

DETERMINANTS OF PARENT'S ATTITUDE ON PRE-REQUISITE SKILLS OF CHILDREN WITH AUTISM

Seema Saikia^{1*} and Ramya Bhaskar²

^{1&2}Department of Human Development, Avinashilingam Institute of Home Science
and Higher Education for Women, Coimbatore

*Email : seemasaikia91@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The study sample of 112 parents was taken through simple random sampling from assorted special schools of Coimbatore city of Tamilnadu to evaluate the attitude of parents on pre-requisite skills of the children with ASD and its determinants. An attitude scale and a socio-demographic questionnaire were administered to assess the attitude as well as personal and family backgrounds. The majority of the parents had a neutral attitude and 12.4% indicated an unfavorable attitude. The multiple linear regression analysis indicated that there is a significant relationship between the socio-demographic factors and the parents' attitudes with $F(7,104) = 3.654$ and $P = .001$. Family income ($\beta .250$, $t = 2.455$, $p = 0.016$), number of siblings of the child ($\beta -.254$, $t = -2.747$, $p = 0.007$), and area of residence ($\beta -.200$, $t = -2.134$, $p = 0.035$) were significant determinants of the parent's attitude towards pre-requisite skills of autistic children.

Keywords : Autism, Family Income, Parent Attitude, Pre-requisite skill

INTRODUCTION

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a childhood developmental disorder characterized by social, behavioral, and communication difficulties (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2022). The signs of ASD include loss of acquired speech, babbling or social skills, avoidance of eye contact, persistent preference for loneliness, difficulty understanding other people's feelings, delayed and impaired language development, repetition of words or phrases, struggle with minor changes in routines or surroundings, restricted interests and repetitive behaviors such as flapping, rocking and spinning (Autism Speaks, 2021). Minhas *et al.* (2015) deliberated

that, "individuals with autism have severely impaired communication resulting in poor social skills and isolation from community-based activities and interactions. ASD knows no barriers and impacts individuals across social and geographical boundaries and is termed as a lifelong disorder that affects the individual into adulthood". Arora, *et al.* (2021) stated that one in 125 children between 2-6 years age group and one in 80 among children in 6-9 years and the overall prevalence was estimated to be 1 in 89.

Rice (2009) states the gender-wise prevalence of ASD, that males were affected more (4.5 times) than females. Children with ASD may communicate out loud, nonverbally or a combination of both. It depends on how they get treatments and therapies. Lecavalier

et al (2006) identified that raising a child with the spectrum is certainly not an easy task for parents. The long-lasting nature of autism demands continuous care and this presents a huge challenge for parents. In addition, the behavioral problems and communication issues among autistic children make the challenges even more difficult and result in high levels of stress among parents. Zakaria and Tauhaid (2018) also stated that parents have to face problematic behaviors (energetic behavior, aggression, damage, and self-injury) causing never-ending emotional and physical effects on parents.

Bronfenbrenner (2005) defined parental attitude as the force characteristic related to a parent's temperament, motivation, and persistence in parenting an autistic child". It was substantiated by Picardi (2018) *et al.* who found that parents with autistic children had an increased subjective burden and negative attitude. They experience more persistent psychological distress and less social support. They also identified that mothers experienced a higher personal burden than fathers. The most positive and negative indicators of objective and subjective load were the symptom, severity, and social support".

Parent's attitudes on pre-requisite skills regarding autistic children are important considerations for the life of parents and children. According to Nathan Mahr (2023), pre-requisite skills represent the fundamental competencies essential for embarking on any potential career route. It involves developing abilities related to following instructions, completing tasks independently, and working well with others. Autistic children have a problem with social skills, communication skills, and appropriate social behavior which is very important in any vocation.

Many children with autism, even after success in home-based behavioral intervention programs, still do not develop skills that are fundamental to success such as responding to group instructions, following directions, asking for help when needed, understanding different kinds of authority, learning to maintain personal cleanliness/hygiene, making small decisions, self-awareness, self-advocacy, and safety skills (Michele R. *et.al* 2014). Here, pre-requisite skills gain the utmost importance. Because parents have to understand pre-requisite skills so that they can teach their children. It is important to start early for children with autism because if these prerequisites of the vocational training are not met then there will not be enough time to learn these skills and get access to the next level of vocational skills of getting a job, learning the job, and sustain the job. Parents of ASD children feel the pressure of seeing their children accepted in society, able to live without help, and take responsibility for their requirements. Given this backdrop, this study was conducted to assess the attitude of parents of children with ASD on pre-requisite skills with the consequent objectives.

