OP-089

EVALUATION OF THE OUTCOME OF INDIVIDUALS WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER IN ADULTHOOD AND FACTORS PREDICTING PROGNOSIS

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BACKGROUND AND AIM: Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a lifelong disorder that core symptoms continue into adulthood with partial changes. Prognosis is mostly poor, but there are also cases who lose the diagnosis. There are a limited number of studies evaluating the ASD in adulthood; results are inconsistent, and datas are often shared from western. We aimed to evaluate the outcome of ASD in adulthood, taking into account the opportunities of our country, and to investigate the predictors of the outcome of ASD and loss of diagnosis(LD).

METHODS: Approval was received from Kocaeli University(GOKAEK-2022/20.21). 87 cases who were diagnosed with ASD in childhood and who were over 18 years old included. Outcome evaluated with Rutter/Howlin criteria.

RESULTS: 49.4% of the cases were diagnosed with Autistic Disorder (AD), 20.7% with Atypical Autism (AA), 24.7% with Asperger Syndrome (AS) and 5.7% with LD. First sentence formation age in AS was lower than AD and AA (p=0.005). None of AD case could speak fluently, two-thirds of AA cases could talk albeit disjointedly, two-thirds of AS and all LD cases could speak fluently. LD's age at starting special education was lower than others' (p=0.001) and their IQ were above 70 (p<0.001). In 9/10 of the cases, autism core symptoms were persisted. Outcome was very good/good in 14.9%, fair in 24.2%, and poor/very poor in 60.9%. In regression analysis; absence of intellectual disability predicted LD and poor/very poor outcome associated with presence of intellectual disability.

CONCLUSIONS: Our article is the first study to comparatively evaluate autism subtypes in adulthood, shows autism subtype is an important predictor of outcome, and there are cases that lose the diagnosis. IQ is the most important prognostic factor; age of development of language skills and age of starting special education are also important. There is a need for longitudinal studies evaluating adult ASD cases that clinicians will encounter frequently in coming years.

Keywords: Autism spectrum disorder, adulthood, prognosis, outcome