

Tunisian Society of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry in 2024

A look at a year dedicated to autism

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The Tunisian Society of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, with its newly elected board as of December 1, 2023, has dedicated the year 2024 to autism. This commitment has led to the launch of numerous initiatives aimed at raising awareness, improving professional training, and enhancing care for children and adolescents with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) across Tunisia.

Key actions undertaken in 2024 include:

Public Awareness Campaigns: Several initiatives were launched to educate the general public through audiovisual media, including multiple radio broadcasts and videos aired on national television and through social media. These addressed key topics such as the signs of autism, epidemiological and etiopathogenic data, early detection, and psychoeducation of caregivers and families.

Mental health-care Caravans: Screening and care services for children with ASD were provided in several remote regions of Tunisia.

Parent Support and Training: Building on the efforts of the previous board, the

Tunisian Society of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry launched a guide for parents of children with ASD in collaboration with the ministry of family, women, and children. Additionally, training sessions were organized for inspectors of education on the inclusion of children with ASD in kindergartens.

Professional Training: Several sessions on the M-CHAT-R/F tool (Tunisian version: <https://aaspfr.org/m-chat/>) were conducted to train frontline professionals in the early detection of autism.

Contribution to the National Mental Health Plan: The Tunisian Society of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry also contributed to the development of the national mental health plan for children and adolescents, which aims to promote the mental well-being of young people in Tunisia and enhance the management of mental disorders. One of the plan's priority areas is the early detection of autism.

Development of a best practice guide on autism: The society is currently working on adapting a best practice guide on ASD to enhance the quality of care for children and adolescents in



Figure 1: The 6th Congress of the Tunisian Society of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, November 21-23 2024, Sfax, Tunisia.

Tunisia. This guide aims to strengthen the implementation of evidence-based clinical practices while tailoring them to the local context. It is expected to be finalized in the first half of 2025.

The 6th STPEA Congress: The 6th STPEA Congress took place on November 21-23, 2024, in Sfax, Tunisia, under the theme "**Preventing Child and Adolescent Mental Health Problems: What Are the Challenges?**" The event gathered more than 250 participants, including child psychiatrists, psychiatrists, psychologists, pediatricians, pediatric neurologists, social workers and other allied professionals. National and international experts provided valuable insights into child, adolescent, and family mental health. The congress, chaired by Pr H  la Ayadi, covered a wide range of topics, from neurosciences to socio-educational sciences, addressing mental health challenges from infancy to adolescence.

It also served as a platform for discussing best practices and innovative approaches to prevent mental disorders before they manifest. We have had several activities where autism spectrum disorder was addressed, such as, a workshop on psychoeducation for families of children with ASD, an event on Early Start Denver Model and early ASD intervention, and another event on the role of the gut-brain microbiota axis in neurodevelopmental disorders in children.

Through these initiatives, Tunisian Society of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry reaffirms its dedication to advancing child and adolescent mental health in Tunisia.

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