

The economic costs and its predictors for childhood autism spectrum disorders in Ireland: How is the burden distributed?

Áine Roddy and Ciaran O'Neill

Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASDs) present a variety of complex challenges for individuals with the condition and their families which may affect their quality of life and result in substantial economic costs. Little is known about the level of this impact, or the distribution, or the extent to which it is borne by families (as opposed to the state) in Ireland. The objective of this study was to estimate the financial cost of childhood ASDs and examine what determines those costs and their distribution. Data for the study came from a confidential survey completed by 195 parents of 222 children aged between 2-18 years, all of whom were clinically diagnosed with an ASD. The sample was recruited using a variety of methods and the survey was completed in 2014/2015. Among families, the findings show the average cost per year for each child with an ASD came to €28,465 (related to spending on private ASD services and lost income from time off work). By comparison, the State spent an average of €14,192 per year on each child (for their ASD related health and social care needs and educational resources such as special needs assistants). The severity of ASD was significantly associated with higher spending by families, but was not found to influence State health spending. The results suggest that parents are central to meeting the needs of young people with ASD in Ireland. Policy implications of these findings suggest significant investment and commitment is needed to address the needs of individuals living with ASDs and their families.