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# Scientific Contributions to Autism: The Trajectory of a Working Group

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*Thematic Dossier*

## **Scientific Contributions to Autism: The Trajectory of a Working Group**

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**Abstract:** This study analyzes the themes and methodology of the joint research of the Brazilian National Association for Research and Postgraduate Studies in Psychology working group - Autism Spectrum Disorder: Research in Health and Education, over its 10 years of existence. This is a documentary study using data collected from the group's biannual reports. Results revealed a total of 64 collaborative research projects, covering a variety of topics (e.g., early identification, cognitive and behavioral assessment, and evidence-based interventions). The target population has been mostly children, adolescents, and families, revealing a gap in studies with adults. Quantitative and cross-sectional studies are the most widely used methodology in the health field, highlighting the need for longitudinal studies. The conclusion is that the group's intellectual production reflects, in part, the expansion of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) research in the country, with implications for national public policies.

**Keywords:** autism, health, education

### **Contribuições Científicas no Autismo: Trajetória de um Grupo de Trabalho**

**Resumo:** Este estudo analisa as temáticas e a metodologia das produções conjuntas do Grupo de Trabalho Transtorno do Espectro do Autista: Pesquisas em Saúde e Educação, da Associação Nacional de Pesquisa e Pós-graduação em Psicologia, nos seus 10 anos de existência. Trata-se de uma pesquisa documental, cujos dados foram coletados dos relatórios bianuais do grupo. Resultados revelaram um total de 64 projetos de pesquisa em colaboração, os quais contemplam temas variados (e.g., identificação precoce, avaliação cognitiva e comportamental, e intervenções baseadas em evidências). A população-alvo tem sido em sua maioria crianças, adolescentes e famílias, identificando-se uma lacuna em estudos com adultos. A metodologia mais utilizada na área da saúde é de estudos quantitativos e

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transversais, apontando para a necessidade de estudos longitudinais no futuro. A conclusão é de que a produção do grupo reflete, em parte, a expansão das pesquisas sobre TEA no país, com implicações para políticas públicas nacionais.

**Palavras-chave:** autismo, saúde, educação

### **Contribuciones Científicas en el Autismo: Trayectoria de un Grupo de Trabajo**

**Resumen:** Este estudio analiza los temas y la metodología de la investigación conjunta del grupo de trabajo de la Asociación Nacional de Investigación y Posgrado en Psicología - Trastorno del Espectro Autista: Investigación en Salud y Educación, a lo largo de sus 10 años de existencia. Se trata de un estudio documental que utiliza datos recopilados de los informes semestrales del grupo. Los resultados revelaron 64 proyectos de investigación colaborativos que abarcan diversos temas (identificación temprana, evaluación cognitiva y conductual, e intervenciones basadas en la evidencia). Se ha investigado principalmente niños, adolescentes y familias, lo que identifica una brecha en los estudios con adultos. La metodología más utilizada en el ámbito de la salud son los estudios cuantitativos y transversales, lo que resalta la necesidad de estudios longitudinales. La producción del grupo refleja, en parte, la expansión de la investigación sobre TEA en Brasil, con implicaciones para las políticas públicas.

**Palabras Clave:** autismo, salud, educación

The trajectory of the Working Group (WG) “Autism Spectrum Disorder: Research in Health and Education” reflects, to some extent, the expansion of knowledge about Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in the country, especially regarding the identification of risk signs, cognitive and behavioral assessment, interventions with individuals and their families, educational practices, and teacher training. Until the early 2000s, studies on ASD were

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incipient in Brazilian psychology. The scarcity of national studies and limited academic discourse signaled a need for an environment conducive to knowledge production within postgraduate Psychology and related areas.

Before the creation of the WG in 2014, collaborations among researchers in the field focused on themes related to the early identification of autism. Initially, the focus was on the systematic observation of signs for suspected ASD and later, on the development of diagnostic instruments. New collaborations with psychologists and educators emerged from the need to include children with ASD in mainstream schools, highlighting the essential link between health and education. Furthermore, the need for a permanent discussion forum to facilitate continuous and systematic actions was recognized. Thus, the WG – “Autism Spectrum Disorder: Research in Health and Education” – linked to the National Association for Research and Postgraduate Studies in Psychology (Portuguese acronym: ANPEPP) was created.

