

**AUTISM AWARENESS IN PARENTS IN THE AGE OF DIGITAL MEDIA
(A CRITICAL STUDY)**

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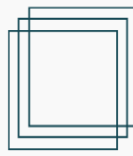
Abstract

Autism is a developmental condition marked by difficulties with social contact and speech, as well as confined, repetitive behavior. This disease manifests itself at birth or the first two and a half years of existence. While the afflicted children look entirely average, they indulge in puzzling and troubling activities that are noticeably different than those of regular children. Autism is becoming more prevalent globally. Due to the fact that parents are typically the main providers, their willingness to understand the signs and effects of autism and react accordingly is critical if we are to offer the best treatment possible to autistic persons. The aim of this research was to assess parents' knowledge and understanding of autism with the help of social media.

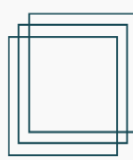
Keywords: Autism Spectrum Disorder; Autistic; Autism Awareness; Intellectual Disability; Asperger Syndrome

Introduction

Autism is a developmental condition marked by difficulties with social contact and speech, as well as confined, repetitive behavior. This disease manifests itself at birth or the first two and a half years of existence. While the afflicted children look entirely



average, they indulge in puzzling and troubling activities that are noticeably different than those of regular children. Autism has no established origin. While studies indicate a strong genetic component, this cannot be attributed to a Mendelian (one-gene) mutation or a single chromosomal abnormality. Males are three or four times more likely than females to have autism, family background, parents' age, and other conditions such as fragile x syndrome, tuberous sclerosis, Tourette's syndrome, and epilepsy are also risk factors for autism. Apart from these, prenatal substance usage has been established as a risk factor. This was shown in a historical case report, which demonstrated that maternal valproic acid usage during breastfeeding resulted in the birth of an autistic child. Congenital rubella has also been linked to autism in several studies. Another relatively common psychiatric disorder is cerebral palsy, which is associated with a high prevalence of autism in infants. Since individuals with autism may exhibit a wide variety of characteristics or signs, health care professionals refer to autism as a continuum condition. Some children with autism avoid eye contact and become aloof, while others interact with their surroundings intermittently and allow inconsistent eye contact, smiles, and embraces. Additionally, children can demonstrate a range of verbal skills, ranging from nonverbal to advanced expression. In chosen regions, intellectual functioning may range from mental retardation to superior intellectual functioning. Certain children with autism demonstrated normal growth in some ways and also demonstrated talents in others, such as puzzles, drawing, and music. However, an Autistic person is often reclusive and spends hours in solo play. Numerous assessment methods have been established to help in the early diagnosis of children who are autistic. The Checklist for Autism in Toddlers (CHAT) is a diagnostic technique used in primary care environments for 18-month-old infants. The Modified Checklist for Autism in Toddlers (M-CHAT) is a 23-item parent questionnaire used to test children between the ages of 16 and 30 months for autism spectrum disorder risk. The pervasive developmental disability screening test (PDDST) is a study administered by parents of children between the ages of one and three years. Individuals with an autism spectrum disorder have an estimated incidence of 0.6 percent–1% of the infant population, according to studies conducted in Asia, Europe, and North America. A research undertaken in the 50 states of the United States of America examined the discrepancies in the diagnosis of autism spectrum conditions between them. The researchers concluded that states with higher school and hospital costs were more accurate in diagnosing autism. According to Pakistan's country study on autism, the condition affects approximately 1 in 120 infants. Owing to a lack of understanding regarding autism, the estimated incidence in Pakistan is significantly lower than in the western world. The general population remains ignorant of the disease's severity and how to properly diagnose it. The aim of this research is to ascertain primary school teachers' knowledge of autism. The findings of this research will assist schools and



organisations in raising concern about autism, allowing it to be identified at an early age and care initiated appropriately.

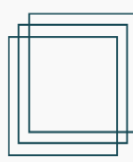


Figure: 01 DOI <https://runwaypakistan.com/a-dummys-guide-to-autism-in-pakistan/>

Objective

Providing treatment for adolescents with autism necessitates the collaboration of many health-care providers. Their comprehension standard may have a huge effect on these children and their families. Unfortunately, autism and other infant behavioral disabilities have gained little consideration from Pakistan's policymakers. Current experts in the area have a variety of misconceptions on the primary characteristics of autism. This is a significant impediment to enhancing the wellbeing and well-being of Pakistani children with autism.

