
ATTITUDES TOWARDS AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER IN URBAN AREA IN MALAYSIA

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ABSTRACT

Autism is a complex disorder of brain development characterized by a variable mixture of compared capacity for reciprocal socio-communicative interaction. Research regarding attitudes toward individuals with Autism spectrum disorder (ASD), particularly the attitudes of adults and adolescents is notably lacking within the research literature. Research surrounding attitudes suggests that attitudes have an impact on behaviour, highlighting the need to establish the attitudes that society currently hold toward ASD. A study in Malaysia shows that the community has bad perception towards autism. This study aims to examine the attitude of community in urban area towards autism and to investigate the impact of gender on participants' attitudes. Questionnaires will be distributed using online. Respondents were answered the questionnaires by online and data were analyzing using SPSS. This study demonstrated an exploratory factor analysis of attitude of ASD. Additionally, exploratory analyses revealed several interesting between ASD knowledge, demographic characteristics, and gender to evaluate actual attitude of ASD in urban area in Malaysia. The results indicated that females displayed slightly more positive attitudes compare to male. Based on the finding, females were reported to have significantly more positive attitudes toward ASD compared to males. The outcome of this study is expected to have a better understanding about autism, it is hoped that people may not only feel sympathy towards autistic children but also feel responsible to foster relationships among humans and stretched out help with full sincerity.

Keywords: Autism, autism spectrum disorder, attitude, urban, Malaysia.

Introduction

ASD is a pervasive developmental disorder characterised by stereotyped repetitive behaviour and persistent deficits in an individuals' social communications and interactions (Cooper, Heron, & Heward, 2014). In Malaysia, adequate schooling is often unavailable for children with ASD, in part because teachers lack the knowledge and skills needed to work with this population. To better understand the current state of knowledge of ASD in Malaysia, we surveyed attitudes regarding the disorder in urban area. Autism affects how a person communicates with, and relates to, other people. It also affects how they make sense of the world around them. Everyday life for people with autism can be confusing, meaningless and even frightening. Understanding and communicating with others is particularly difficult – which can leave people very isolated. People with autism may also experience some form of sensory sensitivity or under-sensitivity, for example to sound, touch, taste, smell, lights or colour. Research regarding attitudes toward individuals with ASD, particularly the attitudes of adults and adolescents is notably lacking within the research literature. Previous research would suggest that adults with ASD have very poor outcomes in later life, particularly in areas of employment and relationships. Research surrounding attitudes suggests that attitudes have an impact on behaviour, highlighting the need to establish the attitudes that society currently hold toward ASD.

Every day The National Autism Society of Malaysia (Nasom) hears from people affected by autism about the lack of awareness and understanding of the condition and the impact this has on them and their families. We hear about intolerance, discrimination and isolation; we hear about rudeness, impatience and lack of compassion; we hear about problems at school, at work and at home; we hear about assumptions and misconceptions both amongst the general public and within statutory agencies. For people affected by autism these attitudes lead to a lifetime of exclusion – exclusion from life in the community; exclusion from employment; exclusion from education. And denial of the help they need to live their lives. Examine the awareness of autism spectrum disorders (ASD) in our community which would help in early recognition and improved support of affected families.

Furthermore, we hoped to expand on the limited literature available on studies of adults with autism, the vast majority describe populations of autistic children.

Problem Statement

Attitudes can be described as a “relatively enduring organisation of beliefs, feelings and behavioural tendencies towards socially significant objects group’s events or symbols” (Hogg & Vaughan, 2011). Research regarding attitudes toward individuals with Autism spectrum disorder (ASD), particularly the attitudes of adults and adolescents is notably lacking within the research literature. Research surrounding attitudes suggests that attitudes have an impact on behaviour, highlighting the need to establish the attitudes that society currently hold toward ASD. A study in Malaysia shows that the community has bad perception towards autism. The more consistent an attitude the more likely it is to predict an individuals’ behaviour under a given set of circumstances (Hogg & Vaughan, 2011).

