



## **IDENTIFICATION, TREATMENT AND EDUCATION OF AUTISTIC CHILDREN: THE NEED OF THE HOUR TO PREVENT AUTISM**

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### **Abstract**

*Autism is a neuro-developmental disorder, especially known as Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASDs), because it has different characteristics and symptoms, and it may vary from child to child. Such children cannot communicate with others meaningfully. It is such a global problem that is on the rise; but awareness of it is very less. So the need of the study arose. The secondary sources of data were consulted for the study, and analytical method of treating the data was utilized. The findings show that early intervention is extremely essential for the effective management of autism. Special education with individualized curriculum and method help a lot to mainstream and rehabilitate autistic children. From the characteristics and symptoms of autistic children, identification of it is possible. Creating awareness about autism is the only safe way to prevent it.*

**Key Words:** *Autism, ASDs, special education, children, method, intervention, prevent.*



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### **Introduction**

Autism is a pervasive developmental disorder that involves a wide range of problematic behaviours which become evident within two-three years of age. It is also known as Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASDs). According to The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA,1990), Sec.300.8 (c) (1), “Autism means a developmental disability significantly affecting verbal and non-verbal communication and social interaction generally evident before age three, that adversely affects a child’s performance.” Autism is not a disease or mental illness; rather it is a neuro-behavioural problem. Autistic children are those who fail to communicate meaningfully and to adjust to the environment properly. They may have normal height and weight; but, instead of playing, interacting and exchanging views with others, they isolate themselves and remain their own world. Actually, information processing of their brain is affected. They possess memory but no imagination.

## **Related Studies**

Some related studies which were consulted to prepare the base of the present study are presented below-----

Dutt (2001) studied social acceptance and problems associated with mental retardation. Survey research design and purposive sampling technique were used in the study. The sample comprised of 50 mild mentally retarded pre-adolescent children in and around Kolkata. Information schedule, teachers' report cards, and inventory of parents' love and aggression were used as tools. The collected data were analyzed using Mean, SD and t-test. The findings showed that there is increase of achievement of mild mentally retarded pre-adolescent children with parental love and decrease of the same with parental aggression, and that early intervention is needed for such children as mentally retarded are those children whose normal intellectual growth is arrested before birth.

Dawson (2008) showed that advances in cognitive and affective developmental neuroscience, developmental psychopathology, neurobiology, genetics, and applied behaviour analysis have all contributed to a more positive outlook for people with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). These advancements have resulted in improved early detection approaches and effective treatment. For the first time, it is possible to prevent ASD. Detecting at-risk infants will be the first step towards prevention before the entire syndrome manifests itself, and applying interventions aimed at changing the trajectory of early behavioural and cognitive development. A developmental model of risk, risk mechanisms, symptom genesis, and adaptation are described in this article.

De Pape and Lindsay (2014) emphasised that autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a developmental illness characterised by inappropriate communication, restricted and repetitive interests, and social impairment. ASD can have a significant impact on family life, including parental duties and obligations. In this meta-synthesis, they looked at what it's like to be a parent of a child with ASD. To combine qualitative evidence, they conducted a theme synthesis, exploring 10 electronic resources and evaluating 4,148 abstracts. They chose 31 articles for inclusion (including 160 fathers and 425 mothers) and used a constant comparative technique to assess them. Pre-diagnosis, diagnosis, family life adjustment, navigating the system, parental empowerment, and moving ahead were the six themes highlighted. Their findings can help inform the development of family-focused programmes and services, as well as give insight for health-care professionals.

Manzi et al. (2008) focused that autism is a heterogeneous etiology produced by a variety of illnesses affecting the central nervous system at a young age. Several metabolic abnormalities have been linked to autistic symptoms at a higher rate than the general population. Inborn metabolic mistakes are thought to affect less than 5% of the population. In the presence of clinical symptoms such as lethargy, recurrent vomiting, early seizures, dysmorphic features, and mental impairment, selective metabolic tests should be performed. Early detection of metabolic problems and appropriate therapeutic interventions may enhance the long-term cognitive and behavioural prognosis in some individuals.

### **Rationale of the Study**

Autism is such a problem with which most of us are not acquainted. There are some parents who hear the term for the first time when they know that their children are autistic. Scientists think that the problem of autism is caused by genetic factor but findings of recent researches show that some environmental or familial aspects are responsible for the problem. So autism is the result of all these factors. The environmental factors may affect at the time of birth or after it or even in the womb. Development of the brain is hampered by the problem. The number of autistic children is increasing day by day at an alarming rate throughout the world. As per the survey conducted in 2014, 1 in every 59 is autistic, which was 1 in 150 as per 2000 survey. The problem occurs 4-5 times more in boys than girls. Though there are many children around us with autism, owing to the lack of awareness, most of the parents cannot understand the symptoms of this problem. The reality is that autism can be minimized or kept under control through the right kind of therapy. Hence, in order to overcome the problem, identification of the same is a must, and for this the necessity of the present study is felt.

