

**Diagnosing Autism Spectrum Disorders in Children:  
Medical and Social Perspectives**

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**Ginny Russell**

## **Abstract**

In this submission, five articles are presented examining one theme: diagnosis of autism spectrum disorders (ASD) in children. Three articles provides perspectives on various social and medical factors that influence the diagnosis of ASD, and the others examine social and behavioural outcomes for children diagnosed with ASD. One article provides an in depth examination of the dilemmas of diagnosis from a parental perspective.

The research utilized both qualitative and quantitative methods. A secondary analysis of a longitudinal birth cohort study revealed that there were a number of children who had autistic traits equally severe as those with clinical diagnosis. Further analysis exposed a possible gender bias in diagnosis. Outcomes for children with ASD diagnoses were worse than for those without diagnoses but with comparable behaviours as preschoolers. ASD diagnosis apparently had no positive effect on the developmental trajectory of prosocial behaviour. The implications of these results are discussed.

Analysis of qualitative data collected in semi-structured interviews with parents of both diagnosed and undiagnosed children exposed dilemmas faced by parents as they contemplated an ASD diagnosis and highlighted parental action to de-stigmatise the condition after diagnosis had been applied.

The body of work as a whole falls at the junction of clinical and educational psychology, developmental psychology, social psychology, social psychiatry, sociology and epidemiology. It draws attention to a number of social processes that contribute to ASD diagnosis. Overall, it is argued, the work supports the conceptualisation of ASD as both a biologically and socially determined condition.

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