

## MOTHER'S PERCEPTION OF SIGNIFICANT PEOPLE'S ATTITUDES TOWARD AUTISTIC CHILDREN

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### Abstract

The present study explored mother's perception of significant people's (namely siblings, grandparents, uncles-aunties, cousins, peers and neighbors) attitudes towards their children with autism. Eight mothers having at least one child with autism were selected purposively as respondents. Their age range was 26 to 52 years. Semi-structured questionnaire and clinical interview were applied to collect data. Results showed that attitudes of significant people towards children with autism were undesirable. According to mother's description, children's paternal grandparent showed more negative attitudes than their maternal counterparts. It was also found that children's peer groups and neighbours showed negative attitudes towards autistic children. Clinical interview indicated that grandmothers, wives of father's brothers, wives of mother's brothers, husbands of mother's sisters tried to avoid their autistic children and felt disturbed. Mothers of autistic children were unwilling to accompany their children to any relative's house for unknown fears. Most of the mothers stated that they were held responsible for giving birth to children with these types of disorder. Finally, mothers grieved over the avoiding attitude of neighbours and peers of their children.

**Keywords:** *Attitudes, Significant people, Autistic children, Mother's perception*

### Introduction

The significant people plays vital role in the development of children. Obviously, parents are the most significant people to the children. In addition, other family members, siblings, classmates, playmates, neighbours, peers etc. are also considered significant for children. Significant people display supportive behaviour toward normal children. But in the case of disabled children, they don't exhibit normal behaviour towards them. Parents with autistic children perceived that siblings, family members, very close relatives, classmates, peers, and neighbours showed some unexpected behaviours towards their children. Parents, especially mother in our society, can't receive this type of attitude positively. As a result, mothers of autistic children exhibited lower levels of mental health (Muhammad, 2015).

Recently, some researchers of Bangladesh and other countries have shown their interest in conducting research regarding several aspects of autism. However; a few researches have been conducted on the attitudes of significant people towards disable children in the world. For

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example, females have more positive attitudes towards individuals with disabilities compared to males (Iobst, Nabors, Rosenzweig, Srivorakiat, Champlin, Campbell, & Segall, 2009; Panek & Jungers, 2008; Scior, 2011). Males were found to be more open to vignette about an individual with ASD (Nevill & White, 2011). Koyama, Tachimori, Sawamura, Koyama, Naganuma, Makino, and Takeshima (2009) found that males were more optimistic when reporting the prognosis of an individual with ASD. In addition to gender, the age of the rater has also been shown to have effects on attitudes. Grandparents reported positive ratings of their grandchildren with disabilities but negative ratings of other children with disabilities (Katz & Kessel, 2002).

Harnum, Duffy, and Ferguson (2007) mentioned that attitudes are affected by a wide range of factors. When compared to a typically developing child, attitudes are more negative towards children with ASD. Interestingly, attitudes differed in one study by Nevill & White (2011) based on the personality of the rater. Attitudes also differed greatly depending on whether a diagnosis of ASD was revealed to participants or not (Chambres, Auxiette, Vansingle, & Gil, 2008). Attitudes of children towards individuals with ASD have been shown to improve received information from formal sources but show little improvement information come from informal sources (Morton & Campbell, 2008).

Research indicated that general physicians had more outdated beliefs compared to specialists who worked specifically with individuals with ASD (Geffken & Frakey, 2005). Stone and Rosenbaum (1988) looked specifically at teachers and parents and revealed a number of misconceptions regarding believed symptoms, etiology, and prognosis. Lastly, a greater number of studies have looked at general perceptions of individuals with ASD including perceptions held by adults, children, and parents of children with the disorder (Harnum *et al.*, 2007; Hines, Balandin, & Togher, 2012).

Swaim and Morgan (2001) revealed that third and sixth grade children showed less positive attitudes toward a short video of a child with autism than toward a video of a child without autism. In addition, girls and older children rated their classmates' behavioural intentions toward the child with autism in the video significantly less positively than toward the child without autism in the video. De Caroli and Sagone (2012) reported that siblings of brothers/sisters with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) showed more negative social attitudes than those expressed by siblings of brothers/sisters with Down syndrome (DS) or intellectual disability (ID). Compared to other siblings, they expressed a more negative representation of their autistic brothers or sisters' life as well as their own.

A more recent experiment conducted by Harnum *et al.* (2007) compared subjects' dislike, avoidance, and perceived similarity to a written scenario of an autistic boy who is new in school. In this scenario, the autistic boy displays traits including rocking, echolalia, and obsession with an object. In this experiment, children subjects perceived that the boy with autism was significantly

unlike themselves, and showed significantly more dislike and avoidance for the autistic child than for a normal child. In contrast, adult subjects in this same study were not significantly more likely to avoid the autistic child than the normal child, and did not perceive the autistic child to be any more different from them than the normal child.

Recent research by Dowjotas (2009) on students' attitudes towards children with autism found that attitude differ based on severity, such that students were most positive toward children with mild autistic symptoms and more negative toward children with more severe autistic symptoms.