The initial objectives of the WG were: to promote interdisciplinarity with research in the areas of health and education; expand interinstitutional collaborations for the production and dissemination of national knowledge about ASD; strengthen existing partnerships; increase scientific production aligned with public health and education policies; and to train new researchers at the postgraduate level using the WG’s scientific production as a reference for their research.

The group initially consisted of 10 researchers from four states, representing three different regions: South (Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul - UFRGS, Universidade Federal de Santa Maria - UFSM and Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina - UFSC), Southeast (Universidade Presbiteriana Mackenzie - UPM) and North (Universidade Federal do Pará - UFPA). In 2016, new members joined the group, in addition to the Universidade Federal de Alagoas - UFAL, representing the Northeast region.

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In response to the need for expansion, three new members from previously unrepresented states joined the group in 2018: Rio de Janeiro (Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio de Janeiro - PUC-Rio) and Minas Gerais (Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais - UFMG). Note that the first special session on ASD was planned at the XVI ANPEPP Symposium, and the work resulting from the WG was published in the *Revista Psicologia: Teoria e Prática* (2019) journal. The group's dynamics shifted from the presentation of individual projects to discussions of projects with high potential for multicenter collaboration. This format has been maintained in subsequent editions, fostering continued collaboration among members to this day.

New members joined in 2020 and the Central region of the country was included, represented by the Universidade Federal da Grande Dourados - UFGD. One of the new members had participated in the WG at the 2014 Symposium as a doctoral student, highlighting the WG's commitment to training new researchers. At this time, the WG reached its highest number of members: 21 researchers from four different regions, totaling 11 universities (UFRGS, Universidade Federal de Pelotas - UFPel, UFSM, UFMG, Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Norte - UFRN, UFGD, Faculdade de Ciências Médicas da Santa Casa de São Paulo - FCMSCSP, PUC-Rio, Universidade do Vale do Itajaí - UNIVALI, Universidade Federal de São Paulo - UNIFESP and UPM). The main objectives in this two-year period were: (a) expanding interinstitutional collaborations for the production and dissemination of knowledge about ASD; (b) consolidating the partnerships established since 2014; (c) updating scientific production on ASD, considering the public policies that had undergone major changes both in the health and education fields; and (d) training new researchers. There is a continuous effort to attract researchers from different regions of Brazil interested in ASD as a research area.

To sustain partnerships and collaborative research projects, we must characterize the existing studies to identify gaps that can be addressed in future investigations. The aim of the present study is to analyze the themes and methodology of the joint productions of the WG of the ANPEPP - Autism Spectrum Disorder: research in Health and Education, in its 10 years of existence.

### **Method**

This is a descriptive study based on document analysis (Sá-Silva et al., 2009). It surveys the scientific output of the WG on Autism Spectrum Disorder: Research in Health and Education, covering a 10-year trajectory across the health and education sectors. The WG's reports, prepared by the group's coordination during the ANPEPP's biennial research and scientific exchange symposia, were used for this purpose. At these meetings, the WG's meet to discuss research, policies, and training within the scope of postgraduate studies in Psychology in Brazil. The systematic approach has been to indicate (in the reports) all academic outputs of the WG produced in partnership among members in the previous two years. After collecting the coordination reports, the WG members divided into the areas of health and education to begin surveying and analyzing the accumulated intellectual production. As a criterion, the productions should be authored by at least two members of the health and/or education WG and have been carried out by November 2024. Considering that the report presented at the 2024 Symposium indicated productions from the previous two-year period, those conducted up to November of that year were indicated by the members and checked in their updated Lattes curricula. The information was compiled in an electronic spreadsheet that was shared among the members. The surveys of each area were entered with the verification of the first author. The types of productions quantified for analysis included: peer-reviewed national and international articles, books, book chapters, roundtables,

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presentations at scientific events with publication in proceedings, collaborative research projects, participation in postgraduate examination boards, and co-supervision of dissertations and theses. A quantitative synthesis of the overall totals by area, year and type of production was obtained. Subsequently, the WG members from each area analyzed the themes and methodologies of these productions, synthesizing their contributions to the health and education of people with ASD in Brazil. Finally, these themes were categorized and exemplified with some productions. The members of each area selected these works by consensus, ensuring they were representative of the identified themes.

