

AN INCIDENCE STUDY OF DIAGNOSED AUTISM-SPECTRUM DISORDERS AMONG IMMIGRANTS TO THE NETHERLANDS

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Objective: To estimate the risk of developing autism-spectrum disorder (ASD) in children born to immigrants as compared to children of Dutch-born parents.

Method: Retrospective, population-based cohort study of all live births (N= 106,953) between 1998 and 2007 in a circumscribed geographical region in the Netherlands. Cohort members were linked to the Psychiatric Case Register to identify diagnosed cases.

Results: 518 cases of ASD were identified, including 150 children with autism and 368 children with Asperger syndrome or PDD-NOS. Children born to migrants from developing countries were at significantly lower risk of ASD (rate ratio (RR)= 0.6, 95% (CI) 0.5-0.9) than children of Dutch-born parents. Within the ASD group, the risk for the subgroup with Asperger syndrome and PDD-NOS was reduced (RR= 0.4, 95% CI 0.3-0.6), whereas that for narrowly defined autism was non-significantly increased (RR= 1.4, 95% CI 0.9-2.4). Migrant groups did not differ in age at diagnosis.

Conclusion: The results echo Swedish findings indicating a reversal of risk gradient in children of parents from developing countries, specifically a decreased risk for high-functioning and increased risk for low-functioning autism.