

Awareness on autism spectrum disorder among primary caregivers of children aged 5 or less, attending child welfare clinics in Battaramulla MOH area

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Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a multifaceted neurodevelopmental condition involving persistent challenges with social communication, restricted interests, and repetitive behaviours. Early diagnosis and intervention are crucial in improving developmental outcomes for children with ASD. In Sri Lanka, awareness of ASD among primary caregivers remains markedly low, hindering timely detection and access to appropriate interventions. This study aims to assess the awareness of ASD among primary caregivers. The specific objectives include evaluating current awareness, identifying sources of child health information, and exploring factors influencing awareness. A descriptive cross-sectional study was conducted among 125 primary caregivers of children aged five or less across five child welfare clinics in the Battaramulla MOH area, utilizing systematic sampling. Data were collected through a pretested, structured interviewer-administered questionnaire. Analysis was done using SPSS version 20. The findings indicated that a majority of caregivers (n=100; 80.0%) possessed limited knowledge regarding ASD with a significant proportion (n=43; 34.4%) having never heard the term “autism”. A significant association was found between educational attainment and relationship to the child, with mothers (n=79; 63.2%) demonstrating greater knowledge than fathers and other caregivers. Social media was the most common source of information. This study highlights a significant lack of ASD awareness and many relying on informal sources. To address this issue, targeted public health campaigns and enhanced healthcare provider education are recommended. Additionally, efforts should engage fathers and other family members in ASD education.

Keywords: *Autism Spectrum Disorder, Primary caregivers, Awareness, Sri Lanka, Child welfare clinics*