

Autism Spectrum Disorder

Why in news?

On World Autism Day (April 2), there should be focus not only on raising awareness of the illness but also on the importance of providing a positive and supportive environment.

What is Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)?

Autism affects 18 million people in India. ASD affects approximately 1% to 1.5% of children aged 2 to 9 years.

- **About** - Autism spectrum disorders (ASD) are a collection of disorders defined by issues such as social interaction and communication difficulties.
- People with ASD may behave, communicate, interact, and learn in ways that are different from most other people.
- **Cause** - It is a developmental disability caused by differences in the brain.
- It has environmental and genetic causes.
- **Fragile X Syndrome (FXS)** is the leading inherited cause of autism in 4% of the global population.
- **Transmission** -It is transmitted genetically for some people.
- **Symptom** -People with ASD often have problems with social communication, interaction and restricted or repetitive behaviors.
- People with ASD may also have different ways of learning, moving, or paying attention.
- **Diagnosis** -There is no medical test such as blood test to diagnose the disorder.
- ASD can sometimes be detected at 18 months of age or younger.
- **Treatment** -There is **no cure** for autism.
- Treatments for ASD seek to reduce symptoms that interfere with daily functioning and quality of life.
- Treatment plans usually involve multiple professionals and are catered to the individual.



What are the challenges?

- Low awareness
- Lack of basic services
- Poor diagnosis
- No national programme on autism
- Lack of systematic estimates
- Lack of central medical registry

- Cultural differences in who gets a clinical diagnosis of autism
- No medical insurance coverage for autism
- Variances in the availability of psychiatrists (less than 10,000 psychiatrists are available in India)

What measures can be taken?

- **Need for an all-India programme** - A national programme needs 3 essential components - assessment, intervention, and awareness.
- **Non-specialists** -Non-specialist workforce (Accredited Social Health Activist /Anganwadi workers, parents/caregivers) and appropriate digital technology can be used to widen the reach.
- **Early intervention** - Simple behavioral interventions that parents/caregivers can be trained on that can have a positive impact.
- **Creation of linkage** -Researchers, clinicians, service providers can be linked to the end-users in the autism community in India.
- **Public awareness** -Can serve to reduce stigma associated with autism and related conditions.
- **Private sector** - Partnership with the private sector would also be vital to take survey and support the victims.

References

1. [The Hindu | Autism](#)
2. [Economic Times |Status of Autism in India](#)