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Substance abuse as an exacerbation of the underlying conditions of Asperger's syndrome (HFA)

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Statement of the Problem: Asperger's syndrome is a developmental disorder known as part of the Highly Functional Autism (HFA) spectrum, affecting approximately 0.5% of the population. Because of their functional nature and average or higher than average intelligence combined with their lack of social skills, these individuals report high levels of physiological stress in everyday activities and regular interactions that intervene negatively not only on their mental health but exacerbating their limitations. Coping mechanisms of their underlying condition and its extensive implications have been a preoccupying issue to the scholars due to their obsessive traits and repetitive behaviors. The objective of this study was to assess substance abuse in individuals in the Highly Functional Autism spectrum, specially individuals with an Asperger's Syndrome diagnosis. A secondary objective was to compare the risk of substance abuse in Asperger's individuals with control subjects with no diagnosis within the Autism Spectrum, taking into consideration individual personality traits.

Orientation: In an extensive meta-analysis of recent literature, 15+ articles concerning substance abuse and/or Asperger's Syndrome were reviewed and analyzed in addition to work field done at the Psychiatric Ward of the Hospital Universitario San Ignacio, Bogotá Colombia.

Findings: This study showed that; adults diagnosed with Asperger's syndrome have a higher risk of substance abuse compared to the normal population due to the preexisting traits of their autistic condition. Their lack of social skills, motor clumsiness, anticipated nervousness, anxiety, among others, cause these individuals to be more susceptible to not only search for external aid to cope with their mental difficulties, but they are more likely to develop addictive disorders due to their obsessive and compulsive traits.

Conclusion & Significance: Asperger's individuals seek an external social aid in the mental disinhibition that substance consumption generates, in order to compensate their lack of social skills. Due to their higher obsessive traits and repetitive behavior, Asperger's individuals are prone to develop an addictive disorder when substance consumption. This has a high negative implication on their underlying condition, exacerbating their mental, psychological and social limitations.

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