Objective of the Study

This study was designed to determine the attitude of autism among the community in urban area in Malaysia. This study aims to examine the attitude of community in urban area towards autism and to investigate the impact of gender on participants’ attitudes. Therefore findings can then be used to improve or strengthening the general knowledge on autism in the community. The outcome of this study is expected to have a better understanding about autism, it is hoped that people may not only feel sympathy towards autistic children but also feel responsible to foster relationships among humans and stretched out help with full sincerity.

Literature Review

Hogg, & Vaughan (2011) defined attitudes as a “relatively enduring organisation of beliefs, feelings and behavioural tendencies towards socially significant groups’ events or symbols”. Researchers regarding attitudes toward individuals with ASD, particularly the attitudes of adults and young people is particularly lacking within the research literature. Earlier researchers consisting attitudes toward individuals with ASD has focused mainly on the attitudes of typically developing children toward children with ASD.

Harnum, et al., (2007) compared adults’ perceptions of attitudes of typically developing with children with ASD or children with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) based on one of three scenarios to read and rated their agreement with statements following the scenarios. Two of scenario results revealed that adults’ perceptions to a child with ASD to be a statistically significantly more disliked and to be avoided compared to (1) a typically developing child and, (2) adult. However one scenario result showed that adults’ perceptions have no statistically significant difference for dislike or avoidance across the child with ASD, the child with ADHD and the typically developing child. Therefore, respondents were significantly more positive when they were provided with accurate information compared to no accurate information.

Conversely, Tonnsen, & Hahn (2016) examined middle school students’ attitudes in terms of the peers’ physical inclusion toward a peer with ASD and the students’ perceptions of their typically developing peers’ attitudes toward the peer with ASD. A significant result showed that the younger respondents had a greater positive attitudes compared to older respondents.

Chambers et al., (2008) highlights the potential importance of knowledge and understanding of ASD in relation to attitudes. Via watching four videos, each representing a child engaging in a behaviour, two of the behaviours were problematic and two were not, researchers studied the effect on adults’ attitudes to a child showing problematic behaviours. Half of the respondents were informed that the child had ASD and the other half were not. All respondents were required to rate the child’s behaviour in several circumstances; social, cognitive and emotional after watching the same four videos. The result indicated that respondents have significantly more positive attitudes when they were knowledgeable of the child’s ASD diagnosis compared to respondents who were not knowledgeable (Chambers, et al., 2008; Matthews et al., 2015). This suggests that the accurate of knowledge may be an important factor when investigating attitudes (O’Halloran, 2017).

Contrarywise, study from Nevill, & White (2011) examined undergraduate college students’ attitudes toward ASD in terms of tolerance and acceptance to a peer with ASD by adapting The Openness to Autism Scale from Harnum, et al., (2007). Generally respondents indicated high level of contact with ASD and openness toward peers with ASD especially for students who had families member with ASD were significantly more open compared to students who didn’t because a greater contact quantity was associated with greater acceptance toward students with ASD (O’Halloran, 2017). It’s because the level of contact or experience adults have with individuals with ASD may be a factor related to positive attitudes toward ASD (Nevill, & White 2011) although families experiencing higher levels of stress and distress than families of typically developing children or children with other disabilities (Allik, et al., 2006; Lecavalier, et al., 2006; Manning, et al., 2011).

While, Campbell (2006) study had detailed the negative impact of inclusion on children with ASD and other learning disabilities are frequently subjected to peer isolation and bullying from their typically developing peers. This study was proved that children with psychiatric illnesses and developmental and learning disabilities experience greater social rejection and negative evaluation compared to children with physical disabilities.

Similar study to Nevill, & White (2011) but different sample, Gillespie-Lynch, et al., (2015) assessed an undergraduate universities’ knowledge of autism through an online educational intervention and stigma of students with ASD through an online

educational intervention training programme. Respondents were required to complete a self-report measure of stigma related to ASD and a self-report measure of autism knowledge immediately before and after (pre-intervention and post interventions scores) during the programme. Results through an intervention revealed an increase significantly in knowledge and a decrease significantly in stigma on students' attitudes toward ASD. Gillespie-Lynch, et al., (2015) found that respondents who reported having an immediate family member with ASD, revealed a trend toward less stigma compared to their peers. This study consistent with Campbell (2006) stated that students with ASD who experienced positive behavioural intentions among their typically developing peers achieved greater academic success compared to students with ASD who experienced more negative attitudes among their typically developing peers.

