**Autism Spectrum Disorders**

Autism spectrum disorders describe the early signs of impairments in socialization and communication, especially the presence of repetitive behaviors. Autistic people usually have differences in the development of their thinking, behavior, language and social skills. Notably, it is three to four times more common in boys than in girls, with most girls exhibiting less obvious signs compared to boys. Despite being a lifelong condition, most children diagnosed with ASD continue to lead independent, productive and fulfilling lives. However, individuals with ASD and their families experience high rates of stigmatization, especially self-stigma, public stigma and stigma from association. Primarily, the stigmatization is associated with the combination of the victims’ pervasive disability and apparent physical normality. Additionally, the situation is aggravated by the fact that people with autism lack identifiable facial characteristics. Furthermore, they do not use devices such as wheelchairs which may alert the society of a presence of a disability. Thus, their unusual behavior may be mistaken for poor parenting, mental retardation or the dangerous lack of self-control. The stigma takes a toll on the families, forcing them to shy away from pursuing autism diagnoses and treatment.

**Diagnosis**

An early autism diagnosis is crucial for providing the appropriate educational and treatment program. Essentially, there is no medical test for autism, hence diagnosis is based on observing how the child talks and acts in comparison to other children in the same age group. The doctors analyze the child’s development history and behavior so that they can make inferences. For a child to meet the diagnostic criteria as per the DSM-V, they ought to have persistent deficits in the three dimensions of social communication and interaction. First, the child exhibits consistent deficits in their social communication and interaction in different contexts. Additionally, it involves poor non-verbal communication behavior due to the inability to use gestures, which may misinterpreted. The children also experience difficulty in forming, upholding and perceiving relationships, especially in adjusting their behavior to suit various contexts. The analysis also looks out for series of restrictive or repetitive behavior or interests. Next, the symptoms must manifest in the early developmental phases, despite the fact that they may fully exhibit later. The symptoms impact the child’s functionality on different levels, either social or occupational, hence limiting them. Finally, it is impossible to draw conclusions based on other disabilities.

**Prognosis**

The prognosis for autism is associated with the individual’s IQ, with lower functioning patients bearing the impossibility of living independently. However, those with higher IQ levels may live independently, have families and get employment. For children, the condition may improve when at 4-6 years, particularly cases of mild autism and began treatment in good time. Prognosis is also dependent on the co-existing mental retardation, with 25-70% of the patients exhibiting different levels of mental retardation. Due to the increased level of awareness about autism, most parents have become amenable to early screening, especially for high risk children. Finally, prognosis is also dependent on diseases that co-exist with autism. They mainly include genetic disorders like Fragile X syndrome and Down’s syndrome.

**Etiology**

While no single cause of ASD has been identified, it results from a series of various causal factors, including genetic, environmental and neurobiological factors. The genetic risk factors point that ASD is caused by hereditable gene mutations. Abnormalities in the genetic code causes abnormalities in brain development that eventually lead to structural and functional brain abnormalities. Notably, pre and post-environmental factors also alters with genetic susceptibility to ASD. Environmental factors include dietary factors, environmental toxins and exposure to drugs, which are perceived to be triggers as they interact with the genetic orientation.

**Treatments and Intervention**

ASD has no given cure and standard treatment. Primarily, treatment seeks to maximize the child’s functionality by reducing the symptoms and supporting learning and development. Behavioral and communication therapies deal with the social, behavioral and language difficulties associated with ASD. A major approach is called applied behavior analysis, which encourages positive behavior as they improve a variety of skills. Assistive technology includes a range of communication devices designed to improve communication and interaction for people with ASD. Occupational therapy seeks to teach the children skills which will help them live independently, like eating, showering and dressing. Recently, dietary treatments have been developed to address ASD symptoms, causing a change in the manner a child acts or feels.

**Reason for Choosing Condition**

I was motivated to research on ASD due to the massive stigmatization they are exposed to. Most parents, especially first time parents lack insight on how to go about a child diagnosed with ASD. Society has perceived it as a death sentence, with people ending up demotivated to consult treatment. Thus, I intend to increase awareness, having come from a background with a sibling with ASD to encourage society to provide the children with equal opportunities, similar to other children.

Personal Reaction

People with autism are the most misunderstood category of people in the society. I believe autism is among one of the largest disabilities. The worst part is the fact that it manifests differently in individuals, to varying depths which is quite a great deal. Having an autistic sibling has subjected my family to a lot of stigmatization, leaving so many unanswered questions. Severally, I try to live life through the eyes of autistic persons, and I must acknowledge it must be the most difficult thing. Currently, the world has been revolutionized, hence the need to build awareness on the aspect that was once a private matter.