It is important to recognise and address existing awareness gaps. Future initiatives should include a stronger focus on autism spectrum disorder in behavioral and related health sciences curricula, ongoing educational education, public information programs, promotion of social resources, and caregiver support groups for these children and families. All of these measures can improve the early detection and evaluation of autism, resulting in more effective therapies and a better prognosis.



Method

A cross-sectional study of parents in Karachi, Pakistan, was performed. We omitted members of the medical community, parents of autistic children, and others who did not fully comprehend English or Urdu. 339 parents were chosen as a sample number. A validated and pre-tested questionnaire was used to collect demographic data, awareness, and attitudes about autism and its signs and symptoms from research participants. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences was used to interpret the data. An awareness score was determined for each participant's opinion about autism and its signs and symptoms to indicate their general knowledge about autism. A mean value was calculated for the number of correct responses among teachers from both sectors. These values were then compared using the Chi-square test and, where appropriate, the Fisher exact test.

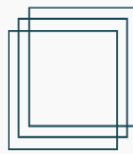
Result

75% of our sample group have learned of autism, with many who met someone with the condition demonstrating a higher level of understanding. However, our participants demonstrated low levels of understanding, with a mean score of 5.59 for right views on autism and 6.84 for knowledge of signs and symptoms. Despite this, 95.6 percent of participants indicated that they would seek treatment for their children if they were diagnosed with autism.

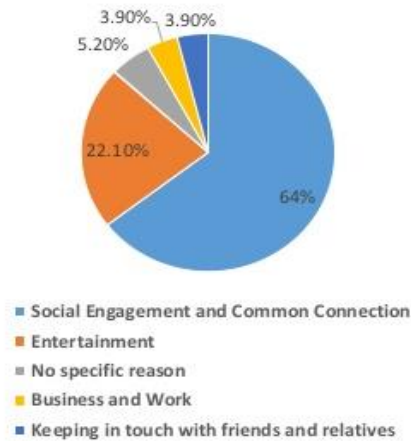
Discussion

Autism, according to the American Psychiatric Association, is a neurodevelopmental condition diagnosed in infancy that results in poor coping abilities and difficulties responding to transition. It is a manageable but not curable disorder. The plurality of our participants correctly identified these traits but wrongly identified autism individuals as having regular eating patterns, notwithstanding the fact that current evidence indicates feeding challenges as a result of compulsive behaviours, motor or sensory issues, or gastrointestinal disorders.

Since the idea of autism patients having savant or exceptional talents, such as skill in arithmetic, painting, music, or rote learning, is often depicted throughout the media and in literature, it's unsurprising that the bulk of our population agreed on this stage. While not every individual with ASD has these abilities, Howlin et al. concluded that one-third of autistic patients do. Even though parental neglect has been identified as a cause of autism, our society has remained unclear about this point, as well as the condition being genetic and preventable, which corresponds to the level of confusion in the available literature. While the majority of autism cases are idiopathic, indirect factors such as German measles have been reported.



Why do autistic people use Social Media?



- Most autistic people use Social Media for Social Engagement and Common Connection
- Find friends or romantic partners
- Option that did not exist before

Source: Jemma Byrne, Autism and Social Media: An exploration of the use of computer mediated communications by individuals on the autism spectrum, University of Glasgow, Scottish Autism

