

The association between socioeconomic status and autism diagnosis in the United Kingdom for children aged 5–8 years of age: Findings from the Born in Bradford cohort

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There have been a number of recent studies, in different countries, looking at the association between socioeconomic status, relative levels of income and educational achievement, and childhood autism. In the United States rates of autism diagnosis have been found to be lower for children of lower socioeconomic status. However in other countries the situation is different. In Denmark no association was found, while in Sweden higher rates of autism diagnosis were found in children of lower socioeconomic status. This suggests that contextual factors, such as the level of socioeconomic inequality and the availability of services, influence the relationship between socioeconomic status and the diagnosis of autism in children. In the United Kingdom access to a diagnosis of autism requires prolonged assertive engagement with a health care system whose budgets are under strain; but little is known about the differences in autism diagnosis rates for different socioeconomic groups. Using data from the Born in Bradford study (a large birth cohort in the north of England: <https://borninbradford.nhs.uk/>) we found that children of higher socioeconomic status were twice as likely to have a diagnosis of autism recorded in their GP records compared to children of lower socioeconomic status. The size of this difference is large and suggests that, in Bradford, there are substantial numbers of children from lower socioeconomic families that are undiagnosed. While further research is required to determine the extent to which this is replicated across the United Kingdom, these findings do indicate a potential source of inequity, which, given the importance of early diagnosis of autism in children, could have serious implications for individual child outcomes.