### **Results and Discussion**

Throughout the 10-year trajectory since the formation of the WG on health and education research in ASD, 328 works involving at least two members of the WG were published up to November 2024. Of this total, 68 were articles in national and international journals, five books, 39 book chapters, eight roundtables, 36 presentations at scientific events with publication in proceedings, 64 collaborative research projects, 98 participations in postgraduate examination boards, and 10 co-supervisions of dissertations and theses. However, for the purposes of this study, the focus of the results will be on joint research projects, their themes, and methodologies. In accordance with the self-citation editorial guidelines of this journal, some projects and publications will be presented as examples of the investigated themes. Further information on the projects and publications, such as their respective authors, foundations, methodology and results, can be found in the works *PEI: Plano Educacional Individualizado para Alunos com Deficiência* (IEP: Individualized Education Program for Students with Disabilities) (Borges et al., 2024) and *Transtorno do Espectro Autista: Pesquisas na Saúde e na Educação* (Autism Spectrum Disorder: Research

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in Health and Education) (Schmidt & Paula, 2024). The following presents the themes and methodologies investigated in the projects by area, beginning with education and then, health.

### **Research Projects in Education: Themes and Methodological Approaches**

The education research projects are distributed among the following themes: (a) identification of risk signs for ASD in school; (b) initial and continuing teacher training in the area of ASD; (c) evidence-based school practices (e.g., principles of applied behavior analysis; peer-mediated intervention); (d) IEPs (foundations, development, and evaluation).

The translation and cultural adaptation of the Autism Self-Efficacy Scale for Teachers – ASSET (Ruble et al., 2013), which assesses teachers' self-efficacy beliefs regarding their ability to perform tasks with students with ASD, is among the projects mentioned. The use of this tool can help identify training needs, particularly as the literature reports a low self-efficacy among teachers regarding the specific educational needs of these students (Ferreira, 2014).

Many teachers actively working in schools have received their training when special education teachers were exclusively responsible for students with disabilities (Januzzi, 2004). During this period, special education did not necessarily consider the learning potential of people with ASD. This scenario still requires responses from both public education policies and the scientific community to generate the necessary knowledge to support teaching practices and guarantee the right to education at all levels for this population (Schmidt & Paula, 2024).

Another project produced evidence regarding the learning benefits with the interaction between children with ASD and their peers at school (e.g., Borges et al., 2024), especially advances in socio-communicative and academic skills (with or without the use of the

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video-modeling method). These advances are also documented in the international literature (e.g., Collins et al., 2025; Zhang et al., 2022).

Studies produced with national samples demonstrate the effectiveness and feasibility of implementing evidence-based practices widely used in other countries, as well as the importance of their adaptation and use in the Brazilian educational context (for a review, see Borges et al., 2024). Furthermore, the relevance, necessity, and feasibility of using principles of applied behavior analysis in naturalistic environments, such as the school, have been demonstrated. This approach enables engagement in academic tasks and reduces disruptive behaviors (Austin, 2025), facilitating the inclusion and retention of students in the Brazilian school environment.

Interinstitutional research projects on the IEP, conducted by members of the WG from various institutions (UFPEL, UFSM, UFRN, UFAL, and UFMG), are funded by national research funding agencies such as the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq) and the Brazilian Federal Agency for Support and Evaluation of Graduate Education (CAPES), in addition to scholarships for master's, doctoral, and undergraduate research. Among them, the project entitled "*Plano educacional individualizado (PEI): Proposições e Adequações para a Realidade Brasileira*" ("Individualized Education Program (IEP): Proposals and Adaptations for the Brazilian Reality") stands out (for project details, see Borges et al., 2024). The focus is the role of the IEP in promoting inclusive education in Brazil; this work tool stimulates the student's learning potential while guiding the teacher's work through collaborative planning with health and education professionals to determine the best pedagogical practices for the benefit of students (and future adoption). Furthermore, the IEP fosters closer ties between family and school, an approach that aligns with Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and the school curriculum, without ignoring the learner's specific educational needs.

The use of the IEP in the Brazilian context was advocated by the approval of Opinion No. 50/2023 of the National Education Council (CNE, 2024) by the Ministry of Education in November 2024. The drafting of the opinion involved the participation of two WG members from the area of Education. Among the various recent controversies surrounding this document was the recommendation of the IEP for students with disabilities in schools and the discussion regarding its inclusive potential and compatibility with the UDL approach (CAST, 2011; Zerbato & Mendes, 2018).

