

Reinforcing neurodiversity-affirming and family-centred practice to support autistic adolescents within culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) families

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Background: Neurodiversity-affirming practice involves embracing each individual's unique capacity and valuing the diversity of neurocognitive functioning, which can help foster the inclusive environment that maximises children's ability to reach their potential. However, this practice is not widely adopted in families with culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds due to cultural barriers and societal stigmas, posing a challenge for children to build inner sense of competence. The objective of this approach is to build a neurodiversity-affirming and family-centred framework supporting adolescents with autism within CALD families.

Approach: The framework proposes guidance for health professionals:

1. Identify enablers and barriers: Cultural enablers and barriers for adopting neurodiversity-affirming practice are identified by health professionals, and analysed with the families and with the interprofessional care team.

2. Address cultural stigmas: Stigmas specific to the families' cultural backgrounds are addressed using culturally responsive and appropriate educational resources.

3. Tailored education: Education on the application of neurodiversity-affirming practice is provided and tailored to the family's cultural needs and capacity.

4. Simplified communication: Communication regarding neurodiversity-affirming interventions recognises the linguistic barriers; discussions are simplified in plain language and translated when needed to maximise the family's understanding and translation of knowledge in practice.

5. Empower families: Families are encouraged to learn and implement neurodiversity-affirming interventions as experts for their children, with ongoing training provided by health professionals.

Outcome: Preliminary findings indicate a significant increase in engagement among CALD families when participating in the implementation of interventions for their autistic adolescents. Families report higher volumes of interventions and a higher success rate of the practice, with the care team observing improvements in occupational performance and sense of self-efficacy in their children.

Innovation and Significance: With limited services dedicated to support non-English-speaking children with special needs, the framework offers a unique approach by tailoring neurodiversity-affirming practice, which is significant in enhancing cultural inclusiveness in care provision.

Disclosure of Interest Statement: The author recognises the considerable contribution that the clients, their families and health professionals within the interprofessional care team has made to the implementation of this practice framework. I also recognise the need for transparency of disclosure of potential conflicts of interest by acknowledging these relationships in publications and presentations. The author has no financial, personal, or professional interests that could be construed to have influenced the outcomes when building the principles for this framework.