ABSTRACT

Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) are being diagnosed at alarmingly high rates and school psychologists are charged with evaluating, identifying, and providing interventions for students with ASD in the United States’ public school systems. A national survey probed Nationally Certified School Psychologists (NCSP) to determine their level of knowledge in the area of autism assessment; the assessment methods, measures, and techniques they employed; their level of training; and their level of preparation and confidence. Results indicated training positively affected NCSPs knowledge about autism; their levels of involvement with students with autism; and their perceived levels of preparation to work with this population. Of the 662 participants, the majority accurately identified true and false statements about autism and the diagnostic features suggesting they had a clear understanding of how to diagnose autism. Participants with more training reported an increased level of involvement on multidisciplinary teams and an ability to diagnose autism when compared to those with less training. Brief rating scales were among the most commonly used instruments, while lengthier, more robust diagnostic instruments were among the least-often employed suggesting school psychologists are not trained or are too strapped for time and resources to use these instruments. Participants felt more prepared to provide consultation and assessment services and less prepared to provide interventions. More than half (57.5%) of participants reported they had formal training (completed formal course work or internship experience) in autism, but just over 40% had only informal training in the form of workshop or in-service attendance. The National Research Council (2001) stresses that workshops are not an appropriate substitute for effective training, supervision, and
consultation, indicating too many of the nation’s school psychologists lack sufficient training in the area of autism. These data and previous research (i.e., Filipek et al., 1999; Ikeda, 2002; Spears, Tollefson, & Simpson, 2001) suggest school psychologists need more formal training and experience in meeting the needs of individuals identified with autism.