

## Commentary

# Autism Spectrum Disorders: How medical, societal, educational and environmental changes have contributed to an epidemic

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### Abstract

Daily, I question the role played by medical, societal, educational and environmental changes in the epidemic of autism spectrum disorders. With conservative estimates at one in six children having developmental delays requiring intervention, we are forced to consider prevention. Skeptics suggest that identification of an increasing number of affected children is a result of better diagnostic techniques and more comprehensive categories. Others argue convincingly that a clash of genetic susceptibility with environmental triggers, such as mercury, pesticides and other known neurotoxins, is responsible.

Could we also be exacerbating the above factors with slow, subtle changes in society, schools and families? This commentary provides an overview of differences between practices 30 years ago, and those now, followed by common sense guidelines for healthcare professionals, educators, and parents. By adhering to these blueprints, all parties can work collaboratively in the best interest of today's children.

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*Keywords:* autism spectrum disorders

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