

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD): A brief report on its main characteristics



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ABSTRACT

The present study, of bibliographic origin, sought to identify in the literature some main characteristics and historical discussions about autism and also to describe what has appeared as more comprehensive

characteristics in children with autism. Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a developmental disorder, persistent throughout life, as it has no cure, nor consistently clarified causes, however, it is important that teachers, family members, parents and other professionals have some basic information about the characteristics of autism so that they can seek their rights regarding the teaching and learning process.

Keywords: Autism, Characteristics, Teaching and Learning Process.

1 INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, schools have been receiving many students with autism. What can be seen is that there are many difficulties in dealing with the multiple characteristics of autism, difficulties that are of teachers, parents, family members and the school management itself.

It is important to highlight that autism is understood as a neuropsychiatric syndrome of early developmental onset. It is characterized by profound and chronic disturbances in social interaction, severe problems with language, the presence of persistent and repetitive behaviors, an intense need for routine in the environment, and a markedly restricted field of functional activities. (SANTOS et al, 2021)

According to Silva and Mulick (2009), autism does not have a specific cause, so it can include genetic, structural, and brain factors, prenatal, perinatal, and postnatal problems. "Its causes range from psychological, brain dysfunctions and alterations in neurotransmitters and environmental factors as defining the disease, to those of a genetic nature" (ORRU, 2009 apud LEONEL, 2021). In view of this finding, although some characteristics are pointed out, a survey that points out the characteristics of autism with greater assertiveness is still inconsistent.

The objective of this study is to identify, in the literature, some main characteristics and historical discussions about autism and also to describe what has appeared as more comprehensive characteristics in children with autism. To achieve the objectives, a bibliographic study has been carried out on *google scholar*, based on the keywords "ASD", "Autism", "Characteristics". Based on



the material already selected, the study, which is still in progress, will be described in the following sections. It is believed that this type of study can contribute so that teachers, family members and other professionals can, in a more accessible way, find the possibilities of understanding autism and make the appropriate referrals.

2 A HISTORICAL CONTEXT REGARDING AUTISM

According to Liberalesso and Lacerda (2020), the term "autism" was first used in 1908 by Swiss psychiatrist Paul Eugen Bleuler to describe patients with symptoms that he thought were similar to those observed in schizophrenia. Bleuler has become a world reference in the study of mental illness.

Since the nineteenth century, the knowledge of early childhood disorders, the role of biological and environmental factors in their development, and treatment approaches has increased exponentially. Although discussions about autism began more than 60 years ago, its full recognition as a separate entity from other disorders, such as childhood schizophrenia and mental retardation, evolves gradually. Most of the history of autism began in the 1940s, with the work of Leo Kanner, a child psychiatrist, who published a paper describing a new disorder, infantile autism.

Kanner (1943) *apud* Whitman (2019) says that the main characteristics of autism include the inability to relate to people, failure to use language for communication in social situations, resistance to change and an excessive concern with keeping everything the same, orientation towards objects rather than people, good cognitive-intellectual abilities, lack of response to the environment; rigid adherence to routine and emotional turmoil when rituals were disturbed; unusual language that included a tendency to repeat the speech of literal responses and the use of pronouns inappropriately.

According to studies, until 1943 autism was mentioned as a disorder, before Kanner's studies autistic people were included in other disorders such as childhood psychosis and mental retardation, or were just seen by society as strange people.

Some theoretical studies seek to explain autism throughout history, but the beginning of studies is marked by the description presented by the Austrian psychiatrist Leo Kanner, in 1943, who observed and described 11 children who had as their main symptom the difficulty of relating to other people. Some common characteristics were also observed, such as severe language disorders, echolalia, pronominal inversion, feeding disorders, stereotypies, a strong resistance to changes in routines.

2.1 THE CHARACTERISTICS OF AUTISM

Morais (2012 *apud* SANCHES; TAVEIRA, 2020), states that the conception of childhood autism, since the nineteenth century, has undergone several changes, and the literature has been describing isolated cases of children with severe mental disorders. These disorders are due to important



developmental disorders that, in accordance with the current terminology, met diagnostic criteria for children on the autism spectrum.

According to Sanches and Taveira (2020), in 1952, the Diagnostic Statistical Manual of Mental Health (DSM) brought the concept of autism for the first time, however, this concept was relating the symptoms of schizophrenia to those of autism.

