Autism in children: The importance of early detection and intervention

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Background

Early detection of autism followed by intervention and treatment of autism symptoms has been associated with better outcome. Still, milder forms of autism spectrum disorders are often recognized late in childhood or even in adolescence.

Methods


Paper 2: Evaluation of The Observation Scale for Autism (OSA), a new screening tool designed for the detection of autism spectrum disorders before the age of three years. Children with autism spectrum disorders, children with Down syndrome and typically developing children were assessed.

Paper 3: For a period of two years all children coming for their standard 30 months check-up at 23 out of 25 Children Health Centers (CHC) in Malmoe were screened with the OSA. Children who screened positive for autism were referred for neuropsychiatric assessment.

Paper 4: Evaluation of a comprehensive, behavioural intervention program comparing three groups of children diagnosed with autism. Group 1 started the program at 3-4 years of age, group 2 at 4-5 years of age, and group 3 were not involved in the intervention program.

Preliminary results

1. The composite variable "any obstetrical risk factor" was a risk factor for autism but not for Asperger syndrome. Maternal country of birth outside the Nordic countries was positively associated with autism but not with Asperger syndrome.

2. The OSA was validated by assessing 37 children diagnosed with spectrum disorders, 23 with Down syndrome and 26 typically developing children. The children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorders showed significantly higher scores compared to the two other study groups.

3. More than 2700 children were assessed with the OSA at the CHCs, and 1.5% of the children screened over cutoff indicative for autism.
4. During spring 2015 the last 20 out of 110 preschool children with autism will be assessed in the intervention study.

**Importance**

The project underscores the importance of early detection and intervention in autism.

**Publications**