Autism Spectrum Disorder: general aspects and concerns about Brazilian politics

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Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) encompasses a highly variable set of neurodevelopmental disorders with early-onset and nondegenerative patterns. According to the World Health Organization’s International Classification of Diseases (11th Revision), ICD-11, ASD is characterized as “persistent deficits in the ability to initiate and to sustain reciprocal social interaction and social communication, and by a range of restricted, repetitive, and inflexible patterns of behavior, interests or activities that are clearly atypical or excessive for the individual’s age and sociocultural context”¹.

Behavioral manifestations in ASD include deficits in social interaction, disturbances in communication skills, both verbal and nonverbal, difficulties in changing routine, motor stereotypies, and a very restricted repertoire of activities or interests², which interfere with the individual’s personal, educational, and professional, social, and affective interactions³, with such abnormalities presenting variable impacts on different individuals and causing a severe burden to relatives and healthcare systems⁴.

ASD etiology is still not entirely characterized, and an interplay of genetic, epigenetic, and environmental factors seems to be involved⁵. Genetic basis points out that sex -differential genetic and hormonal factors confer protective status to females, which could explain the higher incidence of ASD in males⁶.

The current prevalence of ASD in the worldwide population is about 1%, with a median male-to-female ratio of 4.2, with a significant increase in recent years⁷. However, such data are not homogeneous worldwide since there is high variability among methodologies in the obtention of data and where they are collected, as data originating from low-income countries are scarce compared to those from high-income countries⁸. In Brazil, unfortunately, data on ASD prevalence are rare⁹.

Notwithstanding, Brazil has adopted a policy to protect the rights of people with ASD since 2012¹⁰. Nevertheless, despite being contemplated in the text of the law, Brazil is, effectively, one of the nations that least contribute to a better characterization of the prevalence of autistic individuals in the world⁶, with such a lack of information significantly impacting the diagnosis and generating considerable burden on relatives and health systems.

Considering the above, government campaigns must be effectively implemented to properly clarify to the population the importance of an early diagnosis for ASD and increase investment in scientific studies focused...
on this subject, with more research groups working on the issue. Such efforts would contribute to better inserting individuals with ASD into society, generating social and economic benefits for the country.

**DEDICATION**

Dedicated to all autistic persons and their relatives.

**REFERENCES**