

# Black, Hispanic children with autism more likely to regress than whites

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Quinn, an autistic boy, and the line of toys he made before falling asleep. Repeatedly stacking or lining up objects is a behavior commonly associated with autism. Credit: Wikipedia.

Some children with autism appear to be developing normally when they are very young. They babble or even talk, make eye contact with their parents, and crawl and walk on schedule. Then suddenly, these skills seem to vanish.

Described as developmental regression, this loss of language, motor or [social skills](#) occurs more often in black and Hispanic [children](#) compared to white children, according to a study to be presented Tuesday, May 6, at the Pediatric Academic Societies (PAS) annual meeting in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada.

Researchers analyzed data on 1,353 [preschool children](#) with autism enrolled in the Autism Speaks Autism Treatment Network database between March 2008 and December 2011. The database includes demographic and medical information on each child enrolled at one of 17 locations across the United States and Canada. Information collected included whether parents reported that their child had lost skills.

Results showed that 27 percent of children experienced developmental regression according to their parents. Black children were twice as likely to have parent-reported regression compared to white children. Hispanic children were about 1.5 times more likely than white children to lose early skills according to their parents. This difference was apparent even when researchers controlled for primary caretaker's education and the child's insurance status.

"Lost skills are very difficult to recover," said lead author Adiaha I. A. Spinks-Franklin, MD, MPH, FAAP, assistant professor of pediatrics at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston and associate director of the Developmental-Behavioral Pediatric Fellowship at Texas Children's Hospital. "Evidence suggests that African-American and Hispanic children are often diagnosed with autism at later ages than [white children](#) and have less access to services. Our research shows there is one more important factor that contributes to the developmental outcomes of African-American and Hispanic children with autism."

It is important for pediatric providers to be aware that black and Hispanic children with [autism](#) may be at a higher risk of having a

developmental regression, Dr. Spinks-Franklin added. Early intervention is critical for this population of children.

"We want parents to know that if they have any concerns about behavior or development patterns in their children—whether the concern is a loss of skills or some other type of concern—their child should be evaluated by a physician as soon as possible," said study co-author Jennifer B. Swanson, MD, FAAP, first-year developmental-behavioral pediatric fellow at Baylor College of Medicine.

**More information:** Dr. Spinks-Franklin will present "Racial Differences in Developmental Regression in Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders" from 1:30-1:45 p.m. Tuesday, May 6. To view the study abstract, go to [www.abstracts2view.com/pas/view ... hp?nu=PAS14L1\\_4670.6](http://www.abstracts2view.com/pas/view?nu=PAS14L1_4670.6)

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