In Chamberlain, et al.; (2007) study, researchers used social network methods to explore the involvement of children with autism in regular classrooms either they were sociable or not which were an effective engagement with peers based on friendship qualities, peer acceptance, loneliness, and classroom social networks. Notwithstanding involvement in networks, children with autism experienced lower centrality, acceptance, companionship, and reciprocity; however they did not account as greater loneliness.

However, Campbell, et al., (2011) studied middle school students' knowledge pertaining to autism which were across various aspects related to the disorder; etiologic, core symptoms, associated problems and outcomes. Results indicated that the students presented more positive behavioural intentions toward the children who had a physical disability compared to the children with a learning disability. Consistent with Campbell (2006) showed that typically developing students were significantly more likely to reject peers with learning difficulties compared to those with physical difficulties. It is because the typically developing children were more likely to place the blame of any inappropriate behaviours exhibited on the children with a learning disabilities which had no obvious physical disability compared to an inappropriate behaviours with an obvious physical disability (O'Halloran, 2017). Consequently, interventions to support learning abilities of children with autism often include the use of visual supports. These visual support are cognitive tools to enable learning and the production of language, including an interactive environment that can generate real time visual, which allowed the children with ASD to enjoy and be creative within this environment. (Parés, et al., 2005; Hayes, et al., 2010).

Method

Based on the data from online group, total numbers of online residents are 76,492 residents. However, this study gives two weeks as a time frame for the residents to respond. A total of 780 residents of Shah Alam Community completed questionnaires assessing participant demographics and attitudes towards ASD. The correlation between genders with attitudes towards ASD was examined using SPSS.

Conclusions

The table below shows the means statistic which compare between male and female attitude.

Group Statistics

GENDER		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
ATT1	Male	230	3.74	1.247	.082
	Female	550	4.64	.610	.026
ATT2	Male	230	3.31	1.327	.088
	Female	550	3.92	.965	.041
ATT3	Male	230	4.16	1.160	.077
	Female	550	3.94	.841	.036
ATT4	Male	230	2.92	1.115	.074
	Female	550	2.60	.857	.037
ATT5	Male	230	3.00	1.000	.066
	Female	550	3.53	.942	.040
ATT6	Male	230	2.67	.744	.049
	Female	550	3.32	1.257	.054
ATT7	Male	230	1.93	1.453	.096
	Female	550	1.64	.717	.031
ATT8	Male	230	2.91	.760	.050
	Female	550	3.86	1.094	.047
ATT9	Male	230	4.16	1.150	.076
	Female	550	4.01	1.187	.051
ATT10	Male	230	3.16	.690	.046
	Female	550	3.82	.804	.034

The results indicated that females displayed slightly more positive attitudes compare to male. Based on the finding, females were reported to have significantly more positive attitudes toward ASD compared to males. This finding supports previous research which has also reported females to have significantly more positive attitudes compared to males (Gray, & Rodrigue, 2001; Rosenbaum et al., 1987; Slininger, et al., 2000). However, this finding also found out that, the females feel that the children with autism are more difficult to handle compare to normal children.

Similarly, Matthews, et al (2015) reported that males may be better able to tolerate certain characteristics typical of ASD. Greater tolerance would be considered related to the acceptance of the males towards their positive attitude if their child were diagnosed with autism. The finding also realize that male and female respondents have a positive attitude toward autism children because they strongly don't agree with the statement that the children with autism cannot learn. Based on the findings of this study, it shows that respondents in urban area have a better understanding about autism, it is hoped that people may not only feel sympathy towards autistic children but also feel responsible to foster relationships among humans and stretched out help with full sincerity. However, the limitation of the study is limited to urban area which is Shah Alam residents only. Similarly, future studies could investigate differences in gender between urban and rural

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