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Impact of Equine Assisted Activities and Therapies on
Child Behavior and Family Wellbeing
Amy Traylor, Laura Hopson, Cecile Komara, Autumn Anderson
The University of Alabama
Shelley Jones, Joy O'Neal, Ellen Davis, Erin Hall, and Lizz Mastrandonas
The Red Barn

ABSTRACT

- In this mixed methods study, we interviewed parents of children with disabilities receiving Equine Assisted Activities and Therapies (EAAT) to explore parental perceptions of EAAT on child behavior and family well-being and identify elements of EAAT contributing to improvements.
- Parents completed the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ).
- Results indicate children served by EAAT had more social, emotional, and behavioral difficulties than the general population. Parents perceived physical and emotional and family well-being benefits to participating in EAAT.

Figures & Graphs:

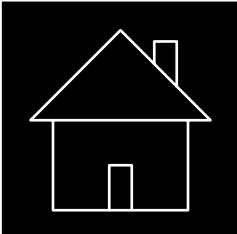
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INTRODUCTION



- Equine-assisted activities and therapies (EAAT) are increasing in popularity among social workers and other behavioral health professionals.
- Limited research examines EAAT’s impact on child and family well-being.
- This mixed methods study explores parental perceptions of EAAT on child behavior and family well-being.

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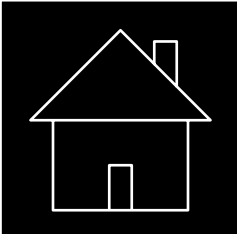
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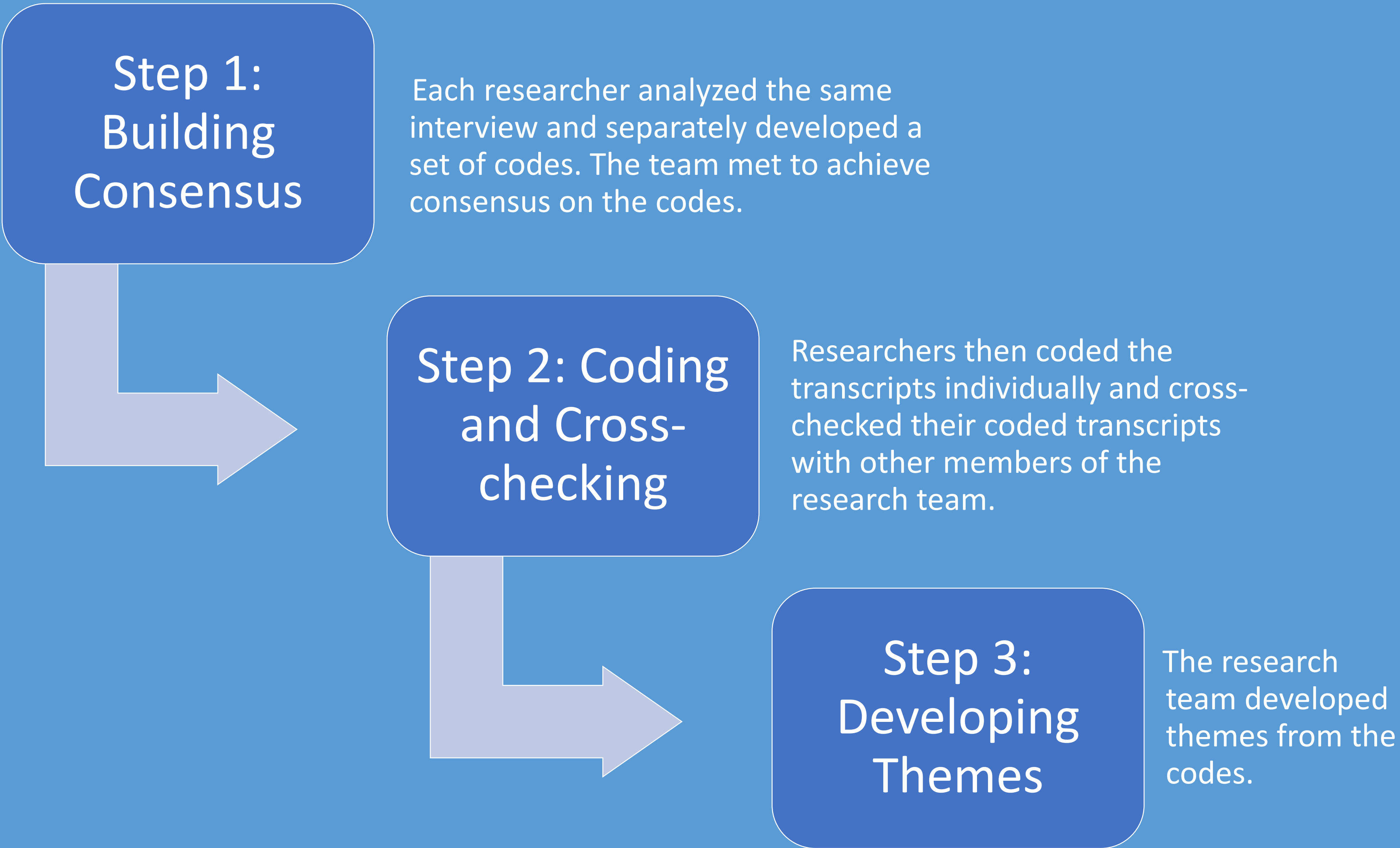
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1. Parents (n=21) of children with disabilities receiving EAAT services and a PATH-certified EAAT instructor (n=1) participated in interviews about children’s experiences with EAAT.
2. Parents completed the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ), a reliable and valid measure of children’s emotional symptoms, conduct, hyperactivity, social skills, and peer relationships.
3. Survey data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and were compared with national norms.
4. Interviews were approximately 45 minutes in length, were audio-recorded, and transcribed verbatim.
5. The research team analyzed the interviews using a three-step approach.

