

Research project: Diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorders: A Study on Case Constructions in relation to Children from Families with Migration Experiences.

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Team: Simone Seitz (PI), Sara Baroni, Anna Frizzarin

Abstract

The increasing global prevalence of autism spectrum disorder (ASD) diagnoses points to the social constitution of the associated case constructs and has sparked a currently growing body of research investigating the social determinants behind this trend. One area of particular interest is the high prevalence of ASD diagnoses among children from families with experiences of migration which raises critical questions about social dynamics behind, in particular on conceptualizations of normality contributing to the production of difference and the constitution of ASD cases. This is because specific social characteristics, such as migration experience, may be pathologised by being understood as risk, so that culturally biased diagnostic procedures and interventions may inadvertently reinforce inequalities. The underlying expectations of 'normality' that influence case constructions can also unwillingly disempower migrated families in the diagnostic process. However, these inequality-relevant dynamics can be obscured by an 'essentialising' understanding of ASD.

DARE takes up the related research desideratum and responds to a request from the Sozialfachbereich Autismus - Überetsch/Unterland. Through a qualitative case study, we explore the "case construction" processes of ASD diagnoses, focusing on the journey from identification to formal diagnosis, from the perspective of the different actors involved. Using a triangulated data collection approach, the study combines: 1) document analysis of local regulations and documents (normative level); 2) semi-structured interviews with experts involved in ASD diagnosis processes; 3) semi-structured interviews with families of diagnosed children. Specifically, the research project aims to shed light on the cultural, social, and contextual factors shaping diagnostic processes, with the overarching aim of promoting equitable and culturally sensitive practices in the ASD diagnostic process.