Parent expects a healthy child. They would like to spend their maximum time by rearing their children. They want to satisfy their life by establishing their children. But everyone's dream or expectation doesn't fulfil always. Sometimes parents don't get dream child rather than they having a child of another kind such as autistic, intellectual disabilities etc. Although, they want to live in happy and peaceful life with those children. But in reality it is not so easy to develop those children normally. Because, significant people of autistic children exhibit unexpected behavior that impaired the children's normal development. Not only children's development but also affect the parents' mental health (Muhammad, 2015). So it is necessary to conduct a scientific research regarding significant people attitude towards autistic children. A few number of researches related to significant people attitude and other variables (Swaim & Morgan, 2001; De Caroli & Sagone, 2012) have been conducted in the developed countries. There is needed to conduct a study in our culture to know the significant people attitudes towards autistic children using mothers as respondents. The present researchers feel that this study would be the first scientific research in Bangladesh. The findings of this study will be helpful for the researchers, counsellors, social workers and other concerned to have better understanding about significant people attitude towards the autistic children in Bangladesh. However, this study conveys practical importance.

The main objective of the present study was to understand the attitudes of significant people toward autistic children. The specific objectives were to understand the attitude of siblings toward autistic children, to explore the attitude of grandparents toward autistic children, to know the attitude of uncles and aunts toward autistic children, to understand the attitude of cousins toward autistic children, to know the attitude of peers toward autistic children.

## **Material and Methods**

### ***Sample and sampling Technique***

For the present study, Panchagarh district was selected which is located in the North side of Bangladesh. Eight mothers having at least one child with autism were selected purposively from the register books of the "Somaj Seba Odhidoptar" and "Protibondhi Seba O Sahajjo Kendro" at Panchagarh district. There were 35 autistic children of the two organizations. Their age range was 26-52 years. The mean age was 38.5 years. Most of the respondents were housewives; only 2 out

of 8 respondents were service holders. Among the respondents, 1 SSC and 3 HSC, 1 Master's degree passed and 3 were illiterates. Participants hold different social economic status.

### ***Study design***

The present study employed case study method. In this research the data were collected through semi-structured and depth interview method.

### ***Instruments***

For data collection the following assessment instruments were used in this study:

**Personal information form:** Personal information form was utilized to gather information about age, gender, socio-economic status, educational qualification, address etc.

**Semi-structured questionnaire:** To collect data semi-structured questionnaire was administered on participants individually. Semi-structured questionnaire was developed by the present authors as well as two experts, one from Jagannath University and another from Dhaka University. An interview schedule was developed to provide a structure to the interview whilst allowing the flexibility to respond to issues deemed important to individual's participant. The content validity of the semi-structured questionnaire was ensured by strictly following the sequential system model of scale development and by expert's input in different stages of item constructions.

### ***Procedure of data collection***

For collecting proper information from participants, at first, rapport was established with participants. Then, participants were informed about the purpose and necessity of the present research in the context of Bangladesh. At the beginning, they simply briefed about the questionnaire and how to fill these questions. Participants were requested to read the question carefully. Before answering these questions, they were requested to fill up their personal information. In addition some questions were asked to participants and their responses were recorded as documents for depth analysis. And they were assured that their information only will be used in research purpose and will be kept confidential until their permission. After collecting information, then the respondents were thanked for their co-operations.

### **Results and Discussion**

The collected data were explained in qualitative nature through content analysis. The findings of the study are presented in the following tables and figures according to the research objectives.

Table 1. Responses of Mothers Regarding Siblings, Paternal Cousins, Maternal Cousins and Peer Group Attitudes toward Autistic Children

Items	Paternal Cousins			Maternal Cousins		
	Siblings Out of 5 cases	Uncle's Children Out of 7 cases	Aunt's Children Out of 5 cases	Uncle's Children Out of 5 cases	Aunt's Children Out of 6 cases	Peer Group Out of 8 cases
1. Don't want to play	03	07	05	05	06	08
2. Don't want to participate in family function	04	07	05	05	06	08
3. Don't want to eat in the same table	05	07	05	05	06	08

*Total number of Mothers was 08b ight) as respondents.*

Table 1 suggest that siblings, paternal uncle's and aunt's children, maternal uncle's and aunt's children, and peer group display negative attitudes towards autistic children in the case of all items. Although two mothers mentioned that siblings of autistic children would like to play together. Table-1 also suggests that only one mother mentioned that siblings would like to take their autistic brother or sister to participate in the family function.

