

Oral Defense Announcement

University of Missouri – St. Louis Graduate School

An oral examination in defense of the dissertation for the degree
Doctor of Philosophy in Psychology with an emphasis in Clinical – Community Psychology

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M.A. in Psychology, May 2020, University of Missouri-St. Louis
B.A. in Psychological Science, May 2016, Boston College

Missed and Prior Diagnoses in Children Later Diagnosed with Autism

Date: June 15, 2023
Time: 1:00 PM to 3:00 PM
Place: Remote

Abstract

Awareness of autism is rising, yet social determinants of health continue to impact rates, ages of diagnosis, and diagnostic load. Different psychiatric labels carry stigmas; unequal rates of diagnoses may indicate biases in the healthcare system. This study investigates six prior diagnoses (ADHD, conduct, adjustment, anxiety, mood, and intellectual disability) assigned to children who are later diagnosed with autism. The study investigates how race, sex, and geographic factors were associated with age of diagnosis and diagnostic load. This study utilized a sample of 13,850 children aged 2-10 who were diagnosed with autism on Missouri Medicaid between 2015 and 2019. The sample was 78.16% male and 14.43 % Black, with 57.95% of children living in urban regions of the state. Results indicated that being White, living in an urban environment, and having more prior diagnoses was associated with older age of autism diagnosis, $F(4, 12229) = 577.25, p < .001$. Using logistic regressions, being White was associated with a child being more likely diagnosed with all prior diagnoses aside from intellectual disability. Being male was related to a higher likelihood of ADHD, but lower likelihood of intellectual disability. Findings showed that living rural was related to a higher likelihood of ADHD, Conduct, and intellectual disability. Overall, being White was associated with older age of diagnosis and higher likelihood of most diagnoses, even in urban-only samples, potentially reflecting more access to providers and more office visits. Living in rural areas was also associated with earlier diagnosis and more prior diagnoses such as ADHD and conduct, which may be due to types of providers or specialists seen. Future research should look at barriers to diagnosis and the advantages and disadvantages of a higher diagnostic load.

Defense of Dissertation Committee

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