Racial Disproportionality in School-based Identification of Autism
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Abstract

Objective: This study examined relative risk of autism identification among school-aged children across the five primary racial groups.

Research Design: Secondary analysis of data reported by state departments of education was used to determine the likelihood that children in each racial group received special education services for autism. These data were used to calculate group risk and relative risk for each minority group relative to White children.

Setting: Data from 47 states, as reported to the U.S. Department of Education’s Data Analysis System, for 2008 was analyzed.

Measures: Risk index and relative risk index

Results: Nationwide, 1 in 240 students were identified as having autism by their school system and received related special education services. Across the 47 states examined, identification rates ranged from 1 in 1000 to 1 in 101 children.

Conclusions: Schools identify 4.2 children in 1000 as autistic. Black, Hispanic, and Native American children are generally less likely to be identified with autism and receive school-based services to accommodate the learning and behavioral challenges associated with the disorder.