

## Emergence of Neurodiversity and Awareness of Autism Among School Teachers- A Preliminary Survey

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**Abstract :** Introduction: Neurodiversity is a concept which captures the different ways in which everyone's brain functions and is considered as part of normal variation. It is a strength-based approach which focuses on the individual's strengths and capabilities and believes in providing support wherever necessary. In many parts of the world, those diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder have been ostracized and ridiculed due to their sensory and communication differences. Hence, it becomes important for the teachers to have knowledge about autism and understand the needs of children with Autism. Need: India is rich in terms of culture, languages and religious diversity. It is important to study neurodiversity in such a population for better understanding of neurodiverse individuals and appropriate intervention. Aim & objectives: This study seeks teachers' knowledge of the causes, traits and educational requirements of children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). It also aims to find out whether mainstream schools actually provide training programs to the teachers to manage such children along with the necessary accommodations. Method: The current study was a cross-sectional study conducted among school teachers. A total of 30 school teachers were taken for the study. The participants were enrolled after informed consent. The participants were directed to a google form consisting of objective questions. The first part of the questionnaire elicited information about school, teaching experience, qualification, etc. There were specific questions extracting details on attending/conducting sensitization and professional programs in regard to care for autistic children. The second part of the questionnaire consisted of some basic questions on the teacher's understanding of diagnosis, traits, causes, road to recovery and understanding the educational and communication needs of autistic children from the teacher's perspective. The responses were tabulated and analyzed descriptively. Results: Most of the teachers had 5-10 years of teaching experience. The majority of the teachers used the term "special child" for autistic children. Around 54.8% (17 teachers) of the total teachers felt that the parents of autistic children should teach their child to learn adaptive skills and 41.9% of the teachers felt that they should take medical intervention. About 50% of the teachers felt that the cause of autism is related to pre-natal maternal factors and about 40% felt that its cause is genetic. Only a small percentage of teachers felt that they were trained to manage the children with autism. More than 50% of the teachers mentioned that their schools do not conduct training programs for managing these children. Discussion & Conclusion: In this study, the knowledge and perspectives of teachers on children with ASD were studied. The most widely held contemporary belief is that genetic factors play a major part in the development of ASD, although the existing evidence is muddled, with numerous opposing perspectives on the nature of this mechanism. It is worth noting that any culture's level of humanity is mirrored in how that society "treats" its vulnerable population.

**Keywords :** autism, neurodiversity, awareness, education

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