Figure: 02 National Autistic Society Report

The well-established and well-documented signs and symptoms of autism, as reported by several sources, include an inability to interact with other children, a delay in or absence of development of critical milestones such as speaking and responding to names, obsessive repetitive behavior, difficulty adapting to change, and emotional dysregulation, many of which were correctly identified by the majority of our participants. Autistic children can not maintain eye contact or make movements, which were characteristics of our society. While being well-known autism signs, researchers remained unaware that patients had a decreased sense of risk and emotional reaction. This is because they are unable to decipher what another individual is saying due to their failure to perceive differences of voice and sound. The care of ASD is mostly dependent on psychiatric therapies, and the importance of initiating treatment as quickly as possible has been consistently emphasized. Given that parents are the main caregivers in the majority of cases, it is well established that educating parents on recovery strategies has an advantage, and through the years, extensive study has been conducted to improve specific training approaches. The majority of parents we consulted believed parental counselling was an important means of therapy but believed food had little impact on the disorder, despite research to the contrary, with a special emphasis on gluten- and casein-free diets. Unfortunately, a minority asserted that autism may be scientifically identified, ignoring the fact that only specific measures such as the childhood autism classification scale (CARS) and autism behaviour checklist (ABC) are available for evaluation. On a more optimistic note, parents opted to have their child screened for autism and, if necessary, handled, but were unaware of centers in Karachi, a finding replicated in studies such as one conducted in China among teachers.

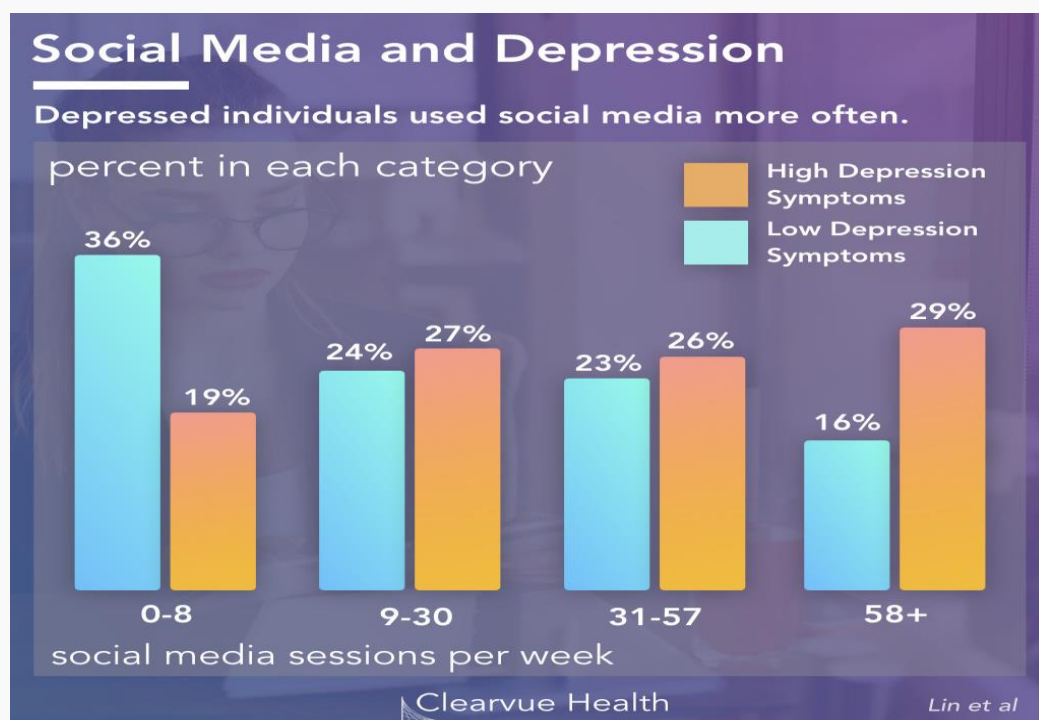
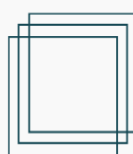
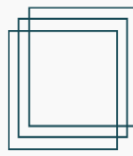


Figure: 03 DOI <https://www.clearvuehealth.com/b/social-media-depression/>

Due to the ease sampling used in our research, some constraints were met. Since the bulk of our participants were middle class, we were unable to determine the impact of social background on parental knowledge. Apart from that, our sample enrolled a greater proportion of females than males. Due to the fact that autism is still a largely unknown condition in the Pakistani community, many citizens were totally ignorant of it and unable to answer any questions about it. Due to the fact that this research was conducted in Karachi, a precise estimate of autism knowledge among the entire Pakistani community cannot be produced. However, our research is unique in Pakistan since it is performed on parents, and the findings can be used to determine how to overcome the current awareness gap among parents, helping them to recognize warning signs and pursue adequate guidance.

