

## **Leisure Participation among Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders from Childhood through Adolescence**

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**Introduction:** Participation in leisure occupations is an important predictor for future mental and physical health and life satisfaction, particularly in adolescents and adults with autism spectrum disorders (ASD). Children with ASD have physiological, cognitive and social challenges that limit their participation in leisure activities. Prior studies have found that diversity of leisure activity participation decreases between ages 6 and 12 but patterns through adolescence are not known. Understanding the patterns across the child's life can help us to better anticipate and address the needs of those individuals.

**Objectives:** Describe the patterns of leisure participation across the ages of the children and adolescence with ASD and compare them to social severity and to repetitive behaviors.

**Method:** The Children's Assessment of Participation and Enjoyment, the Social Responsiveness Scale 2, and the Repetitive Behavior Scale, Revised were used to assess participation, social severity and repetitive behaviors in 90 children and adolescents (age 6 - 19) with ASD.

Differences in patterns of leisure participation were examined across the ages of the children and compared to social severity and repetitive behaviors.

**Results:** Although diversity of leisure activity participation decreased between ages 6 and 12, it tended to stabilize during adolescence, but remained very limited. Activity diversity was significantly correlated with social severity and repetitive behaviors.

**Conclusion:** Findings suggest that targeting social intervention across childhood and into adolescence could improve participation in recreation and leisure. Increased participation in recreation and leisure could improve mental health, physical health, and life satisfaction as individuals with ASD transition to adulthood.