

Autism spectrum disorders & other developmental disorders

From raising awareness to building capacity

World Health Organization, Geneva, Switzerland
16 -18 September 2013



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WHO coordination and supervision

Chiara Servili (Technical officer, Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse, World Health Organization, Geneva, Switzerland) initiated and coordinated the development and production of this publication.

Shekhar Saxena (Director, Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse, World Health Organization, Geneva, Switzerland) provided overall direction and supervision.

WHO interns who provided support

Lucia Chen and Laura Pacione (WHO/Geneva)

Contributors

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Special thanks to all colleagues who facilitated group works and/or moderated sessions (in alphabetical order): Merry Barua (Action For Autism/India), Myron Belfer (Harvard Medical school/USA), Dan Chisholm (WHO/Geneva), Petrus De Vries (University of Cape Town/South Africa), Tarun Dua (WHO/Geneva), Maureen Durkin (University of Wisconsin-Madison/USA), Julian Eaton (CBM International), Francesca Happe (International Society for Autism Research), Eileen Hopkins (ICare4Autism/USA), Olayinka Omigbodun (International association for Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and Allied Profession), John Peabody (Qure Healthcare/USA), Catherine Rice (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention/USA), Michael Rosanoff (Autism Speaks), Yutaro Setoya (WHO/Geneva), Andy Shih (Autism Speaks/USA), Norbert Skokauskas (World Psychiatric Association), Mark Van Ommeren (WHO/Geneva), Taghi Yasamy (WHO/Geneva).

Technical editing

Tim France (Inis Communication/UK)

Graphic design and layout

Orestis Sideratos (Fresh Design/Greece)

Administrative support

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1. Introduction

Developmental disorders

- Developmental disorders are a group of conditions with onset in infancy or childhood and characterized by impairment or delay in functions related to the central nervous system maturation.
- They may affect a single area of development (e.g. specific developmental disorders of speech and language, of scholastic skills, and/or motor function) or several (e.g. pervasive developmental disorders and intellectual disability).

Autism spectrum disorders

- The umbrella term 'autism spectrum disorders' (ASDs) covers conditions such as autism, childhood disintegrative disorder and Asperger syndrome.
- Core symptoms include a variable mixture of impaired capacity for reciprocal social communication

Epidemiological data estimate the global prevalence of ASDs to be one person in 160, accounting for more than 7.6 million disability-adjusted life years and 0.3% of the global burden of disease. This prevalence estimate represents an average figure, and reported prevalence varies substantially across studies. Some well-controlled studies have, however, reported rates that are substantially higher. The prevalence of ASDs in many low- and middle-income countries is as yet unknown.

Worldwide, people with ASDs and other developmental disorders represent a vulnerable group. They are often subject to stigma and discrimination, including unjust deprivation of health and education services, and opportunities to engage and participate in their communities. Globally, access to services and support for people with developmental disorders is inadequate, and families of those affected often carry substantial emotional, economic and care burdens.

Autism was brought to the attention of Member States and the United Nations General Assembly in January 2008, when the General Assembly adopted resolution A/RES/62/139 designating 2 April each year as World Autism Awareness Day. The subsequent observation of that day has substantially increased international awareness about ASDs.

In December 2012, the General Assembly unanimously adopted a resolution entitled *Addressing the socioeconomic needs of individuals, families and societies affected by autism spectrum disorders (ASD), developmental disorders (DD), and associated*

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