

## Screening for autism in Santiago Chile: community perspectives

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### Abstract

Autism spectrum disorders (ASD) are a major pediatric concern, with increasing incidence. Early identification and treatment improve outcome. ASD can be difficult to recognize, however parents play a crucial role in this process. In Chile, little is known about ASD and there are no universal screening programs. Objective: To determine whether M-CHAT is a feasible screening tool for risk of ASD in toddlers as well as to identify parents' perceptions in our community. Study group: 200 children (16 to 30 months of age) were evaluated from two medical centers; one of them in a very low socioeconomic and vulnerable community. Methods: Descriptive study with both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. M-CHAT and M-CHAT Follow-Up Interview were applied to participants, and two focus groups were conducted. Results: 22% initially screened positive; of these, 11.4% continued to screen at-risk after the Follow-Up Interview. Three patients were assessed by a developmental pediatrician; two were compatible with an ASD diagnosis and are currently in treatment. Three main topics were identified from parents' perspectives: 1) perception of ignorance, 2) family/healthcare's involvement, 3) playing as stimulation of psychomotor development. They also thought that the M-CHAT was a good questionnaire; however they had difficulties in understanding certain questions. Conclusions: Applying the M-CHAT could be feasible in the Chilean community; however there are certain aspects that should be taken into consideration. ASD are indeed an important pediatric problem in our community, and we owe it to our patients to respond to their growing needs, particularly among underprivileged children.