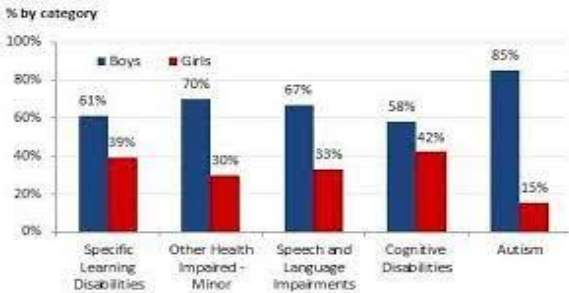


Background

According to Lord *et al* (2018) autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is the term used to define repetitive sensory motor behaviours and social communication deficits. The National Autistic Society (2022a) defines Autism as a developmental disability, which is lifelong for individuals, affecting their levels of communication and interaction with society. There are approximately 700,000 autistic children and adults in the UK, with one in 100 people on the autism spectrum. Research displays that it has been over 50 years since Kanner’s (1943, cited in The National Autistic Society, 2022b) classic Autistic syndrome was first described. Ever since, clinical work and research results have assisted in developing knowledge and recognition of Autism. In comparison to 50 Years ago as, more adults and children are now being diagnosed with Autism, although there is still a lengthy process of creating an autism friendly world.



Source: autism360.com, Google images, 2022.

The graph displays that there is a higher percentage rate of Autism in Boys in comparison to Girls. According to Autism 360 (2022), boys are four times more likely to be diagnosed with ASD than girls.

Identifying and Diagnosing

An example of how Autism is diagnosed in the UK, according to NHS (2019) involves an Autism assessment which consists of a referral from a GP because of parents concerns or the school’s special educational needs coordinator (SENCO) which can take up to 14 months. Positives of the referral process enables the child’s needs to be assessed and potentially catered for within the setting and parents and families will have confirmation of any concerns which they may have suspected regarding their child displaying traits of Autism.

However, Lai *et al* (2014a), Young *et al* (2018), Gould and Ashton-Smith (2011) and Hull *et al* (2017) share views on how people with ASD may often use compensatory behaviours to hide their Autism, to mitigate social challenges. This is echoed by Livingston *et al* (2019) and Tierney *et al* (2016) who also share views on how ASD can be masked. Lai *et al* (2019b) states that this is more common in females with ASD in comparison to males. Elaborating on how this can become a barrier if behaviours are masked as it may cause a delay or even a missed diagnosis.

Further challenges of this process include waiting lists as they may be longer than expected for assessments, especially in recent years with the ongoing impacts of Covid which will delay the diagnosis time, due to a possible back log of assessments, appointment times and restrictions. Further delays may depend on parents or practitioners’ awareness of the ALN. Practitioners may not be able to identify signs of ALN due to a lack of experience of working with children with additional learning needs. Therefore, they will be less likely to identify specific causes of concern. British Medical Association (2019) states potential impacts of long waiting times or delayed diagnosis, which can impact a child’s education, place stress on families and deny the child of an understanding as to why they react to certain situations.

Early Intervention

Kadam *et al* (2021) believes that early intervention and diagnosis can maximize a child with ASD’s developmental outcomes. White *et al* (2020) express how co-occurring mental health problems for people with ASD are the catalyst for early intervention and referrals.

However, Itzhak and Zachor (2011) states that studies suggest that biological factors such as age, severity of autism and language abilities, as well as environmental factors such as education and maternal age, impact on individual ability of benefitting from early ASD intervention.

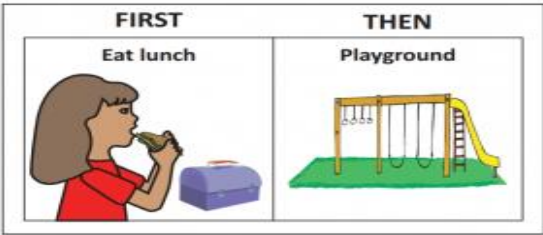
Barriers

A case study in New Delhi explores how Autism can be considered as a barrier for future employment, according to Thakur and Varmani (2015) further stating that employment is one of the greatest challenges for people with Autism, due to social interaction deficits. However, a socially inclusive environment can make representative changes to society’s views on employing individuals with ALN. Paula *et al* (2020) displays how Latin-American families experience frequent stigma after reporting feelings of discrimination for having a child with ASD. This can be a result of a lack of understanding of ASD and judgement, which can cause anxiety for families.

Financial situations can be challenging for families due to specific necessities and essentials needed. However, NHS (no date b), Family Fund (2021) and Welsh Local Government Association (2022) provide financial advice and support for families who may be struggling. Autism Speaks (2022) discusses how change can be unsettling for an Autistic child and can become a barrier for social interaction. Further stating that loud and busy environments can lead to challenging behaviours because of feeling anxious, frustrated or tense. Adapting environments such as classrooms can support children with ALN.

Similarly, T aurozzi (2016) shares views on how classrooms and settings can be adapted to visually support children with ASD by including timelines and visual representations of activities and food and drink to promote inclusivity as well as supporting their needs.

Visual Supports



Source: paaautism.org, Google images, 2022.

This image is an example of a visual support which is used in ST F units and many classrooms for children with ASD. Visual timelines represent activities and structure of the setting. Benefits of visual aids, according to PA Bureau of Supports for Autism and Special Populations, (2022) allow children to communicate with others and their parents.

However, plans can change which may interfere with the timeline. Examples of this would be outdoor activities needing to be postponed due to weather conditions, or interruptions such as fire drills, which may result in meltdowns, which can further prevent them from participating in activities.

Children with ASD may resort to only using a visual timeline to identify activities by pointing at the visuals as opposed to using their voice to communicate, making them too reliant on visual cues as suggested by The Autism Helper (2020).

Conclusion

In support of The Additional Learning Needs code for Wales 2021 (Welsh Government, 2021) to ensure that children with ALN are supported, effective training for staff is essential in developing an understanding of individual differences of each child in the class. Especially

those with autism, as supportive environments catered to their needs will reduce anxiety and meltdowns such as spacious classrooms, visual supports, sensory activities, and soft play. Swansea Council (2022) advises that all schools should have policies that display how they promote effective partnership working to ensure that pupils with ALN’s needs are met. This is also in support of the Equality Act 2010.

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