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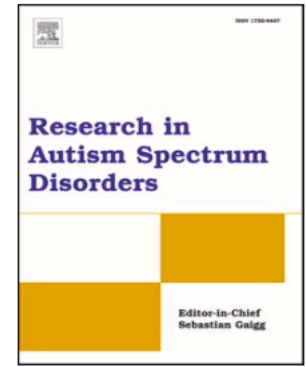
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Service encounters across the lifespan in individuals with autism spectrum disorders: Results from a multisite study in Latin America

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ABSTRACT

Background: Core symptoms of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) continue to affect everyday life as children grow and transition into adulthood. That way, different services may be needed at various stages of their lifetimes. This study aimed to describe service encounters and hours of service per week for individuals with ASD in Latin American countries and compare the data from three age groups (preschoolers, school-aged, and adolescents).

Methods: The data were obtained from an online survey adapted by Red Espectro Autista Latinoamericana (REAL) in 6 different South & Central American countries. The total sample was composed of 2520 caregivers of children and adolescents with ASD.

Results: Service encounters for Speech, Occupational, and Behavioral Therapies decreased with patient age, while medication increased. Regardless of the age group, a large proportion of individuals (19–37 %) were not receiving treatment, and those receiving treatment got fewer hours than best practice recommendations. For adolescents, the gaps in treatment are even greater and less consistent.

Discussion: Failure to offer timely identification and intervention for ASD will result in more impairment of the individual and the family burden. Although there are several initiatives to develop more resources for this population in Latin-America, the provision of services for ASD is still undervalued. Many such individuals might not be receiving the services they need, while

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