

Autistic people 'need empathy'

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Awareness about condition is key to reducing trauma for sufferers

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New Delhi: Whether an unreasonable airline denies them a seat or an inconsiderate doctor refuses to examine them, autistic people have long faced unnecessary discrimination. Experts nonetheless believe that awareness and a little empathy are the only solutions to improve the situation.

Today is celebrated as the World Autistic Awareness Day globally to highlight the need to help improve the lives of children and adults with autism so that they can lead full and meaningful lives.

Autism is an incurable complex neurobiological condition that impacts communication, behaviour and social relationships. It has become the fastest growing global disorder.

"Autism is an invisible condition, that is, an autistic person may not necessarily be on a wheel chair or on crutches, so people don't accommodate for the person," Merry Barua, founder of NGO Action for Autism (AFA)

"People tend to relate autism with rude behaviour and this is all because of lack of awareness," she added.

Barua says the discrimination against autistic people is a traumatising, especially for the parents and there is an urgent need to spread awareness to demystify it.

"I have had parents who complained that how some dentists refused to check their autistic children because they won't sit still. The doctors neither had the time nor the patience so they were shown the door," said Barua.

For 36-year-old Abha Singh, it was a harrowing experience last year when she decided to fly from Kolkata to Delhi with her autistic 13-year-old daughter.

"She was sitting on her seat and just flapping her arms. The next thing we knew, we were asked to get off the flight as my child was a potential risk to the other passengers," an infuriated Singh told IANS.

"Can't they show a little compassion? What harm could a 13-year-old girl do, more so when she is autistic," said the Delhi resident.

The parents further agreed that raising an autistic child can be quite draining both physically and mentally. However, at the end of the day the smile and cheers on their children's faces is all that matters. "Raising an autistic child is tiring. But I know that my child is doing the best he can and is very happy in his school with his friends so that satiates me," said Indrani Basu about his 19-year-old autistic son Ayan.

However, according to Barua, the one question that

every parent with an autistic child fears is what will happen to their children after them.

Says Basu: "It's the worst nightmare of a parent. But what we can do is to focus on today and work on the individual for their better tomorrow."

According to psychiatrist Samir Parikh, apart from awareness and empathy, it's the parents who need to stop blaming themselves.