The WG's most recent project investigates the relationship between the IEP and the Individual Transition Plan (ITP) (for a review, see Borges et al., 2024). The ITP consists of a plan of measures and adaptations that can integrate the IEP to facilitate the transition of students with ASD between different school stages (early childhood education, elementary school, and high school), as well as into the job market or higher education. The literature, in turn, highlights the importance of this relationship between the IEP and the ITP (Landmark et al., 2022; Ruble et al., 2019). Collaborating researchers in this project are affiliated with the National Institute of Science and Technology (INCT) Educational Policy and Teaching Work, demonstrating a commitment to producing knowledge that can contribute to society.

The work entitled “*PEI - Plano Educacional Individualizado para Alunos com Deficiências*” (“IEP - Individualized Education Program for Students with Disabilities”) (Borges et al., 2024), which details the presented projects, was organized by members of the WG, bringing together national and international partnerships (postgraduate programs from the UFPEL, UFSM and St. John's University in New York, USA, with funding from CNPQ).

In methodological terms, data generation in the field of education uses a variety of approaches, ranging from qualitative and exploratory studies (with semi-structured interviews and questionnaires representing more than 50% the studies) to single-case studies. The latter involves experimental designs capable of establishing functional relationships on

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evidence-based practices. This diversity reflects the broad range of themes and research questions in the educational field addressed by the WG.

Finally, a key milestone of the WG's partnerships is the advancement of national public policy for students with ASD. In collaboration with the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation (MCTI), the WG proposed the National Research and Development Network on Autism. This initiative led to the formation of a 10-member expert committee representing all regions of Brazil, seven of whom are members of the WG.

### **Health Research Projects: Themes and Methodological Approaches**

The analysis revealed these health research areas: (a) healthcare profile; (b) families' experience of stigma; (c) mental health indicators for children and adolescents; (d) evidence-based interventions (focusing on individuals and families); and (e) validation of instruments (screening, diagnoses, etc.).

These themes mainly result from projects in partnership between WG members and international partnerships. In 2015, the Latin American Autism Spectrum Network (Rede Espectro Autista Latinoamérica – REAL), composed of researchers from Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Uruguay, Venezuela, and the Dominican Republic, was created. Its main objectives include the sharing of data and knowledge, the promotion of evidence-based practices, and the strengthening of local institutions to diagnose and treat autism in an accessible and culturally appropriate manner. Among other topics, the production of this network investigates: the profile of healthcare (including the use of medication) and education among children, young people, and adults in Brazil and five other countries; the experience of stigma lived by more than two thousand families; and mental health service needs (Pérez Liz et al., 2022).

Even though the scenario has progressed significantly in cities with greater coverage of specialized services for children and adolescents, the early diagnosis of children with ASD

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remains a crucial need in the Brazilian public mental health system. A recent study by the WG shows the gap between the age of first parental concerns and the diagnosis of ASD; such delays result in missed therapeutic opportunities that can adversely affect long-term prognosis (see Schmidt & Paula, 2024). This finding underscores the need for awareness and training programs for parents and educators on the early signs of autism, emphasizing that timely intervention is critical. Additionally, in the area of behavioral and emotional regulation, WG researchers have mapped mental health indicators for children and adolescents with ASD both in Brazil and Latin America. As a result, important instruments for assessing emotional outbursts in ASD have been culturally adapted for Brazil and their psychometric properties were verified. In 2024, the behavior topography of emotional dysregulation in more than 600 children with ASD from five Latin American countries could be characterized. The results revealed that bad mood and irritability were significant factors in increasing the likelihood of emotional outbursts in children with ASD. Irritability, in particular, was identified as an important trigger for emotional dysregulation, highlighting the need for its careful consideration when monitoring the mental health of children with ASD.

Although early intervention is a global consensus in the scientific community (Hume et al., 2021), its implementation is not yet a reality in Brazil. The average age at diagnosis varies between 47 and 59 months. This highlights a critical gap, aggravated by discrepancies related to access to treatment, region of residence, the clinical profile of ASD, among others. Furthermore, there is no efficient flow for the care of people with ASD within the Brazilian Unified Health System (SUS) (Oliveira et al., 2017).

A priority for the WG is the development of evidence-based intervention studies, particularly in response to current gaps in Brazilian Psychology training regarding autism. Low-cost models with scalability potential are prioritized, such as the Computerized Progressive Attentional Training (CPAT) program. In a randomized clinical trial, this program

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demonstrated effectiveness in improving the attention, cognition, and academic skills of school-aged children with ASD (see Schmidt & Paula, 2024).