### **Objectives of the study**

The present study was conducted keeping ahead the following objectives-----

- (i) To identify the symptomatic characteristics of autistic children,
- (ii) To ensure treatment and education of autistic children, and
- (iii) To find out the ways of prevention for autism.

### **Identifying Symptoms**

As autism is a social and communication problem, children with such problem may have normal physical growth; they can sit or move like a normal child. So it is very difficult to identify the problem at the beginning for parents. However, the following characteristics

which become prominent during one to three years may help to identify the children with the problem -----

- I) They remain silent most of the time.
- II) They cannot speak meaningfully.
- III) They may have mental retardation.
- IV) They may suffer from some physical problems.
- V) They fail to maintain eye-contact.
- VI) They cannot point anything with finger.
- VII) They fail to express their need or emotion.
- VIII) They repeat same words, actions or movements.
- IX) They cannot understand body language.
- X) They remain unaware of the outer world.
- XI) They have interest in very limited aspects.
- XII) They cannot interact with others properly.
- XIII) They don't like to play with others.
- XIV) They do not respond even when called by name.
- XV) They don't laugh with others.
- XVI) They don not respond to fondling.
- XVII) They may weep for nothing.
- XVIII) They may eat some uneatable items.
- XIX) They cannot play with toys properly.
- XX) They are indifferent to pain or pleasure.
- XXI) They cannot build relationship with others.
- XXII) They like to stay alone for hours.
- XXIII) They cannot adjust to the environment.
- XXIV) They fail to follow directions.
- XXV) They cannot understand abstract things.

If autistic children are suddenly stopped from what they were doing, they become angry or they start crying. In such case, minute timer can be used to warn them to finish what they were doing.

### **Treatment and Education**

As autism is not curable, early detection of it very much essential. If identified earlier, especially within one and half years, treatment is possible by using plasticity of the brain which helps to adjust anew. Behavioural therapy, music therapy, speech therapy, school-wise special method of teaching and training of parents help to make the autistic children almost normal. Sign Language may work for the problem. Special education classes help a lot to solve the problem. Even in integrated classes, their education may be taken care of. The educational procedure should be decided after analyzing a particular behaviour. The treatment may vary from person to person. Sympathetic attitude of parents towards such children is very much needed. Actually there is no single type of treatment for autism; rather there is integrated treatment system for the problem. The main purpose of such treatment is to enable the children with autism to go to school, speak meaningfully, and make social relations. Thus, for the rehabilitation and mainstreaming of the autistic children, both treatment and education are essential. Parents, teachers, physicians and experts---all should work in co-ordination. Parents are trained in behavioural techniques as, in most cases, they are asked to take care of their child at home.

### **Prevention of Autism**

As genetic, environmental and familial factors are said to be responsible for autism, precautions should be taken accordingly to prevent the problem. When there is a proneness to autism genetically, parents must be very careful from the birth of the baby. Early intervention of the problem will help to check the severity of it. In order to prevent the environmental possibility of autism, it is essential to avoid taking any drug during pregnancy unless prescribed so for a specific problem by doctors. It is also essential to avoid taking any kind of alcohol during pregnancy. Having rubella immunization before being pregnant helps a lot prevent autism. Not only that, early detection and treatment of any kidney or heart disease help in preventing the same. Besides these, following a good lifestyle and a nutritious diet chart helps in the prevention of the problem. To prevent the familial factor of autism, parents must be very careful of and sympathetic to their children. They should fondle their children and observe each and every reaction of them at every action. Parents should note whether their children are showing gradual change of behavior like other children of their age.

### **Educational Implication**

The present study undoubtedly bears educational significance. The concerned teachers will have some input on autism to guide the concerned students. The concerned parents as well as the guardians and other members of the family will have some relevant information regarding autism which will help them a lot to take care of their children properly. The policy-makers as well as the curriculum planners also may have some clues from the study. Not only that, the Voluntary Organizations (VOs) and Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) that work for the children with autism will have some guiding principles from the study which will help them do their work in the field effectively. The study will help in creating some amount of awareness in the field of autism and boost the morale of the personnel who work for autistic children.

### **Conclusion**

Autism is not a disease to be cured by medicine or operation; rather it is a journey. Early intervention is very much vital here, because success depends on it. As early there will be detection, so early autism management will be started. It is an integrated effort where teachers, parents, therapist, expert, and psychologist work together in order to mainstream and rehabilitate the particular autistic child. The most important thing is awareness. The reason is that still now some superstition works behind it which aggravates the situation. Taking care of autistic child is not easy. Therefore, parents as well as other family members should gather as much information about autism as they can. Autistic children need extra care and love, because their way of understanding and expressing is different. If we can do it whole-heartedly, they will definitely communicate with us meaningfully.

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