Does AS/ASD get worse with age?

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We regularly receive requests for www.aspergerpartner.dk from NT relatives who report worsening symptoms with age in its close relations with Asperger / ASD.

NT spouses who have performed the role of carer for their AS partner for years without understanding or recognition from the professional community, report on age-related deterioration in symptoms and abuses which their partner exhibits. At the same time NT spouses encounter a wall of ignorance if they seek support in the public system, which predominantly closes their eyes to high functioning adults with autism and their families.

Expert: It gets worse

The international expert in Asperger's syndrome /ASD, psychologist Dr. Tony Attwood, confirms that the offending symptoms in a person with AS / ASD can worsen with aging. In an interview Tony Attwood describes, that a person with AS / ASD may exhibit fluctuations during the life cycle. In childhood the autistic symptoms are usually very obvious. From the mid-20s, the person is often better at controlling the behavior through compensatory strategies. But in the last decades of the life cycle, it may happen that the person with AS / ASD will not care how his (her) behavior affects other people. The aging person with AS/High functioning Autism falls back to a childhood problem behavior level. Listen to the interview with Dr. Tony Attwood here: http://www.autismsupportnetwork.com/news/video-dr-tony-attwood-discusses-allergies-aging-autism-diagnoses-and-bullying-3789242

Danish conference

A conference organized by Rehabilitation Forum, Denmark May 21, 2014 referred to the theme of Autism and Aging. A presentation from the Danish National Social Agency's representative called "Current best knowledge about autism and aging" is enlightening. Highlights from the topic are available online and can be read here: http://www.rehabiliteringsforum.dk/fileadmin/filer/Konference_Socialstyrelsen/kl_13.00_-_WS4_-_Charlotte_H._Kaumanas.pdf

Some important points to mention include:

- The great majority of the older population with AS / ASD have never been diagnosed.
- Persons with autism spectrum disorder may lack the capacity to recognize and respond to signs of disease.
• Elderly people with High functioning autism may have reduced ability to sustain attention, reduced working memory and oral skills, while other cognitive areas are intact.
• Alternatively, autistic symptoms may diminish with age in line with the physiological aging process and better coping strategies.
• A serious problem is the lack of knowledge of ASD by professionals and employees in elder care.
• There is very little research / literature on aging and autism.
• Autism Spectrum Disorder affects all aspects of life - of the person with ASD, of the family members, relatives and society.


**NT-relatives’ knowledge is invaluable**

Those with the best first-hand knowledge of changes in symptoms and behavior among the elderly, usually talented individuals with ASD, are, in our opinion the next of kin, particularly NT-spouses. They are caring people whose knowledge should be recognized. We are therefore pleased to accept all inquiries addressed to www.aspergerpartner.dk from NT relatives who can contribute knowledge and experience of these changes.

**An adult daughter's report**

A story about an aging father with Asperger's syndrome is written by the author Liane Holliday Willey, who has Asperger's syndrome. She writes:

> “I noticed that as he got older, he became more effected by AS, and not always in a happy way. It pained me to see my dad struggle with things he used to be able to manage. His mind didn't dim, but his AS shinned. He started talking more and more about train schedules. He got more nervous when his routine was interfered with. And he became more adverse to human contact beyond our tiny immediate family. If I had sought their advice, aging experts might have told me this is the way many elderly go, but I saw a discreet difference between my father and other people his age. My father wasn't becoming a typical older person who needed care and comfort. He was returning to his comfort zone; his Aspie roots.”
Risk of Alzheimer?

NT spouses also wonder whether people with AS / ASD have a greater risk of developing Alzheimer's? The Danish National Social Agency, Socialstyrelsen, states that they do not yet know whether the incidence of dementia is higher or lower in people with autism. A 2014 Paper from The National Social Agency states in section "Older and autism":

"People with autism may lack the capacity to recognize and respond to signs of illness in old age (…..) The special profile of people with autism may also have an impact on how age-related diseases appear in relation to the onset, incidence and degree. For example, long-term medication may influence the aging process. We do not yet know whether the prevalence of dementia is higher or lower in people with autism." (‘Autism' is used for the entire autism spectrum, including Asperger Syndrome and High Functioning Autism).

Alzheimer's and Autism

The Internet provides some literature which touches on the question of whether there is an association between ASD and Alzheimer's. This article on http://autismsd.com/ mentions, among other things:

“At psychological level, both Autism and Alzheimer share a number of features including, catatonic state, disrupted sleep, difficulty with balance and language comprehension, and attention transition issues and a lot. Studies conducted on neurodevelopmental and neuropsychiatric disorders develop a strong belief of genetic overlapping between Alzheimer and Autism. (…..) Both Alzheimer’s and Autism patients have significantly similar abnormal findings in the brain including, extreme deposition of metal ions such as mercury (Hg), reduced Acetylcholine (neurotransmitter), existence of viral or bacterial infection and markedly increase in β-amyloid (1-42).”

See the full article here http://autismsd.com/autism-and-alzheimers/

It is not scientifically proven that there is an increased risk of Alzheimer's for individuals with ASD.

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