

# The Experiences of Behaviour Interventionists Who Work with Children with Autism in Families' Homes: Qualitative Variables

Miriam Elfert and Pat Mirenda, University of British Columbia

## RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Behaviour interventionists (BIs) often provide 1:1 early intensive behavioural intervention (EIBI) to young children with autism in their homes. With the exception of a report by Elfert and Mirenda (2006), little published research exists on the experiences of this emerging professional group

As part of a larger study, this qualitative study explored BIs' perspectives of occupational stressors and rewards.

## RESEARCH METHODS

### Participants

N = 65 BIs (63 females and 2 males) who worked for 1 of 6 agencies in 2 Canadian provinces. All BIs worked for agencies that provided EIBI to children with autism in families' homes.

Mean age: 27.3 years (range 20 to 46 years)

Mean years of education: 14.9 years (range 12 to 18 years)

Mean length of experience working with children with autism: 35.4 months (range 6 to 180 months)

Mean hours of work per week: 29.3 hours (range 4 to 44)

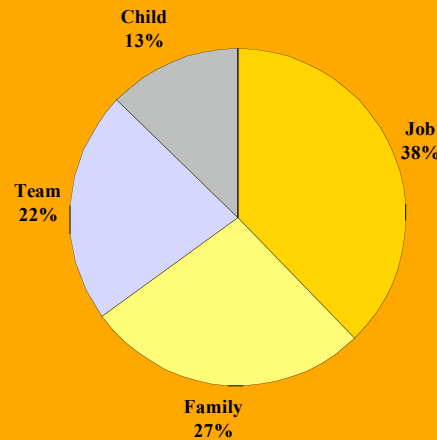
BIs were asked to answer two open-ended questions:

1. What do you feel is/are the most challenging or stressful aspects of your job as a behaviour interventionist?
2. What do you feel is/are the most rewarding or enjoyable aspects of your job as a behaviour interventionist?")

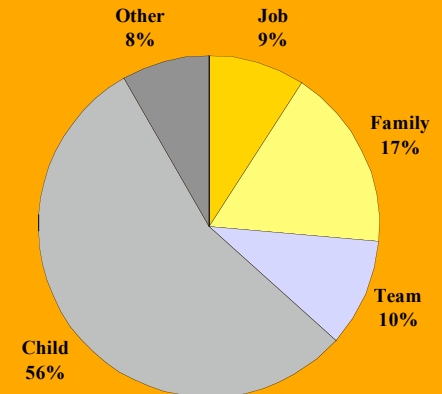
## DATA ANALYSIS

Participants' written responses were evaluated using a content analysis with an "emergent coding" of the content, in which a coding scheme is established after all responses are collected. Inter-rater reliability ranged from 95%-99%.

Sources of BI Stress



Sources of BI Reward



## RESULTS

BIs reported that the most challenging aspects of their work were related to the workplace (38%), family (27%), team (22%) and child variables (13%). In particular, BIs identified feeling responsible for children's progress; working in families' private living spaces; experiencing conflicts, inconsistencies, and lack of support from families and team members; and dealing with child problem behavior as their greatest challenges. The most rewarding job aspects were related to child (55%), family (17%), team (11%), workplace (9%) and other variables (8%). In particular, positive job aspects included seeing children make progress, helping families, and working as part of well-functioning teams.

## CONCLUSION

These descriptive data provide important information to service agencies providing EIBI in family homes. This information is absent from current literature, even though BIs are key team members. Typically, BIs work alone and intensively with children with autism for low wages, and job turnover is often high. Service providers need to be aware of the challenges BIs face, so that they can provide appropriate supports and training that enable BIs to achieve success in a complex and challenging job.

Email communication: Miriam Elfert [melfert@interchange.ubc.ca](mailto:melfert@interchange.ubc.ca)