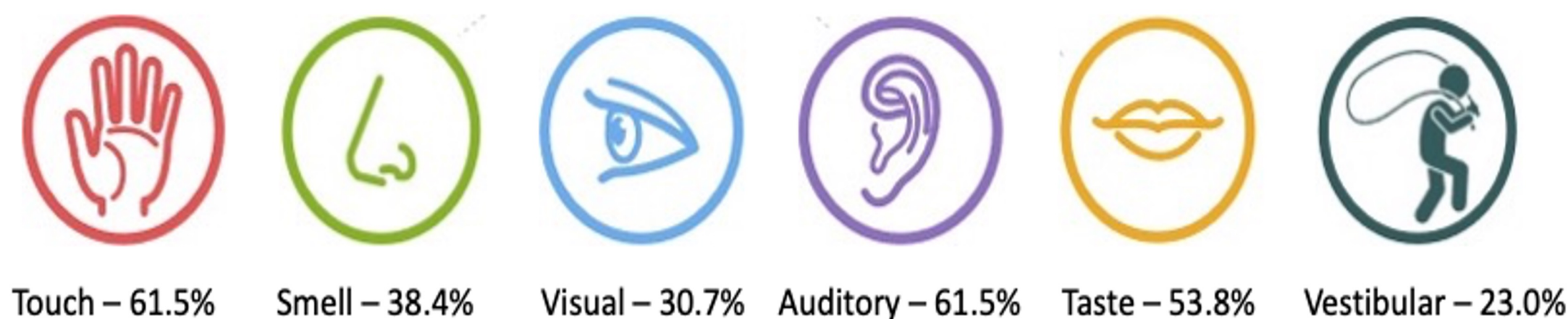


Figure 1. Percentage of registered participants with each identified sensory need.

Methods

Procedures:

A manualized protocol, baseline characterization and outcome measures, and a sensory system training were developed.



Participants were recruited from professional networks via an email flyer.



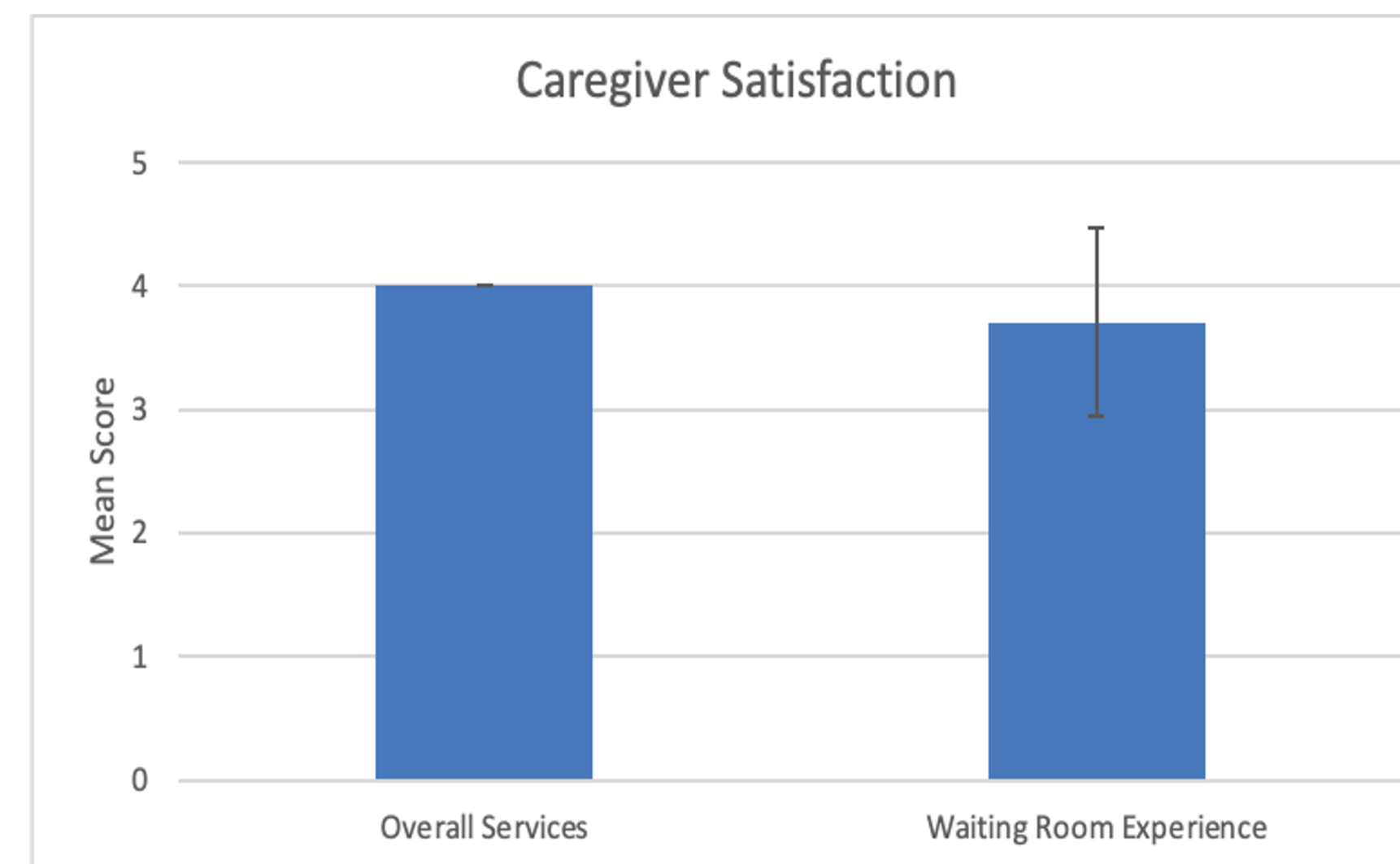
Vaccine clinics were scheduled and carried out by an interprofessional team at the Nemours Swank Autism Center.



