Frequency and pattern of documented diagnostic features and the age of autism identification.

OBJECTIVE: The DSM-IV-TR specifies 12 behavioral features that can occur in hundreds of possible combinations to meet diagnostic criteria for autism spectrum disorder (ASD). This paper describes the frequency and variability with which the 12 behavioral features are documented in a population-based cohort of 8-year-old children under surveillance for ASD, and examines whether documentation of certain features, alone or in combination with other features, is associated with earlier age of community identification of ASD.


RESULTS: The median age at ASD identification was inversely associated with the number of documented behavioral features, decreasing from 8.2 years for children with only seven behavioral features to 3.8 years for children with all 12. Documented impairments in nonverbal communication, pretend play, inflexible routines, and repetitive motor behaviors were associated with earlier identification, whereas impairments in peer relations, conversational ability, and idiosyncratic speech were associated with later identification.

CONCLUSIONS: The age dependence of some of the behavioral features leading to an autism diagnosis, as well as the inverse association
Frequency and pattern of documented diagnostic features and the age of autism identification.

between age at identification and number of behavioral features documented, have implications for efforts to improve early identification. Progress in achieving early identification and provision of services for children with autism may be limited for those with fewer ASD behavioral features, as well as features likely to be detected at later ages.

DOI
10.1016/j.jaac.2013.01.014

Alternate Journal
J Am Acad Child Adolesc Psychiatry

PubMed ID
23582871

PubMed Central ID
PMC4051284

Grant List
LJS9 / Intramural CDC HHS / United States
P30 HD003352 / HD / NICHD NIH HHS / United States
P30HD03352 / HD / NICHD NIH HHS / United States
UR3/CCU523235 / PHS HHS / United States
UR3/DD000078 / DD / NCBDD CDC HHS / United States
UR3/DD000677 / DD / NCBDD CDC HHS / United States