

Autism Spectrum Disorder

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ABSTRACT

An overview is provided of the increasingly prevalent condition of Autism Spectrum Disorder. The importance of correct and timely diagnosis of the condition and its proper management are highlighted.

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INTRODUCTION

Autism spectrum disorder manifest at an early age in childhood,¹ as a developmental disorder, comprised of a number of challenges related to social skills, restricted communication, and repetitive behavior of thoughts². People facing autism are faced and challenged by understanding other people's perspective.³ Autism spectrum disorder is further divided into 3 main types, Autistic Disorder, Asperger Syndrome, and Pervasive Developmental Disorder.⁴

The first type, Autistic Disorder comprises the triad of problems with communication, social interactions, and impaired play in children of younger than 3 of age.⁵ Asperger Syndrome comes under the category of high-functioning autism spectrum; such children are intelligent but lack social skills. Pervasive Developmental Disorder classifies people who particularly cannot fit in the ASD criteria.⁶

According to the epidemiology studies done by the World Health Organization (WHO) among 100 children 1 is autistic, and the changes in yearly number of autistic children has shown an increasing trend of ASD globally.⁷

A study carried out in UK showed 1% prevalence of ASD.⁸ In Asia, the overall prevalence is 0.36% which is increasing; comparatively East Asia has a higher ASD prevalence of 0.51% than South (0.31%) and West Asia (0.35%).⁹ ASD affects about 5 million children in South Asia.¹⁰ A study carried out on ethnic groups of ASD children in the UK reported that Pakistani children showed a slightly greater prevalence of autism and cerebral palsy than other ethnic groups.¹¹

In recent research literature the prevalence has further increased showing 1 in 54 kids being affected by ASD in 2016¹² than in year 2000 when 1 in around 150-160 was affected.¹³

Timely evaluation and identification methods are crucially important¹⁴ as is early treatment and ASD services have shown great improvements.¹⁵

To this end, proper screening methods and evaluations on school-based children on a wide spread population must be done; in Pakistan only about 200 psychiatrists and a handful of child psychiatrists are responsible for providing the much-needed services in a country which has one of the highest burdens of mental health disorders in South Asia.^{16,17} Parents can be educated about ASD as they are the core supporters and will prove as one of the most beneficial coping strategy.¹⁸

There should be proper training provided to postgraduates regarding ASD. Medical students should also be provided proper exposure under the supervision of seniors.¹⁹ Pakistan is currently lacking proper services for ASD children at schools, they need to come up with a proper specialized plan.²⁰ Services in Pakistan for adults are negligible, families face a lot of problems for providing a safe and secure environment for their children; adults supportive groups and NGOs can be formed to help these people, along with increasing public awareness of ASD.²¹

Hopefully this editorial based on a small collection of articles would have painted a picture on the paucity of services for ASD patients and highlight how important it is to focus on how gradually the prevalence of ASD has increased over the past few years. Hopefully improving on these services, along with education, awareness, and safe environments will help in providing better outcomes for ASD and many complications can be reduced.

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