Parent training has been a growing and fundamental approach to address the need for behavioral intervention in individuals with ASD. It is particularly relevant in contexts with limited resources or restricted access to intensive services, as seen in Brazil. International studies demonstrate the effectiveness of applied behavior analysis interventions for ASD, especially regarding improvements in communication and social interaction, the mental health of caregivers, and the reduction of maladaptive behaviors (Eckes et al., 2023; Sandbank et al., 2023). However, due to the high cost and scarcity of qualified professionals, it becomes essential to explore alternative strategies, such as family training.

Bagaiolo et al. (2019) conducted a multicenter study on parent training based on principles of applied behavior analysis. This line of research was initially implemented in 2013, led by the Instituto Gradual (its main social action is research on parent training) in collaboration with the Ambulatório de Cognição Social Marcos Mercadante (TEAMM/UNIFESP) and the Ambulatório de Transtornos do Espectro Autista (PROTEA/IPq-HCFMUSP). The TEAMM is a specialized center for ASD, linked to the Department of Psychiatry at UNIFESP focusing on assistance, teaching, and research. PROTEA belongs to the Instituto de Psiquiatria at the Hospital das Clínicas of the Faculdade de Medicina at the Universidade de São Paulo.

The objective of this investigation on parent training was to manage disruptive (maladaptive) behaviors and improve functional communication. It was conducted between March 2017 and November 2018 using a convenience sample of 120 family participants from the three institutions (Bagaiolo et al., 2019). The intervention was offered in person, through group sessions lasting 12 weeks. The main methodological components of this research line are based on a hybrid model combining Behavioral Skills Training (BST) and Pyramidal

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Training, demonstrating viability for the training of family members and multipliers, which, in turn, increases the scalability, reliability, and generalizability of the intervention results (Erath et al., 2020).

The main findings indicated statistically significant reductions in interfering behaviors, with a 20.6% decrease in the total score of the Aberrant Behavior Checklist (ABC) between the initial assessment ( $M = 62.8$ ;  $SD = 27.0$ ) and the final assessment ( $M = 49.8$ ;  $SD = 24.2$ ;  $p < .001$ ). Simultaneously, symptoms of depression and anxiety in caregivers, measured by the Hamilton Dementia Rating Scale (HDRS), decreased by 25.1%, from  $M = 11.9$  ( $SD = 4.4$ ) to  $M = 8.9$  ( $SD = 4.6$ ;  $p = .05$ ). Data collected daily by family members (through systematic records throughout the training) indicated that the most significant reduction in disruptive behaviors occurred from the seventh week onwards, coinciding with the introduction of Functional Communication Training (FCT), reaching a 72% decrease by the end of the intervention. These results reinforce the importance of the FCT in the context of parent training and suggest that group interventions represent a viable alternative to broaden access to evidence-based practices, with positive impacts for both individuals with ASD and their families (Bagaiolo et al., 2019).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, parent training sessions were adapted to a synchronous online format, requiring methodological adjustments in data collection and analysis. Online groups addressed the topics of managing interfering behaviors and food selectivity, maintaining indicators of the effectiveness of the training, similar to those of the in-person phase. The results indicated that family members continued to use the learned practices two years after the intervention, reinforcing the sustainability of the model (see Schmidt & Paula, 2024).

From 2022 onwards, the multicenter parent training study has been entirely modeled for the digital environment using the “*Meu Diário TEA*” (My ASD Diary) application. This

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platform allows family members to complete the learning path and apply the practices asynchronously and independently. An increase in sample size is estimated with this change, thereby extending the pyramidal base of the target population. A study based on implementation science (Damschroder et al., 2022) is underway to verify the feasibility of the application for FCT. Studies on parent training for selective eating in the application version were expanded from 2021 onwards, involving a scoping review, a study on the feasibility of the application for selective eating, and the development of a quasi-experimental case-control study. In addition to the centers already mentioned, data collection will also take place in a specialized service linked to the SUS, located in Itajaí/SC. The proposal for a cross-cultural adaptation of the parent training version for managing interfering behaviors conducted in Angola through a master's thesis with participation of two researchers from the WG (health area) is also noteworthy. The continuation of these initiatives depends on strengthening multicenter partnerships and incorporating technological advances, with a view to democratizing evidence-based practices for diverse populations.

