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**THREE-YEAR OUTCOME OF PRESCHOOL CHILDREN  
WITH AUTISM OR ASPERGER'S SYNDROME**

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The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition (DSM-5) specifies that Asperger's disorder is a type of pervasive developmental disorder without clinically significant cognitive or language delay. There are no data, however, on the outcome of children with Asperger's disorder or on whether their outcome differs from that of children with autism. As a pervasive developmental disorder, Asperger syndrome is distinguished by a pattern of symptoms rather than a single symptom. It is characterized by qualitative impairment in social interaction, by stereotyped and restricted patterns of behavior, activities and interests, and by no clinically significant delay in cognitive development or general delay in language. Intense preoccupation with a narrow subject, one-sided verbosity, restricted prosody, and physical clumsiness are typical of the condition, but are not required for diagnosis. The objectives of this study were to compare the outcome of groups of children with these disorders over a period of 3 years on variables independent of the defining criteria and to identify variables that might account for these differences.

All children 4-7 years of age who came for assessment or were currently in treatment at a pervasive developmental disorder service of one of several centers in Ivano-Frankivsk region were identified. Children who received a diagnosis of autism (N=32) or Asperger's syndrome (N=18) on the basis of a diagnostic interview and had an IQ in the nonretarded range were given a battery of cognitive, language, and behavioral tests. Families were contacted roughly 3 years after the date of their enrollment in the study, and many of the tests were readministered.

Children with Asperger's syndrome had better social skills and fewer autistic symptoms 3 years after study enrollment than the children with autism. The differences in outcome could not be explained by initial differences in IQ and language abilities. Children with autism who had developed verbal fluency at follow-up were very similar to the children with Asperger's syndrome at study enrollment.

Although the exact mechanism for the differences in outcome remain to be determined, it appears that Asperger's disorder and autism represent parallel but potentially overlapping developmental trajectories. Prognosis may be improved by diagnosis at a younger age that allows for early interventions, while interventions in adulthood are valuable but less beneficial. There are legal implications for individuals with AS as they run the risk of exploitation by others and may be unable to comprehend the societal implications of their actions.