Introduction

The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM) has served as the gold standard for diagnosis and management of mental health and developmental disorders.
- Diagnoses have shaped lived experiences and access to care.
- In the DSM-5, Asperger’s and autism were grouped under the term Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).
- Change due to inconsistent application of diagnostic criteria.
- Concerns voiced by the Asperger’s community in response to the proposed changes included:

  • Inability to access support services.
  • Heightened stigma related to the term autism.
  • Loss of identity associated with the Asperger’s terminology.

- In 2013, Cascio posited that three theories may explain the fate of Asperger’s after its recategorization under the DSM-5:

  1. Transient Mental Illness (Nadesan)
     - Diagnosis that may have had temporary meaning that has now been lost.
  2. Diagnostic You Have to Fight to Get (Dumit)
     - People identify with Asperger’s as a diagnosis, but its meaning is no longer recognized by clinical professionals.
  3. Demedicalization (Conrad)
     - Asperger’s is no longer thought to be a disorder, but a personality trait that does not need to be treated or cured.

Objective

- To identify which theory best captures what we see in the literature with respect to the fate of Asperger’s syndrome after its removal from the DSM-5.

Methods

- Non-scoping literature review, including peer reviewed articles, theses, and dissertations.

  Inclusion Criteria
  - Empirical Research
  - Perspectives on individuals on the spectrum
  - Involves perceptions of Asperger’s
  - Addresses DSM-5 change

Search Methods

- Books on Autism, Neurodiversity, and Social Sciences

Search Terms:
- (DSM-5) OR (DSM V) OR (identity) AND (Asperger*)

Results

Eligible Articles

- Six peer-reviewed articles.
- One book chapter.
- One indexed doctoral dissertation.

Conclusions

- Few publications addressed change despite fears.
- Most publications focused on impacts on diagnostic rates with fewer ASD diagnosis under the new criteria.
- Many pieces support the demedicalization theory while some support the diagnosis you have to fight to get theory.
- Majority of works explicitly or implicitly rejected the idea that Asperger’s is “transient”; it remained meaningful as a separate concept from autism, at least in early publications.
- More research should explicitly investigate identification with the Asperger’s label, especially in light of the growing infamy of the eponymous doctor.

Explanations for a mixed pattern in data:

- Asperger became a term of identity prior to the DSM-5 change.
- Restrictive DSM-5 criteria may be a barrier entry into the medical system.
- Limited publications restricts conclusions about diagnostic trends.
- Intentional distancing from label due to Hans Asperger’s connection to the Nazi movement.

References