

AUTISTIC SPECTRUM DISORDER

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ASD

WHAT IS AUTISTIC SPECTRUM DISORDER

According to the National Autistic Society (2023) and the National Health Service (NHS) no date Autism is a developmental disability which can affect how people interact with the world and how they communicate. Autism is a condition that you are born with, it is not a curable illness. Autism affects people differently and is often referred to as a spectrum. Listed below are a few difficulties some autistic sufferers may encounter in addition to communication difficulties.

- repetitive and restrictive behaviour
- extreme anxiety
- over or under sensitivity to light, sound, taste or touch
- meltdowns or shutdowns.

THE STATISTICS

When discussing how many people suffer with ASD, it is important to recognize the 'autism prevalence', autism prevalence is the estimation of how many autistic people there are in the UK. It needs to be noted that this number does not represent how many people have an actual diagnosis. Government estimations currently state that more than 1 in 100 people are on the autistic spectrum. There are approximately 700,000 autistic adults and children in the UK. National Autistic Society(2023), GOV.UK (2021).

A study conducted by McConkey (2020) shows the prevalence rises of autism cases in schools across the U.K.

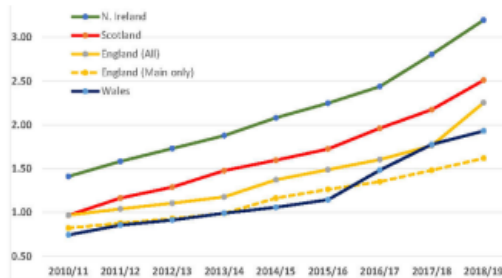


Figure 1. The prevalence rates of pupils with ASD in each country of the UK in the school years 2010/11 to 2018/2019 [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](#)]

Although the data above shows the rise in autism levels throughout the four countries, the results are based on school data census, where the child has undergone the formal process of assessment, it does not evaluate or show the severity levels of the children's needs Escher (2020). McConkey goes on to say within the study that the rise is also linked with autism being identified as co-morbidity.

DIAGNOSIS

Diagnosing ASD is a complicated process as it can be present in so many varying areas of life and affects everyone differently. Although ASD diagnoses are increasing, it is debated whether this is because of new cases or just the availability of better diagnostic systems Elder (2017).

Symptoms of ASD present themselves in the first 2 years of life, the development of the condition changes as they age, for example behaviours displayed in early years such as hyperactivity, can shift to hypoactivity during young adulthood. Diagnosis of ASD can only be conducted by a trained professional, along with a detailed history, observations and information passed on from families and schools. For a diagnosis to be possible the person needs to have significant lifelong difficulties that have an impact on multiple aspects of their life's. These issues are sub-categorized as social interaction and communication and restricted, repetitive behaviours, interests or activities. Although the person does not have to experience all of these difficulties they would look for difficulties occurring from both columns NHS WALES (no date). However there is greater difficulty in diagnosing girls with ASD as they are able to mask most of the behaviours in comparison to boys as supported by Moyes and Porter (2014).

WHAT ARE GOVERNMENTS DOING

There has been a significant amount of input over the last few years in regards to helping and assisting those who suffer with autism. The Autism Act was introduced in 2009. This act was the starting point for introducing change and support to those living with autism, however it only applied to adults. This document was later updated in 2014 with the 'think autism' strategy where it began to recognise the importance of early recognition of the condition in children and young adults. Although these were a good starting point it meant that younger children with autism were still being overlooked. Since then more improvements have been made for children with the revised Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) code of practice (2015). This act was linked to the Children and Families Act (CAFA) (2014), having these two policies linked ensures that Local Authorities (LA) and schools or colleges are aware of what they not only should do, but what they must do by law to help improve the lives of those living with autism. IPSEA (no date).

ISSUES/ CHALLENGES/ BENEFITS

Autism can be challenging to live with, this in part is due to the behaviours sometimes displayed - stimming, acting out, meltdowns. However when these behaviours are displayed this is how an autistic person manages their emotions. NHS (no date) Ambitious About Autism (no date). Although these are not always avoidable, there are methods in which to support sufferers to learn to regulate themselves these could be using headphones to minimize noise, turning off bright lights or creating pressure by using a weighted blanket or snake. Green, Ben-Sasson (2010).

However autism does not always have to be viewed as a negative. According to Psychology Today (no date) and The Autistic Awareness Centre (no date) by beginning to see autism as a neurodiversity in the brain instead of a curable illness, this would greatly enable autistic people to use their traits to their advantage. For an example a persons who has traits that involve repetitive actions and a fascination with patterns they would benefit from working in a quality control type of environment. By positively thinking about autism this may change opinions and enable schools and communities grow and develop how they support those who live with autism Bennie, M. (2019).

POTENTIAL BARRIERS

Liu, Li, & Zheng, et al. (2016) state that children with ASD do not receive adequate schooling as the teachers have a lack of knowledge and skill to be able to support them efficiently, this is supported by NASEN (2019) who have recognised that there is a training gap from teachers who do not receive any Initial Teacher Training (ITT) relevant to SEN. A study conducted by Vickerman & Coates (2019) found that 43% of newly qualified staff felt underprepared to work with children with SEN in schools.

43% of trainees identified their initial teacher training had not prepared them sufficiently to work with children with SEN in schools.

This is a huge barrier when working within any setting that has ASD pupils. Without adequate knowledge or training how can the child be successfully supported?

COMBATING BARRIERS

A strategy that would greatly benefit those working with ASD would be that of something similar to what NASEN created in 2019- Autism: Research Practise Programme. This programme allowed teachers time to study and gain a deeper understanding of children with Autism and their needs. Alongside this it enabled them to create interventions and strategies to assist those in their care. This however can be only be achieved by having relevant access to ASD specialist, funding and willingness to learn from staff. A review carried out by National Education Union (NEU) (no date) found that there is approximately a £2bn annual shortfall in funding for those with SEND.

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