OBJECTIVES

- To assess the attitude of parents on pre-requisite skills of children with ASD
- To find out the socio-demographic determinant of parents' attitudes on pre-requisite skills

METHODOLOGY

A simple random sampling technique was applied for choosing 112 parents of autistic children from assorted special schools in Coimbatore. The institute's human ethical clearance was obtained. A letter explaining

the need and objectives of the study was submitted to special school authorities and permission was taken to do the study. Parents who drop and pick their children from the special schools were approached to participate in the study and informed consent was taken from them after explaining the study's purpose. A self-structured questionnaire was used to collect the socio-demographic information of the subjects. A Likert scale (consisting of 35 items) was developed by the researcher and was used to assess the attitude towards pre-requisite skills. The items on the scale were related to the aspects of scheduling, attention, socialization, self-control, self-advocacy, and safety aspects. Each item had 5 responses indicating strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, and strongly disagree with 1,2,3,4, and 5 ratings and vice versa for negative items.

The reliability of the scale was checked by using Cronbach's alpha reliability test which showed the good reliability (77). The levels of attitude were derived by averaging the total score indicating higher the score, favorable

the attitude. Frequency and percentages were calculated and multiple-linear regression analysis was applied to determine the relationship between the variables and identify the determinants of parents' attitudes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As per the objectives study results were presented under the following sections:

Section I : Results for socio-demographic profile of the respondents

Section II : Results regarding the attitude of respondents for pre-requisite skills

Section III : Results for association of variables and testing of significance

Section I : Results for socio-demographic profile of the respondents

This section details the findings about the socio-demographic profile of the respondents' sex, educational qualification, occupation, family income, number of siblings, family type, and area of living.

Table 1 : Socio-Demographic profile of the respondents

Variables	Details	n =112	%
Sex of Parent	Father	31	27.4
	Mother	81	72.6
Education Qualification	Higher Secondary	0	0
	UG	42	37.2
	PG	68	61.1
	Ph. D	2	1.8
Occupation	Govt. employed	15	29.5
	Private Sector	22	47.5
	Self Employed	3	16.4
	Home Maker	72	63.7
Family Income	Under2-5 Lakhs	16	14.2
	Under 5-10 Lakhs	87	77.9
	10 lakhs & above	9	8.0

Variables	Details	n =112	%
Number of Siblings	Single child	83	74.1
	1 Siblings	29	25.9
Family Type	Nuclear	86	77
	Joint	26	23
Area of living	Urban	93	83.2
	Semi-Urban	19	16.8
	Rural	0	0

Table 1 presents the socio-demographic profile of the respondents. It is evident from Table 1 that the majority of the parents who responded were mothers (72.6%) and the rest were fathers (27.4%). Most of the parents (61.1%) had postgraduate and graduate (37.2%) degrees. Parents were homemakers (63.7%), working in private (47.5%) as well as government sector (29.5%) and were self-employed (16.4%). It was noticed that 77.9% of respondents had family income between 5-10 lakhs, followed by 2-5 lakhs (14.2%) and above 10 lakhs (8.0%). The majority of the respondents had a single child

(74.1%) and 25.9% reported that the autistic child has one sibling. Further, the majority of respondents (77.0%) had nuclear families while 23% were living in joint families. The majority of the respondents were residing in urban (83.2%) and the rest (19.8%) were living in semi-urban areas. No respondent was living in a rural area.

Section II : Results regarding the attitude of respondents for pre-requisite skills

This section describes the findings about the attitude of respondents about pre-requisite skills.

Table - 2 Attitude of respondents on pre-requisite skills

Variable	Favorable	Attitudes Neither favorable or unfavorable i.e. Neutral	Unfavorable
Attitude	0	99 (87.6%)	14 (12.4%)

Table 2 shows the attitude of parents on pre-requisite skills. A higher percentage (87.6%) of respondents tend to have a neutral attitude which indicates that they have neither a favorable nor unfavorable attitude while 12.4% indicated an unfavorable attitude and no parents seemed to exhibit a favorable attitude. As per these results, it is seen that parents' attitudes were neither favorable nor unfavorable towards pre-requisite skills.

