

Autism spectrum disorder and criminal responsibility in the Italian forensic context: A multicenter study for the Italian validation of the FARAS (FARAS-IT)

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INTRODUCTION

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is frequently underdiagnosed in adulthood and remains largely overlooked in forensic evaluations of criminal responsibility. In the Italian legal system, the assessment of imputability is traditionally focused on severe psychiatric disorders, with limited consideration of neurodevelopmental conditions.

This multicenter observational study aims to validate the Italian version of the Forensic Autism Risk Assessment Scale (FARAS-IT) across forensic and non-forensic settings. By comparing offenders under security measures, offenders without psychiatric care, and psychiatric patients without criminal history, the study seeks to improve autism-informed forensic assessment, enhance standardization, and promote more equitable and evidence-based judicial decisions.

Framework for the Assessment of Risk & Protection in Offenders on the Autistic Spectrum



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AIM

Italian forensic practice is characterized by marked heterogeneity and by the absence of structured, autism-informed assessment tools specifically designed for judicial contexts. The Forensic Autism Risk Assessment Scale (FARAS) was developed in the UK to provide a systematic framework for identifying autism-specific risk and protective factors in individuals involved in the criminal justice system. To date, no Italian validation of FARAS exists, and its applicability within the Italian medico-legal framework remains unexplored.

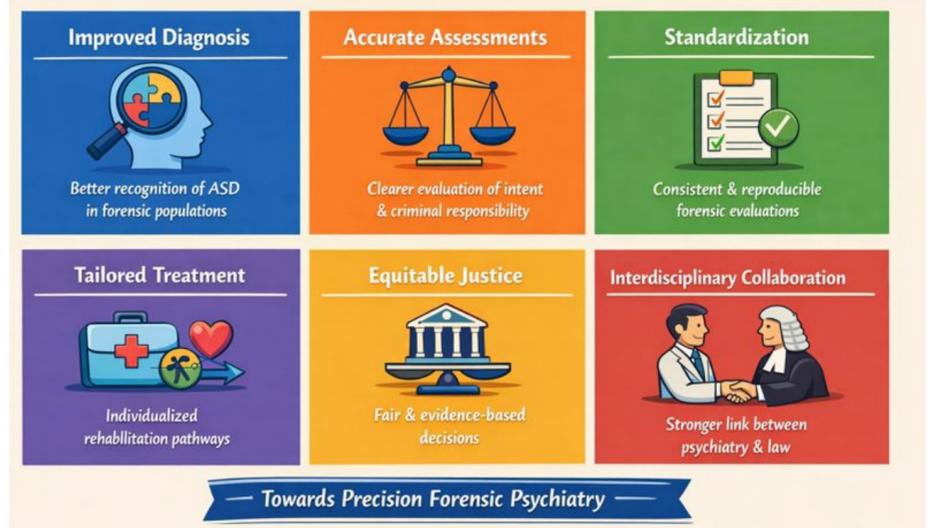
EXPECTED IMPACT

The validation of the FARAS-IT represents a substantial advancement for forensic psychiatric practice in Italy, **introducing an autism-informed framework into evaluations of criminal responsibility.** The study is expected to **improve diagnostic accuracy by facilitating the identification of previously underrecognized Autism Spectrum Disorder in adult forensic populations. By systematically integrating autism-specific risk and protective factors, FARAS-IT may reduce misinterpretations of intentionality, volitional control, and behavioral meaning in judicial contexts.**

The adoption of a standardized tool is likely to decrease inter-examiner variability and enhance transparency and reproducibility in expert evaluations. From a clinical perspective, the study may promote more individualized and appropriate treatment and rehabilitation pathways, particularly within REMS and community-based forensic services.

At a systemic level, the project supports the development of evidence-based, equitable judicial decisions, mitigating the risk of both over- and under-attribution of criminal responsibility. The integration of neurodevelopmental, clinical, and contextual dimensions contributes to the broader paradigm of precision forensic psychiatry. Finally, the study is expected to strengthen interdisciplinary collaboration between mental health services and the justice system, fostering a more nuanced and ethically grounded approach to forensic

Expected Impact of FARAS-IT Validation



MATERIAL AND METHODS

Study Design

- Multicenter, observational, cross-sectional, comparative study
- Regions involved: Campania, Puglia, Tuscany
- Recruitment period: 12 months
- Assessment at time T0
- Methodology aligned with COSMIN guidelines

Participants

Group A- Offenders in forensic psychiatric settings (REMS, intermediate forensic facilities, community-based supervision).

Group B- Offenders without formal psychiatric care (high-risk group for underdiagnosed ASD)

Group C- Psychiatric patients without criminal history

Individuals with ASD receiving care in community mental health services or non-forensic residential facilities.

CURRENT STATUS

The study protocol has been finalized. Recruitment of participating forensic and psychiatric services across multiple Italian regions is ongoing, with data collection at the T0 phase underway.

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