Satisfaction surveys were completed by the participants' caregiver at the clinic or virtually and scored using a 4-point Likert scale.

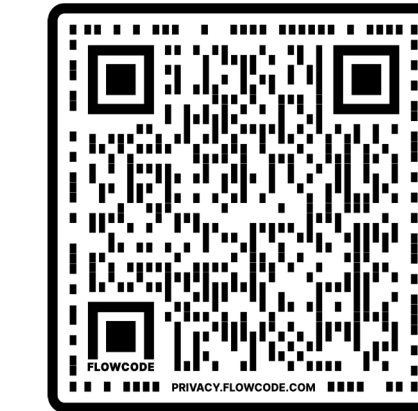
Results

- 100% of registered children successfully received their vaccinations.
- 100% of respondents reported that the vaccine clinic met almost all of their needs and that they would return to the program if they needed another vaccination.

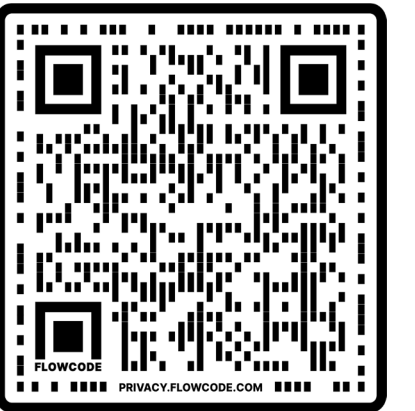


Note. Post survey had a 53.85% response rate.

Sensory Systems Training



Vaccine Clinic Manual



Post-Clinic Caregiver Responses

"The staff was amazing times a million!"

"The whole team works very hard on making not just the patient but the family feel at ease."

"I will gladly drive 125 miles round trip."

Discussion

- Pilot data supports the use of sensory adaptations for autistic children during vaccine administration.
- Sensory adaptations were rated with high levels of satisfaction, acceptability, and usefulness by participating caregivers.
- Feedback from participants indicate that areas for improvement could be in enhancing the waiting room experience or providing additional sensory toys.
- Preliminary findings reinforce importance of utilizing a manualized protocol to ensure successful implementation of sensory-friendly vaccine clinic procedures.

Conclusion

- This study serves to advance the current body of evidence supporting sensory friendly healthcare interventions for autistic children.
- Occupational therapy practitioners can serve as valuable consultants in outpatient primary care services.
- The sensory friendly vaccine clinic underscores the benefits of interprofessional collaboration in healthcare settings shown in previous studies.
- Researchers should implement initiatives for parent education to increase awareness and understanding of sensory challenges and the benefits of sensory adaptations.