According to the study most of the parents with neutral attitudes might be confused in accepting or denying their willingness to

provide the training on prerequisite skills. This could be because of social pressure and also due to a lack of support from their family members. The parents of an autistic child have a negative mindset that ASD is not curable and it's a lifelong process. Thus, according to them providing training on pre-requisite skills may not influence their child's behavioral change. Therefore, they may not want to acknowledge that training on prerequisite skills will improve their day-to-day life. Lack of community support is also a major issue in this regard. A study carried out

by Griffith *et. al* (2010) revealed that parents of ASD children scored low on helpful perceptions because they lacked social support for their children. With this, parents of autistic children end up showing higher stress levels that might affect their attitudes.

Section III : Results for association of variables and testing of significance

This section details the findings drawn from the Multiple linear regression, testing of relevant assumptions on the sample of 112

respondents as independent variables were seven. The assumption of singularity was met and correlation (the independent variables did not have coefficient loadings with more than 0.8) was also met. The collinearity statistics were met with tolerance being less than 1 and VIF with less than 10. Extreme univariate outliers were identified during the initial screening and were modified after which the cook's distance was found to be .000 to .186.

Table 3 (a) : Relation between parent's attitude and socio-demographic factors

Variables	Attitude	Sex of Parent	Education Qualification	Parents Occupation	Family Income	Siblings of Child	Type of Family	Area of Living
Attitude	1							
Sex of Parent	-.162*	1						
Edu. Qualification	.019	-.080	1					
Parents Occupation	-.070	.738**	-.128	1				
Family Income	.249**	-.296**	.056	-.392**	1			
Siblings of Child	-	.047	.093	-.047	.079	1		
Type of Family	.231**						1	
Area of Residence	-.131	.009	.012	-.149	.254**	.206*		1
Mean	1.88	.067	-.056	.101	-.295**	-.213*	-.079	1
Std.Deviation	1.88	1.72	2.64	3.16	2.94	2.26	1.23	1.17
Number	.332	.449	.517	1.167	.470	.440	.424	.377
	112	112	112	112	112	112	112	112

Table 3 (a) explains the results of the correlation between the attitude of parents of autistic children and their socio-demographic factors. For this socio-demographic variables such as sex of parents, education, qualification, parent's occupation, number of siblings of child, type of family, and area of residence were the independent variables while parents' attitude was the dependent

variable. The attitude of respondents showed a significant negative association with the sex (-.162*), number of siblings of the child (-.231**), and area of residence (-.208*) while a significant positive association was seen for family income (.249**), The sex of the parent was significantly positively associated with occupation (.738**) and negatively with family income (-.296**). Occupation of

parents showed a negative association with family income (-.392**). Family income has a significant positive association with the type of family (.254**) and a negative with area of

residence (-.213*). Siblings of the child were positively associated with the type of family (.206*) and inversely with area of residence (-.213*).

Table 3 (b) : Summary of the model

Model	Model Summary			
	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.444 ^a	.197	.143	.298

1. Predictors: (Constant), Area of Residence, Education Qualification, Type of Family, Parent type, Siblings of Child, Family Income, Parents Occupation
2. Dependent Variable: Total attitudes

Table 3 (c): ANOVA results

Model		ANOVA				
		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	2.268	7	.324	3.654	.001 ^b
	Residual	9.223	104	.089		
	Total	11.491	111			

1. Dependent Variable: Total attitudes
2. Predictors: (Constant), Area of Residence, Education Qualification, Type of Family, Parent type, Siblings of Child, Family Income, Parents Occupation

Coming to Tables 3 (b) and (c) represent the model summary and ANOVA respectively. Table 3(b) shows that the R-value is .444 indicating the relationship between the independent and dependent variable to be

positive with 19.7% of variance with R^2 being .197. Also, Table 3(c) reflects the highly significant relationship between the socio-demographic factors and the parents' attitude with $F(7, 104) = 3.654, P < .001$.

