

Report by:

Varakini Parameswaran

Student Researcher

University of Windsor

Thanks to Autism Ontario's travel bursary, I was fortunate to have the opportunity to attend IMFAR for the first time. This conference gave me a lot of insight into ASDs and widened my views onto the different kinds of research being conducted worldwide, ranging from medical research, screenings, epidemiology studies, and sound vocalizations. As an undergraduate majoring in Behaviour, Cognition and Neuroscience at the University of Windsor, this event gave me the opportunity to meet with graduate students and connect with scientists, clinicians and professors in my local area as well as worldwide.

The first conference highlight was watching my supervisor, Dr. Marcia Gragg, present our work on "Autism: Count Us In! Parent Telephone Hotline for Community Screening for Autism Spectrum Disorders". The screening for ASD was done through a telephone procedure which was low-cost and well accepted. As well, seeing my colleague Lisa Barzotto present her work on "Perceptions of Applied Behaviour Analysis for Children with Autism: Technical vs. Conversational Language". This research points out that using plain English results in a greater acceptance of ABA and jargon-free language makes it easier to teach ABA to lay people.

The second highlight was being immersed with different kinds of research that are being conducted world-wide on ASD. Such an example was the keynote address of Dr. Patricia Kuhl on "Language and Learning and the 'Social Brain' ". I never thought to put phonetic learning, social interactions and autism together until I listened to the keynote speaker. It was said from the results that "children with autism show little interest in speech, which could prevent language mapping."

The third highlight was attending presentations that have also sparked a personal interest: Theory of Mind, Emotions and Early Cognitive Development. It was interesting to find out the different methods that are being applied by other researchers around the world. Although the methodology was different, we are tackling the same questions. It was stimulating to learn the different methods and analyze each method to see its strengths and weaknesses.

I would like to thank Autism Ontario for giving me the opportunity to attend IMFAR. I look forward to attending future conferences and I recommend every student researcher to go to the conference if he/she has the opportunity to do so.