What is Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)?

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Learning Objectives

1. Understand how to identify autism
2. Understand the increase in autism over the past 20 years
3. Understand disparities in autism identification and services
What is autism?

AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER

Social – Communication Differences & Restricted Interests
Social Communication

- Social - Emotional Reciprocity
- Nonverbal Communication
- Social Interaction and Play
Restricted (strong) Interests / Repetitive Behavior

• Predictability
• Motor movements
• Focused interests
• Sensory Differences
Estimated Autism Prevalence 2020

* Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) prevalence estimates are for 4 years prior to the report date (e.g. 2020 figures are from 2016)
Why might someone have ASD?

• No one cause of autism has been identified
• Most cases involve genetic and environmental factors
People do NOT have ASD due to:

1. Vaccines
2. Poor Parenting
3. Poor Nutrition
Identifying ASD

- No definitive medical test
- Clinical interviews
- Behavioral observation/checklists
- Standardized cognitive and psychological testing
- Equal opportunity diagnosis
Disparities in Identifying Autistic Girls

- Girls are diagnosed later than boys
- May show increased depression in adolescence
- Females may be more likely to mask autism

"The thing about being autistic is that you gradually get less and less autistic because you keep learning, you keep learning how to behave. It's like being in a play."

excerpt from a 2010 interview for The Wall Street Journal

Disparities in Diagnosis

Fig. 1 Cumulative percentage of sample with autism by age at first diagnosis.
Disparities in Autism Care

1. Poorer access to healthcare and education
2. Fewer referrals to specialty care
3. Lower quality of care
4. Lack of culturally competent providers
5. Limited research comparing interventions across cultures

(Smith et al., 2020 review)
Common Barriers for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Families

- Lack of diversity among practitioners
- Biases about cultures, parenting styles etc.
- Mismatch between home and provider language
- Provider understanding of impact of sociocultural and socioeconomic stressors
- Limited knowledge about bilingualism
Interview
Thank you for joining us!

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