Model	Coefficients				
	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	2.167	.364		5.948	.000
Parent type	-.116	.095	-.162	-1.219	.225
Education Qualification	.015	.055	.024	.273	.786

Model	Coefficients			T	Sig.
	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
Parents	.038	.038	.139	1.007	.316
Occupation					
Family Income	.171	.070	.250	2.455	.016
Siblings of Child	-.186	.068	-.254	-2.747	.007
Type of Family	-.103	.071	-.136	-1.446	.151
Area of Residence	-.171	.080	-.200	-2.134	.035
1. Dependent Variable: Total attitudes					

Further, the multiple linear regression analysis depicts that the family income ($\beta = .250$, $t = 2.455$, $P = 0.016$), number of siblings ($\beta = -.254$, $t = -2.747$, $P = 0.007$), and area of residence ($\beta = -.200$, $t = -2.134$, $P = 0.035$) are the significant variables that are determining the parents' attitude in the study. Hence, one unit change in family income will increase .250 score in parents' attitude on prerequisite skills of autistic children, while one unit change in the number of siblings decreases the parents' attitude by -.254 score, and one unit change in area of residence will decrease -200 score in parents' attitude. It could be understood that a higher family income shows a favorable parents' attitude based on the ordinal score of 1 to 4 where a higher score denotes higher income. Similarly, the lesser the siblings show the parents' attitude to be unfavorable with the ordinal score of 1 to 3 indicating higher the score higher the number of siblings. However, the area of living indicates that parents from urban areas show unfavorable attitudes based on the given nominal score of 1 and 2 for urban and semi-urban areas respectively.

Having an autistic child in a family marks a workload not as usual as it is for a normal child, especially for the care taker as well as the family members. Following this, they

have to make a huge amount of savings for their child's treatment and other expenditures. An unspoken condition exists that if the family has a good level of income, the family can afford the best care and treatment for the autistic child along with the other family expenditures. The study has come by the fact that economic wellbeing is important and it has a significant effect on the parent's attitude level. Wellness in the economic status indicates a favorable attitude towards pre-requisite skills and it can be considered as one of the predictors for the desirable attitude of parents of autistic children. According to Banach *et.al.* (2010), "Parents whose child is diagnosed with ASD experience difficulties and it changes the dynamics of the family in that everyday activities need to be modified and the child with ASD will need extra attention from the parents. Parents have to work more, and spend more for the child and family. Learning that the child is autistic can result in scattered emotions for the parents. Each family handles the vision of their child differently".

Quite often, it happens that parents of autistic children look for one more child of their own who is not autistic which gives them hope and support. The point of view which takes to opinion is that, if an autistic child has a sibling, then the sibling will be able to take care of the autistic child by playing with them,

accompanying them, assisting them, etc. In that way, the parents feel that the child will be less dependent on them as well as makes them feel secure. Therefore, the parents may have more chances of getting their own time or extra time to focus on other aspects and their careers. Consequently, an autistic child having siblings is considered to be a predictor of favorable parents' attitudes. McHale *et al.*, (2016) found that "Siblings are often the first playmates, the first role models and the first teacher's children will have. As such this unique relationship provides the opportunity for social, emotional, behavioral, and psychological development, all of which are particularly important for children with ASD who can face many challenges across these areas. The sibling relationship may provide many positives for the child with ASD".

Parents who are living in urban areas have unfavorable attitudes compared to semi-urban areas. It may be assumed that semi-urban families are more interested in learning new ideas to provide their children with a better life than families residing in urban areas. It is also assumed that parents from urban areas seem to be occupied with exploring other ways of giving the best to their children outside the home and also squeeze in time to focus on their day-to-day work. Thus, they may be not in a position to or cannot give much time to their child. In this study, parents residing in semi-urban areas seem to hold a positive attitude towards autistic children as they would want to give training or practices that they can at home. In a conservative society, social norms, societal demands, and expectations play a vital role in determining parents' choices, attitudes, and acceptance. The stress levels vary and pressure from society may not have as much impact on the parents residing in the semi-urban area as it does to parents in urban areas.