Table 2. Responses of Mothers Regarding Paternal Grandparent, Paternal Uncle and Aunty, Maternal Grandparent, Maternal Uncle-Aunty and Attitudes toward Autistic Children (N=8)

Items	Paternal Uncle-Aunty			Maternal Uncle-Aunty		
	Pat. Gra. Out of 7 cases	Fa. Bro & Wiv. Out of 7 cases	Fa. Sist. & Husb Out of 7 cases	Mat.Gra Out of 7 cases	Bro & Wiv. Out of 6 cases	Mat. Sist. & Hus. Out of 7 cases
1. Annoyed with child's behaviour	06	06	05	05	06	05

*Mother's perception of significant people's attitudes toward autistic children*

2. Neglects the child	06	06	05	05	06	05
3. Don't want to go with child in the function	07	07	07	06	06	07

*Pat. Gra.=Paternal Grand parents, Fa. Bro. & Wiv=Paternal Father's Brothers& their Wives; Pat. Fa. Sist. & Husb=Paternal Father's Sister's & their Husbands; Mat. Gra=Maternal Grandparents, Mo. Bro & Wiv = Maternal Mother's brothers & their wives; Mo. Sist. & Hus.=Maternal Mother's sisters & their husbands*

Table 2 suggests that paternal grandparent, paternal uncle and aunty, maternal grandparent, maternal uncle and aunty show negative attitudes towards autistic children in the case of all items. Although two mothers mentioned that maternal grandparent don't neglect and don't show annoyance with autistic children. Table 2 also suggests that only one mother mentioned that paternal grandparent annoyed with autistic children and neglected them. One mother mentioned that maternal grandparent would not like to take the autistic children to participate in the family function. In addition two mothers said that father's sisters and their husbands as well as mother's sisters and their husbands don't neglect and don't show annoyance with autistic children.

Table 3. Summary of Mother's Perceptions Collected through Depth Interview.

Respondents	Outcome (Mother's Perception)
Mothers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i) Sometimes father of autistic child/children felt bothered.</li> <li>ii) Grandmothers, wives of father's brothers, wives of mother's brothers, husbands of mother's sisters, would like to avoid autistic children and felt bothered.</li> <li>iii) Mothers of autistic children would not like to accompany any relative's house.</li> <li>iv) Most of the mothers said that they are responsible for giving birth children with autism.</li> <li>v) Neighbours, peers would like to avoid them seriously.</li> <li>vi) Mothers are sufferings by unknown fears to take another baby after receiving the autistic child.</li> </ul>

Findings of the research suggested that mothers perceived that brothers and sisters of autistic children sometimes love or caress for their brothers/ sisters. But they are not agreed to eat in the same table. They also did not give them the opportunity to participate in the family function and

would not like to play with them. From the findings of the present study, it was also found that play, family function; eating in same tables are the important areas of problems (Table -1). Majority of them indicated that siblings were not wanting to play together, participate family function, to eat in the same table. The result is relevant with other findings (De Caroli & Sagone, 2012).

The second objective of the study was to know the attitude of grandparent toward autistic children. From the findings it could be said that in most of the cases majority of the mothers felt that paternal and maternal grandparents showed annoyance with special children's behaviour. They always neglected these children and did not like to go outside the home with the special children. From the findings it was seen that annoyed behaviour, neglects, going outside the home with autistic children are the important areas of problems (Table 2). Table 2 also indicated that maternal grandparent showed less negative attitudes than paternal grandparent. Katz and Kessel (2002) have found similar results.

The third objective was to know the attitudes of uncle and aunt toward autistic children. Majority of the mother reported that the uncles and aunts of the autistic children always annoyed by the children behaviour. They always neglect the special child/children and would not want to go outside the home with the special child/children. Mothers also felt that they did rude behave with their children. Table-2 indicated that both paternal uncles and aunts showed negative attitudes towards autistics children. In explaining these results it can be said that in our culture most of the parents are busy to rear their respective child/children. They may think that other children with disabilities can disturb their children's development. They can't receive easily the other disabilities children at their home.

In our study the fourth objective was to know the attitude of cousins toward autistic children. Majority of the mothers felt that their cousin's did not behave properly with their children. They did not give the opportunity to participate the family function. As well as they didn't give the opportunity to participate in the play. Mother also reported that the cousins never want to wish to eat in the same table with the autistic child.

The fifth objective was to know the attitude of peer group toward autistic children. In 8 out of 8 cases mother's perceived that the peer group did not want to play with the autistic child. They did impolite behave with the child. They also did not want to participate with any social function with the autistic child. Mother reported those peer groups never want to wish to eat in the same table with the autistic child. Mother perceived that the attitude of peer group toward autistic children was negative. Swaim and Morgan (2001) have found similar results. Another study showed that children subjects perceived that the boy with autism was significantly unlike themselves, and showed significantly more disliking and avoidance behaviour for the autistic child than for a normal child. In contrast, adult subjects in this same study were not significantly more likely to

avoid the autistic child than the normal child, and did not perceive the autistic child to be any more different from them than the normal child (Harnum *et al.*, 2007).

However, this study has some limitations. One limitation of our study is that sample size is very small. It will be important for future work to study a more sample of autistic children mothers. Another potential limitation of our study is that we have taken only mothers as a respondent. It will be better if we could take both mother and father as respondents.

### **Conclusion**

This is the first study in Bangladesh to explore the significant people attitude toward autistic children according to mother's perception. It will add to the small body of research in this area with the hope of informing clinical services. The study revealed that the significant people attitude toward autistic children was negative. The current findings also suggest that child paternal grandparents show more negative attitude than maternal grandparents. It was also found that children peer group show more negative attitude toward autistic children. We aim to honors the importance of our research practices by sharing our experiences with other researchers with this paper.

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