Therapy access among children with autism spectrum disorder, cerebral palsy, and attention-deficit-hyperactivity disorder: a population-based study.

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AIM:
This study examined cross-sectional population-based rates in reported need and unmet need for occupational, physical, and speech therapy services in children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) compared with children with attention-deficit-hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and cerebral palsy (CP).

METHOD:
The 2005-2006 and 2009-2010 (USA) National Survey of Children with Special Health Care data sets were used to compare therapy need and unmet need among children younger than 18 years with ASD (n=5178), ADHD (n=20566), and CP (n=1183). Bivariate approaches and multivariate logistic regression using imputed data were used to identify associations between child and family characteristics, and access to therapy services.

RESULTS:
After adjusting for other variables, children with ASD had a significantly greater likelihood of having an unmet therapy need compared with children with ADHD (odds ratio [OR] 1.66, 95% confidence interval [CI] 1.36-2.03), but a similar unmet need as children with CP (OR 1.30, 95% CI 0.97-1.74). Factors associated with unmet need included survey year, younger child age, no health insurance, and increased functional and behavioral difficulties.

INTERPRETATION:
Children in our sample had greater unmet therapy needs in 2009 than in 2005. Caregiver-reported reasons for unmet need included cost and school resources. Research examining future trends in therapy access are warranted for children with ASD and CP.