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Autism and PTSD

People with autism are bound to experience traumatic events. Being in a loud crowded place or being bullied by kids at school can be deemed traumatic by kids on the spectrum. The spectrum is incredibly broad therefore autism manifests in many different ways. People with autism can be very sensitive to certain things such as having their toothbrush moved, causing them to react in ways that may seem unjust. Similarly, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is when someone experiences something traumatic or life threatening event triggering extreme reactions and/or anxiety when those memories are triggered. Someone with PTSD may even suffer from depression. PTSD is hard to detect and treat in people with autism, since they have boundaries we are not aware of yet. (Gravitz 2019) Autism and PTSD have very similar characteristics, which is why it is difficult to recognize when someone with autism is suffering from PTSD. (Gravitz 2019)

PTSD is very common and can be seen in soldiers who return from war, and in someone who has experienced a natural disaster. PTSD can also be seen after someone has been raped or assaulted. It is hard for people to move past these events and are easily triggered by things such as smells or even a song. (Gravitz 2019) People who have gone through a traumatic event may

have symptoms such as having the memory of the event being replayed over and over again and having nightmares. They may also avoid everything that is tied to the event, that includes people and activities. Sometimes they will not even talk about the event in hopes that they could forget about it. Someone experiencing PTSD may even behave in a way that is dangerous to themselves and those around them (American Psychiatric Association). PTSD can last anywhere from one month to several years. “PTSD can cause other things such as depression, substance use, memory problems and other physical and mental health problems.” (American Psychiatric Association 2017 para. #3)

Many people don't really understand what autism is and how it affects people who have it or those around them. “Autism is a brain-based disorder characterized by social-communication challenges and restricted repetitive behaviors, activities, and interests” (Autism Science Foundation). Autism is a developmental disability that affects how those who have it communicate and behave in social settings, they also have many behavioral issues. The only thing that sets people with autism apart from people without autism is the way they communicate, interact, behave, and learn. “Some behaviors include repetitive motor behaviors, same routine, resistance to change and, in some cases, aggression or self-injury” (Autism Science Foundation).

People with Autism and people with PTSD have similar characteristics in terms of behavior which is why doctors have trouble diagnosing PTSD in people with autism. Doctors and other professionals see them having PTSD symptoms such as anxiety and constantly talking about the event, and just blame it on the autism, not knowing they are actually suffering from PTSD. Doctors aren't able to differentiate the two.

Since Autism and PTSD overlap, parents mistake their children's behavior as the behavior of someone on the spectrum, when their trauma is usually to blame for their behavior. When children experience trauma at a very young age it is difficult to diagnose them. As adults the lines don't get blurred since being diagnosed autistic requires that the child shows symptoms before age 7. (Allez, K. & Carrigan, N.2017) When children go through a traumatic event early in their life, it can be hard to differentiate what symptoms are because of the trauma or because they have trouble with social interactions. (Allez, K. & Carrigan, N.2017) For the people with autism it is hard for them to be treated for PTSD because doctors are not sure what traits are because of PTSD and which traits are because of the autism. Due to this situation it is difficult to come up with a way to treat the PTSD because doctors are unsure of the boundaries they have. There are many treatments and therapy methods for autism and many treatments for PTSD today, lots of research is done for both autism and PTSD.

According to *Scientific American* (Gravitz 2019) she discusses a study where they interview caretakers and people on the spectrum. They ask them about causes of trauma, and the interviewer heard things such as “sexual abuse, emotional abuse and horrendous bullying, to much broader concepts. Or feeling constantly overwhelmed by sensory experience—feeling marginalized in our society because you're somebody with differences.” In other words, she says, “the experience of having autism and the trauma associated with that.” (Scientific American 2019)

People on the spectrum are more likely to develop PTSD due to them being more vulnerable to trauma, such as extreme bullying, and being taken advantage of sexually.

Considering how many similarities they have in behavior, PTSD is overlooked in people on the spectrum.

Works Cited

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