CONCLUSION

The study findings highlight the neutral attitude of parents indicating neither favorable nor unfavorable towards pre-requisite skills for autistic children with a considerable percentage of them reporting an unfavorable attitude as well. Socio-demographic factors such as family income, the number of siblings the autistic child has, and the areas of residence were found to be significant predictors of parents' attitudes towards pre-requisite skills. It is quite a task for a society like India that hosts varied cultures, traditions, languages, socioeconomic inequalities, and different education levels to understand Autism, and bringing about a change in their attitude towards pre-requisite skills is a challenge. In conclusion, the researcher deliberates on building a favorable attitude among parents by sensitizing them regarding the importance of training the children on pre-requisite skills and also, conducting an intervention programme to enhance positive mind set and mental health. These can give power to parents to steer beyond the existing socio-demographic conditions to have encouraging and resourceful parenting which can be more effective, helping them to enrich the social and emotional life of the ASD children and themselves. Owing to the limitation of a small sample size of the present study, it is recommended that research be carried out on a larger group for are presentation to infer the effects and impacts.

REFERENCE

- American Psychiatric Association. (2013). Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders (5th ed.). Washington, DC: Publisher.
- Arora, N. K., Nair, M. K. C., Gulati, S. (2018). Neurodevelopmental disorders in

- children aged 2–9 years: Population-based burden estimates across five regions in India. *PLoS Med.* 2018 Jul; 15(7): e100261.
- Autism Speaks (2021), <https://www.autismspeaks.org/science-news/autism-and-health-special-report-autism-speaks>
- Banach, M. and Couse, L. An interdisciplinary approach: Supporting families after diagnosis. Poster presented at the Council on Social Work Education. San Francisco, CA. October, 2010 [Google Scholar]
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (2005). Making human beings human: Bioecological perspectives on human development. Sage.
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Prevalence of autism spectrum disorders among children aged 8 years-Autism and Developmental Disabilities Monitoring Network, 11 Sites, United States, 2010. *MMWR Surveill. Summ.* 2014;63:1–21. [PubMed] [Google Scholar]
- Griffith G. M., Hastings R. P., Nash S. and Hill C. (2010) Using matched groups to explore child behavior problems and maternal well-being in children with Down syndrome and autism. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders* 40, 610–9
- Lecavalier, L., Leone, S., and Wiltz, J. (2006). The impact of behavior problems on caregiver stress in young people with autism spectrum disorders. *Journal of Intellectual Disability Research*, 50, 172–183.
- Michele R. Bishop, Carolyn Bredek, in Evidence-Based Treatment for Children with Autism, 2014. Doi, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/psychology/prerequisite-skill#:~:text=Many%20children%20with%20ASD%2C%20even,skills%20to%20consider%20targeting%20include%3A&text=Responding%20to%20group%20instructions&text=Completing%20assignments%20independently>
- McHale S. M., Updegraff K. A., Feinberg M. E. (2016). Siblings of youth with autism spectrum disorders: Theoretical perspectives on sibling relationships and individual adjustment. *Journal of Autism & Developmental Disorders*, 46(2), 589–602. [PMC free article] [PubMed] [Google Scholar]
- Nathan Mahr, Explore pre-vocational skills. Learn the definition of pre-vocational skills, understand their different types, and discover various pre-vocational skills examples. Updated: 11/21/2023. Doi, <https://study.com/academy/lesson/what-are-pre-vocational-skills.html#:~:text=Pre%2Dvocational%20skills%20are%20sets,and%20working%20well%20with%20others.>
- Minhas, A., Vajaratkar, V., Divan, G., Hamdani, S. U., Leadbitter, K., Taylor, C., Aldred, C., Tariq, A., Tariq, M., Cardoza, P., Green, J., Patel, V., and Rahman, A. (2015). Parents perspectives on care of children with autistic spectrum disorder in South Asia - Views from Pakistan and India. *International Review of Psychiatry*, 27(3), 247–256.
- Picardi A, Gigantesco A, Tarolla E, Parental Burden and its Correlates in Families of Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder: A Multicentre Study with Two Comparison Groups. *Clin Prac Epidemiol Mental Health* 14, 143-176 (2018).
- Zakaria, S. M., and Tauhaid, N. S. M. (2018). Cabaran membekalkan anak-anak autisme daripada perspektif ibu (The challenges of nurturing autistic children from the mother's perspective). *Jurnal Psikologi Malaysia*, 32(1), 58-7