Autism is now identified with about one infant out of every 150. With the growing incidence of this disease, increased understanding in the populace is essential to detect it at an early age and start treatment. A research performed in Singapore with 503 preschool teachers revealed teachers' lack of awareness, behaviors, and activities about childhood cognitive and behavioral disorders. Similarly, in our research, we discovered that only 47.9 percent of answers to questions about information were right. This demonstrates unequivocally that the bulk of the public were unaware of important information about autism. Early detection of autism is critical for the child's academic growth. Early detection of illness allows effective treatment to be initiated in infants, thus assisting in their growth. Teachers are critical in a child's early years of adulthood.



Their capacity to identify Autistic children in the school will prove advantageous in the long run. Autism is managed by a mixture of medication, behavioural, and social therapy. Ghanizadeh and Moghimi-Sarani concluded in a clinical study that risperidone and acetylcysteine reduced irritability in children with autism but had little impact on the central symptoms of autism. Similarly, a systematic study of drugs widely used to cure autism discovered that, although medications are often used to treat autism, there is no proof of their efficacy.

The present research is the first to explore Pakistani healthcare practitioners' understanding of formal diagnosis standards for Autistic Disability and their opinions about the disorder, based on our analysis of the related psychiatric literature. In general, various clinicians tend to have a shared perception of the condition as manifested by social delays, speech problems, and limited desires of adolescents with Autism. A significant result is that the disorder's early development, identified as occurring before the age of 36 months (a diagnostic characteristic of Autism), is either unknown/undervalued and/or not considered during the diagnostic phase. Parents with children with Autism were observed and subsequently expressed their questions to health providers between the ages of fifteen and nineteen months. This understanding, though, does not often result in an early detection by healthcare practitioners. While speech delay is a common presentation of autism, it is not deemed abnormal in Pakistan until thirty-six months or later, resulting in many children being tested, referred, and diagnosed far after early childhood. This lack of focus on early appearance can be explained by a lack of awareness of normal presenting complaints, a hesitation and anxiety of naming an infant at an early age, and/or the overlap of autism symptoms with those of other comorbid conditions such as developmental delay. Changing HCW's pessimistic attitudes and views about autism should inspire parents to pursue effective treatment, thus encouraging early intervention, which is critical for a positive prognosis.

Despite the study's shortcomings, the findings offer a valuable summary of screening procedures and awareness of autism in a low-income developed world without an infant behavioral wellbeing program. The findings indicate that existing experts in the area have an asymmetrical view of autism, owing to the prevalence of many myths on several of the disorder's salient characteristics, including developmental, perceptual, and emotional characteristics. The thesis has therapeutic ramifications and emphasizes the importance of continuing education for healthcare practitioners from diverse disciplines on autism in Pakistan. Future surveys, with a greater sample scale, should involve several sites throughout Pakistan, encompassing both urban and rural environments. These research will serve as a baseline for guiding policy and preparation for the delivery of healthcare to children with Autism and other behavioral disabilities in Pakistan.

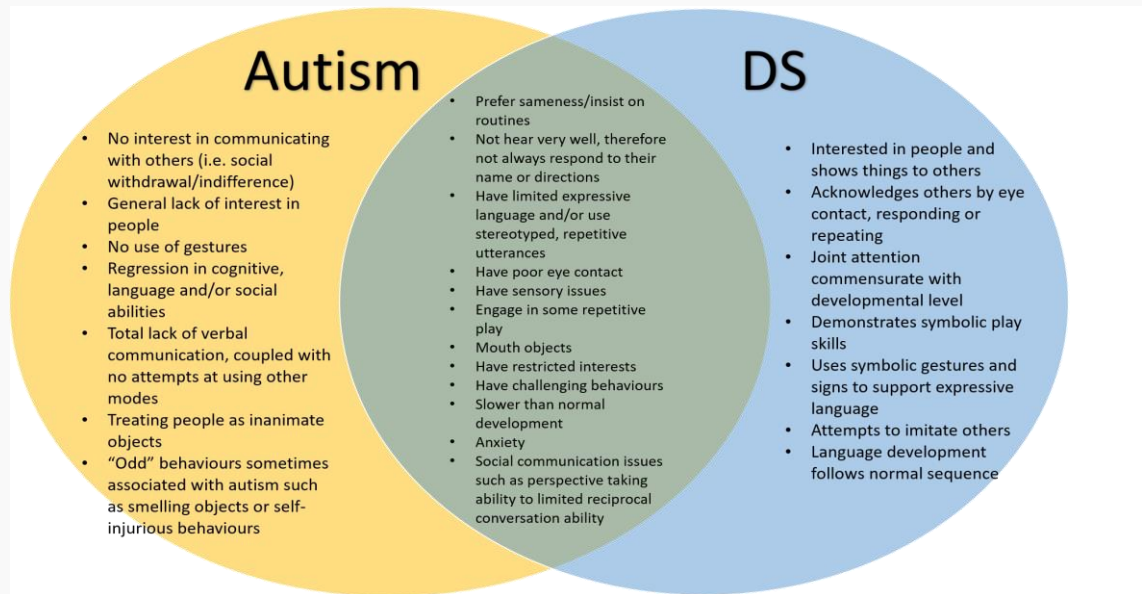
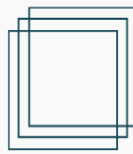