Santos et al. (2021) state that autism is still widely confused, although its definition has undergone some changes.

In order for a child to be diagnosed as autistic, it is necessary that he or she presents symptoms that fit into at least six (or more items) that assess qualitative impairments in the areas of social interaction, communication, and patterns of behavior, interest, or stereotyped activities; Delayed or abnormal functioning in the areas of social interaction, language for the purpose of social communication and symbolic games must be identified before the age of three; Although it is recognized that autism can occur alone or in association with other disorders that affect brain functioning, such as Down Syndrome or epilepsy, it is necessary to distinguish it from Rett Syndrome or Childhood Disintegrative Disorder (DSM-IVTR, 2002 apud SERRA, 2004, p.19).

Causes of developmental disabilities include genetic and environmental factors; It can manifest itself, before or after birth, during the first years of life or in adolescence, influencing neurobiological and psychological functioning, resulting in a disability. Although there is no evidence that autism is actually caused by environmental factors, there is growing clinical and research evidence indicating that environment can have a marked influence on autistic symptoms, and that carefully structured interventions can lead to harm reduction in relation to the development of students on the spectrum.

Araújo et al (2022, p. 32-emphasis mine) state that

The characteristics of the disorder are very comprehensive, affecting individuals to varying degrees in the areas of social interaction, communication, and behavior. Nowadays, the term "autism spectrum" is used considering the breadth of specificities related to inconsistent responses to stimuli and the heterogeneous profile of abilities and impairments.

Since people diagnosed with autism have difficulties in the areas of language and social interaction, they usually also have difficulties in other areas, such as academic, occupational, and independent living development, which are central to the definition of developmental characteristics related to ASD.

By virtue of the aforementioned facts, ASD is a disorder that causes disturbances in the neurological development of the child, such as those of communication, behavior and social interaction. It can already be observed from the first months of the baby's life with irritability when being cradled, for example. At one year and six months of age, autism becomes more evident, and it is essential to investigate speech delay, repetitive interests, and even loss of eye contact (SANTOS *et al*, 2021).



The World Health Organization (WHO) defines childhood autism as a syndrome present from birth, which invariably manifests before 30 months of age. It is characterized by abnormal responses to auditory or visual stimuli, and by severe problems with the comprehension of spoken language. Speech is slow to appear, and when it does, echolalia, inappropriate use of pronouns, immature grammatical structure, and inability to use abstract terms are noted. There is also, in general, a difficulty in the social use of both verbal and body language.

Autism is a behavioral and emotional disorder that is due to some type of organic brain impairment, and therefore does not have a psychogenic origin. It defines, among its characteristics, a decrease in the pace of psychoneurological, social and linguistic development, as well as the presence of abnormal reactions to various sensations, such as: hearing, seeing, touching, feeling, balancing and tasting. The relationship between people, objects or events is carried out in an unusual way, leading to the belief that there is an organic involvement of the central nervous system.

However, this aspect can change over the years. Younger or more committed autistic people may be more resistant to interaction, while older or less committed autistic people may be more open to accepting the interaction but not seeking it effectively.

According to the Statistical Diagnostic Manual of Mental Health (2014), the DSM 5 considers symptoms to be present early in the developmental period, and may not become manifest until social demands exceed limited capacities, and are exposed later in life, causing impairment in social, professional, or other areas important to the individual. The DSM 5 classifies severity levels into:

Interaction/Social Communication:

- Level 1 (needs support): difficulty in initiating social interactions, atypical or unsuccessful responses to social openness; decreased interest in social interactions; failure in conversation; attempts to make friends strangely and unsuccessfully;
- Level 2 (needs substantial support): Marked deficits in conversation; apparent losses even with support; limited initiation into social interactions; abnormal/reduced response to social openings;
- Level 3 (needs very substantial support): Severe impairment in operation; initiation of very limited social interactions; minimal response to social openings.

3 FINAL THOUGHTS

In view of the study carried out, it was possible to verify that autism has some basic characteristics, which need to be known by education professionals, as well as family members, so that they can contribute to the teaching-learning process contributing to the amelioration of the damages. This is a study that still needs to be deepened because it is in the initial preparations, but it can bring important contributions regarding the characteristics of ASD.



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