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Comparative Study of Neurocognitive Profiles of Children with High Functioning Autism (hfa), Asperger's Syndrome (as) and Intellectual High Potential (gifted): in What Are They Different?

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Introduction: Although the terminology of Asperger's Syndrome has been subsumed within high functioning autism in the last edition of the DSM, the absence of a clear consensus concerning the relevance of the distinction between HFA and AS persists among researchers and clinicians. Besides, the frequent convergence of clinical signs between AS and intellectual high potential encourages to investigate the existence of parallels and their nature. The current situation contributes to maintain confusion at the diagnostically level and by extension to hamper the care system.

Objectives: Explore and better define three atypical neurocognitive profiles: HFA, AS and intellectual high potential, in order to refine the criteria for a more accurate identification.

Methods: Data will be collected from 5 groups of children: 'typical HFA', 'typical AS', 'typical gifted children', 'atypical' (ambiguous diagnosis) and control. These groups will be compared to each other at multiple level: cognition, language, social cognition, psychomotor assessment. Evaluations will be completed by questionnaires and by a clinical interview process (anamnestic data).

Results expected: 'Typical' gifted children, even when they exhibit social issues, don't have constitutional deficit in the area of social cognition and perform normally or above average in such tasks. Children with heterogeneous psychometric profiles show neuropsychological and/or psychopathological disorders. AS group performs better in language dimension and verbal comprehension (vocabulary, verbal abstraction) than HFA group. In addition, AS children might present motor coordination difficulties and undetermined lateralization more frequently than HFA children.

Conclusions: Despite these differences, these children exhibit atypical developmental trajectories characterized by heterochrony.