

SPECTRUM

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How we see it

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a lifelong condition with no cure. This makes early detection imperative so that intervention and support can be put in place to help the individual as soon as possible. The symptoms (a physical or mental feature, which is regarded as indicating a condition or disease) of ASD are specific to each individual, but almost all on the spectrum share some similarities.

Today I discuss some of the more prevalent symptoms of ASD.

Although uncommon, detection of ASD can occur when an individual is as young as 2 years old. For the majority of ASD sufferers, this would not be the case, mainly because certain symptoms of ASD are not obvious in the early stages of life.

According to the latest Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, one of the primary symptoms of ASD is defined as -- persistent deficits in social communication and social interaction across multiple contexts.

Specifically, these typically express themselves as difficulties in emotional reciprocity. An example of this would be the inability to return a smile, or reacting to a certain emotion inappropriately. Other symptoms can be difficulties in understanding or responding to certain body language cues and difficulties in maintaining and building relationships. These are just some of the varying difficulties faced by the individual, and each person with ASD will experience these at different levels of severity.

ASD can also impact on a person's ability to express themselves through appropriate body language or interpret those signals presented by others. Often this can be seen in the misinterpretation of non-verbal communication or discomfort faced in making proper eye contact. Understanding and expressing themselves through facial expressions can be a great challenge for people suffering from ASD.

Building and maintaining relationships can be a huge hurdle and may present itself as a lack of interest in playing with peers and/or a difficulty in adjusting to different social circumstances. It is important to note that although these can be classified as specific symptoms of ASD, they are not the same for every individual.

Another major symptom of ASD is defined as 'repetitive patterns of behaviour, interests or activities'. Repetitive patterns are perhaps the most stereotypical of all the symptoms of ASD, often a specific motor movement or 'tic' or echolalia (repetition of a phrase or word which would be considered meaningless). Repetitive patterns of behaviour can also be a circumscribed interest. This is when the individual with ASD expresses an almost obsessive interest in a very specific topic or

object: for example, a child with a fixated interest in doors, or wheels of cars. Repetitive patterns of behaviour, like most of the symptoms described, is specific to the individual.

Heightened stress around the concept of change can be another symptom of ASD. Often a person with ASD will display an adherence to routine and difficulties in changing scheduled behaviour. For example, an individual who can only eat particular foods at a certain time, or can only wear certain items of clothing. Individuals with these symptoms typically find changes to their routine extremely difficult to cope with, and will become distressed at the slightest change to their daily norm.

Individuals with ASD can also have hyper- or hypo-sensitivity to sensory stimuli: sound or smells for example. Their reactions to these stimuli can range from one

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extreme to the other: they can either be extremely interested or react adversely to a stimulus.

The obstacles faced in diagnosing ASD surround the fact that no two individuals will suffer the same set of symptoms and each will vary in severity within the same category. Additionally, ASD will often co-exist with another disorder like an intellectual disability. For these reasons, reaching a diagnosis of ASD is not easy, and often can involve more than one specialist examining different aspects and abilities of the individual and can take several years.

While this may seem frustrating it is important to see the process through so that life changing interventions can be put in place. Recognising and understanding the difficulties faced by individuals with ASD is a major step in helping them to better acclimatise to everyday life. People without ASD should strive to understand the difficulties that people with ASD face and therefore help them to overcome and strive in spite of these difficulties.

As the series — "Let's talk about autism" — continues, we hope to address some of the more important issues related to the disorder. To read previous published articles, visit: www.thedailystar.net/author/kiyoshi-bhuiyan

CORRIGENDUM

Of Plenty and Pitha

We regret to inform our readers that in an article styled 'Of Plenty and Pitha' printed on Star Lifestyle on November 14, 2017, the name of Muntasir Mamun, professor of the Department of English and Humanities at the University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh, was mistakenly dropped. The write up was based on his keen insight and contribu-

tion. He had said, "The real spirit of Nobanno resides in the villages of the country."

According to Muntasir Mamun, Rabindranath Tagore draws an obvious comparison to Nobanno's harvest and the smiles of farmers in Agrahayan triggered by a generous reap. From the write-up, Rabindranath Tagore pens verses of the national

anthem of Bangladesh depicting the scenic beauty of a golden Bengal in Agrahayan and an obvious reference to the abundant and ripe rice crop standing in the fields.

We profusely apologize for any inconvenience caused for the error on our part.

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*Till 31 December 2017



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