Latino Autism Children More Likely to Be Diagnosed

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The autism rate among Latino children has increased, matching the rate of autism for white children—and that's a good thing, reports Fox News Latino.

Autism, or autism spectrum disorder, is a developmental disorder that appears within the first three years of life. It can affect social and communication skills to varying degrees, ranging from conditions that are mild and barely detectable to those that require full-time therapy. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the prevalence of autism among white children is 1 in 100 but among Latinos it's 1 in 170.

Setting out to study these differences, researchers from the Massachusetts Department of Public Health examined almost 400,000 birth records and data from early intervention programs in the state.

Researchers found that toward the beginning of the study, white children had the highest rate of autism, a whopping 90 percent higher than Latino children. But by 2005, there was virtually no difference—a step in the right direction. That's because the numbers don't mean that more Latino children become autistic, but rather that those who were autistic were finally being diagnosed.

During the study, Massachusetts began supporting early intervention programs that helped standardize diagnosis procedures. At the same time, national pediatric guidelines for autism diagnosis were introduced, including routine screening and awareness campaigns.

As a result, doctors and caretakers became more adept at recognizing and diagnosing autism in kids. And an early diagnosis can get children into treatment sooner, helping them overcome previously unexplained challenges. In fact, early diagnosis and intervention have been linked to higher IQ levels and less restrictive classroom settings.

However, while the study shows gains in autism screenings, the way that autism is handled and treated in ethnic settings is still in question. For example, Latino children with autism usually score significantly lower than their white counterparts on cognitive tests; further research is needed to explain what role bilingualism plays.

Still, there is progress, says Jose Cordero, the vice chairman of the board directors of the Autism

Society. It used to be that no one wanted to speak about autism because people thought that very little could be done, he said. “The message today is that there is great hope. There are different strategies that can help, and early recognition is crucial.”

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