Figure: 04 DOI <https://www.clearvuehealth.com/b/social-media-depression/>

Social networking sites specifically for individuals with Autism

1. ▪ WeAreAutism.or: Allows individuals to share, talk, and communicate in a user-led social network for individuals, family members, and members of the community.
2. ▪ WrongPlanet.ne: A web community designed for individuals and parents, professionals of those with Autism Spectrum Disorder, ADHD, and other neurological differences. A discussion forum is available for members to communicate with one another. There is also a blogging feature and a chat room for real-time communication.
3. ▪ AutismSpeaks.ning.org: An online support forum for individuals on the spectrum.

Helping Your Child to Use Technology In A Social Way

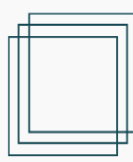
A recent study published in the Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders found that although individuals with ASD are often preoccupied with television, computers, and video gamers (screen based media), the majority (64.2%) spent most of their free time using non-social media (television, video games), while only 13.2% spent time on social media (email, internet chatting)

The Future of Social Media and ASD

- ▪ Social skill groups for ASD children and adolescents need to reflect the changing nature of interactions (i.e., exchanging Instagram name or Snapchat code first instead of phone numbers)
- ▪ Social media and computer based communication technologies are making it possible for many people with ASD to enter the workforce more productively Several large tech companies are intentionally tapping into the Autism community to access valuable skills that are in demand Software company SAP launched “Autism at Work”

<https://ejdl.academiascience.org>

Emergent: Journal of Educational Discoveries and Lifelong Learning is a scholarly peer reviewed international Journal



in 2013, with the goal of employing 650 colleagues on the Autism Spectrum by 2020
➤ ▪ Utilizing computer based communication can help alleviate some of the challenges people with Autism may have in the workplace and allow them to better share their knowledge and skills

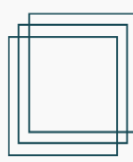
CONCLUSION

Our study unequivocally demonstrates teachers' loss of understanding about autism. We propose that schools provide proper preparation plans for teachers to assist them in diagnosing and then teaching autistic children appropriately. Regrettably, our population lacked understanding and information about autism. To close this discrepancy, educational campaigns can be undertaken to increase parent education of autism, allowing for early diagnosis and development of an effective care plan/therapy. On a more optimistic level, the majority of parents expressed a willingness to have their children examined and monitored in the event of a diagnosis. However, only a few participants were aware of the existence of autism centers in Karachi. General doctors are critical in educating caregivers about autism. There is still no permanent treatment for autism. However, through the use of drugs or certain therapies, it may be regulated or suppressed. This early childhood programs will assist children between the ages of one and three in developing critical skills.

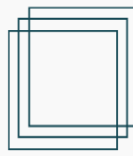
Autism early intervention programs provide counseling to assist the infant with speaking, walking, and socializing with others. Therefore, it is often prudent to contact a physician whether you believe your child is experiencing complications or is experiencing a developmental disorder. Whether or not a child has been identified with autism, you should also engage them in early intervention programs, which ensure that a child between the ages of one and three would not acquire a disability. Furthermore, medication for complications, such as speech therapy for language deficits, also may not include a specific ASD diagnosis.

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