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METHODS

Qualitative Analysis



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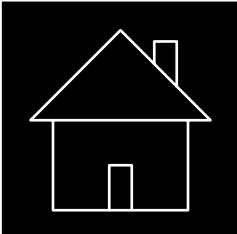
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FIGURES & GRAPHS

Figure 1: SDQ Means and Standard Deviations with National Norms

	Study Sample	National Norm	80% of population	10% of population	5% of population
Total difficulties	16.8 (6.7)	7.2 (5.8)	0-13	14-16	17-19
Emotional problems	4.7 (2.4)	1.5 (1.9)	0-3	4	5-6
Conduct problems	1.9 (2.0)	1.2 (1.7)	0-2	3	4-5
Hyperactivity-inattention	5.2 (2.6)	2.9 (2.6)	0-5	6-7	8
Peer problems	4.6 (2.1)	1.5 (1.6)	0-2	3	4
Prosocial behavior	7.3 (2.2)	8.8 (1.7)	8-10	7	6

Figure 2: Themes and Supporting Quotes

Theme	Quotes
Physical Benefits	I think it’s the rhythm of the horse too that’s like not even physically with him but the social and emotional part where he feels like he’s calm, and I don’t think that anything can do that other than a horse. I’m truly a believer in that.
	I really think it helps 'cause when we first started, even just sitting on the floor, she would get tired ... Maintaining her balance on the horse, not needing as much support from the two sides supporters to keep her balance, so she can adjust with the horses.
Emotional Benefits	It does help get her ready to go back to school. Because in the school setting she's got more of those like, “Hey, you've gotta be a little bit patient. It's not one-on-one, you're sitting and doing an activity at a table or with a group or whatever that is not just about you.”
	I’ve just seen a lot of confidence come out of him. I’ve seen a decrease in that anxious—the way he communicates anxiously there in the beginning. I see more control and confidence now, personally.
Family Wellbeing	Normally, in the past, she would've blamed her sister... I would've had to been defusing that situation..., but she didn't blame her the entire time. She just calmly worked, and we got everything taken care of...That was a big step for her
	Definitely, I think it helps him probably, too, with his confidence because this is something that his brothers don’t get to do...so it gives him this worth of, “I get to do this; they don’t. I’m good at it.”

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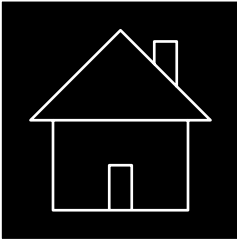
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RESULTS

- Themes elicited from codes related to:
 - Physical benefits, including gross motor control, balance, and core muscle strength;
 - Emotional benefits, including reduced anxiety and improved self-control and self-confidence;
 - Improved family well-being, including improved communication among family members, improved sibling relationships, and reduced emotional stress.
- Survey data indicated that, overall, children served by the program had more difficulties related to emotional problems, conduct, hyperactivity, and peer relationships than the general population.



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Figures & Graphs:

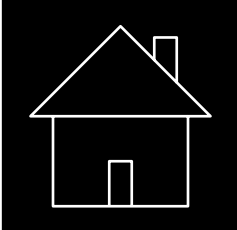
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CONCLUSIONS

The findings add to the EAAT knowledge base by giving a voice to parents of children receiving services.

Survey data point to stressors faced by children with disabilities and their parents. Parents perceive strong physical and emotional benefits of EAAT for their children and improved family well-being.

Results suggest that social workers interested in using EAAT with youth focus on holistic child and family outcomes, aiming for improved emotional and physical health, as well as reduced family stress.



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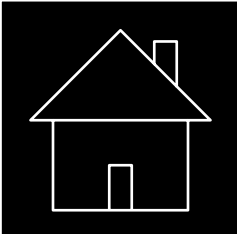
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