The cultural development and/or adaptation is another relevant line of research conducted by WG members with promising results. This work involves the rigorous verification of the psychometric properties of instruments, whether in the area of screening and diagnosis, or in the assessment of adaptive functioning (see Schmidt & Paula, 2024). As an example, two gold-standard diagnostic assessment instruments were translated and adapted; the Autism Diagnostic Interview-Revised (ADI-R) and the Autism Diagnostic Observation Schedule (ADOS), thereby making it possible to consider the linguistic and cultural specificities of the Brazilian public. Furthermore, in the field of risk indicator screening instruments, the *Protocolo de Avaliação do Comportamento da Criança - PROTEA-R* (Child Behavior Assessment Protocol) and the *Protocolo de Avaliação Comportamental para Crianças com Suspeita de TEA - versão revisada - Não verbal -*

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PROTEA-R-NV (Behavioral Assessment Protocol for Children with Suspected ASD - revised version) were developed. Since the construction of these tools, the results demonstrated their clinical applicability, relevance and adequacy in terms of administration and coding, as well as adequate evidence of criterion and convergent validity. Another developed screening instrument is the *Observação Estruturada para Rastreamento de Autismo* (OERA) (Structured Observation for Autism Screening). It has high scalability potential for level 1 screening, and excellent reliability and fit indices assessed through confirmatory factor analysis. Currently, the following versions are being validated: OERA Baby, for infants from 18 months old; and the OERA 9-99, for young people and adults with level 1 support. Finally, cultural adaptation and psychometric studies of the Adaptive Behavior Assessment System (ABAS-3) were conducted. This adaptive functioning assessment instrument is designed to evaluate conceptual, social, and practical skills in various neurodevelopmental disorders, mainly in ASD and intellectual disability, both in the diagnosis and monitoring of interventions.

Regarding assessment processes, especially in relation to cognition, the literature supports the effectiveness of non-verbal instruments for intellectual assessment. These are more suitable and accessible to subgroups with ASD who present significant limitations and challenges in communicative skills via oral language (Mecca et al., 2020). The results of the studies showed significant difficulties in tasks that do not require verbal responses (Mecca et al., 2020). In addition, there were differences in performance in distinct tasks, with children performing better in visual processing tasks and showing more significant difficulties in reasoning and visuoconstructive tasks. Finally, during the period of social distancing due to the COVID-19 pandemic, sleep habits of autistic children were analyzed in comparison to children with Down syndrome and typical development. Although all three groups exhibited impairments in sleep habit indicators, when comparing them in the pre-pandemic and

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pandemic periods, the ASD group demonstrated the most significant changes. This group presented higher scores (indicating more impairment) in relation to sleep anxiety, difficulty falling asleep, resistance to bedtime, sleep duration, night awakenings, and parasomnias, indicating the already pointed need for parental guidance on sleep hygiene (Gios et al., 2024).

Regarding methodological aspects, 80% of the studies produced in the health field are quantitative and cross-sectional, with designs including correlational studies, case-control studies, and instrument validation studies. Clinical studies also represent a significant part of the production. Descriptive and exploratory qualitative approaches are mainly employed when evaluating the social validity of the intervention through interviews and questionnaires (see Schmidt & Paula, 2024).

This study demonstrated the WG's contribution to the field of ASD by generating scientific evidence that bridges both health and education research. Education studies focus on formative interventions aimed at teachers in Basic Education, strategies for the development of pedagogical and educational programs for students with ASD. The findings emphasize the need for empirical evidence to inform effective, feasible practices within the Brazilian educational context, ultimately supporting the development of truly inclusive public policies. Health studies have focused mainly on the development of epidemiological studies, instruments for early screening of signs of ASD, diagnostic assessment instruments, intervention protocols for children and adolescents and for parents and caregivers (parent training). These interventions are developed within collaborative networks in national and international settings. Future studies should account for varying levels of support needs, specificities across clinical subgroups, and longitudinal data from targeted populations.

Another urgent theme is the production of knowledge in the area of adults with ASD, since the target population of the WG's production has been mostly of children and adolescents. A common characteristic of studies in both areas is the findings derived from

evidence-based practices that can reduce the gap between research and effective educational and healthcare practices aimed at people with ASD in Brazil.

The limitations of this study include the focus of analysis being limited to only one type of WG production and few examples of authored studies to avoid self-referencing. However, based on the scientific contributions and development of the respective areas evidenced here, the WG demonstrates its potential through a group of researchers committed to scientifically based decision-making in the fields of health and education in Brazil. Finally, by influencing and actively participating in public policies in both areas, the WG has been expanding its social role in the fight to promote the quality of life of individuals with ASD and their families.

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