

Social Conversation skills in Children with Autism with Special Reference to Affective understanding and Perspective Taking

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Abstract

Affective understanding and perspective taking skills involves understanding the facial expressions, emotions of other people and comprehending the context of other's communication. Children with autism spectrum disorders show a considerable deficit in social interaction and communication. Social skill interventions for children with autism needs a special focus on developing affective understanding and perspective taking which helps in developing other areas of socialization. Thus, the study focused on parents and teacher perception of affective understanding and perspective taking skills in 200 children with autism was studied. Differences in affective understanding and perspective takings was examined with regard to age, gender and type of family of children with autism. The findings of the studied didn't show any significant difference in gender and type of family of children with autism. Regarding parent perspective a significant difference was observed between the age and affective understanding of children with autism. The implication of this finding is discussed in detail in this article.

Keywords: Autism Spectrum Disorder, Affective Understanding, Perspective Taking, Social skills.

INTRODUCTION

Personal bonding and relationship with our significant people are the essence of human life. As social beings people constantly spend time with people around them. Affective understanding and perspective taking has a crucial role in having a positive relationship with others. Empathetic understanding of other emotions, thoughts and feeling paves way in taking conversations in the right perspective. Social skills are highly strengthened with good affective understanding. "Autism Spectrum Disorder" is a neuro-developmental condition typically appearing in the first three years of life that significantly affect person's ability to communicate, understand relationships and relate to others, it is frequently associated with unusual or stereotypical rituals or behaviours." (RPwD Act, 2016). Being an emerging condition that is diagnosed in the early years of

life it is manifested through difficulties in the affected individuals in social interaction, social communication along with the presence of restricted, repetitive and stereotyped behavioral patterns. Social skills are the major area of weakness among children with autism. Difficulty in social interaction, poor sharing by the peers and impaired information processing lead to the development of difficulty in social understanding (Barry et al., 2003).

Affective understanding and perspective taking in children with autism is also an area of concern as they show less eye contact, fails to understand others emotion, show inappropriate emotion in various situations in real life. Deficits in social perspective taking is also a core feature of autism spectrum disorders. It is exhibited in the inappropriate reasoning with regard to the knowledge and states of others (Baren & Cohen, 1997, 1985). Comprehending and making use of

others intentional and emotional states is also impaired in children with autism (Rutherford et al. 2004). They find difficulty in making friendship because of rude and insensitive appearance which led to impairment in social, occupational and other skills (Barnhill et al., 2002). Impairment in recognizing others perspective and reacting in a cold, uncaring manner is commonly found among these children with autism. (Rogers et al. (2007) These deficits in social skills of autistic children have lifetime impact and affecting the autistic children in the view of community interaction, academic skill and self independence and also affect their family members and their community interactions (Walton and Ingersoll, 2013). Limitations in these areas contribute to delay in language and profoundly affect their ability to interact with others (Bloom P (2000). Addressing the issues in affective understanding and perspective taking will help in developing social skills in children with autism with suitable interventions. Hence, understanding the persisting social skills with regard to affective understanding and perspective taking in children with autism with their primary social groups is very essential. So, this present study is focuses on comparing the perception of parents and teachers on affective understanding and perspective taking of children with autism.

METHODOLOGY

Participants

Parents and teachers' relationship bridges early child development in both home and school environment. Parents and teachers who are the primary and secondary agents of socialization therefore need to be oriented on the importance of developing social skills in children with autism. Hence the study has oriented the parents and teachers of children with autism on the importance of social skill. The main purpose of this study is to create awareness among parents and teachers to focus on the social skill development of children with autism apart from regular academic teachings. For studying the level of affective understanding and perspective taking skills of children with

autism, 200 children with autism, their parents, teachers were selected using simple random sampling method.

Data collection

The affective understanding and perspective component of Social Skill Rating form of TRIAD social skill assessment was used for the purpose of data collection. The data was collected from the parents and teachers through questionnaire method. Few demographic variables such as age, gender of the child with autism and their type of family was considered for the study.

Statistical analysis

The analysis was carried out using the statistical software SPSS (version 17.0). The association between the age and level of affective understanding and perspective taking were analyzed by chi square analysis. The mean difference in the level of affective understanding and perspective taking on comparing gender and family type is studied using independent T test and the level of significance is measured at $P < 0.05$.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Deficit in social skills is an important area of treatment for children with autism. So it is in need of appropriate interventional program to improve the social skills (Scottone et al, 2006). Deficits in affective understanding and perspective taking skill in children with autism will hinder the children from appropriate response for the initiation and maintenance of social interaction with each others. Children with autism suffer from consequences of social interaction deficits. A young child with autism always show interest towards interaction with peer, expresses poor support in social interaction and desires to be alone than being with peers (Bauminger & Kasari, 2000). Children with autism always show social relationship problems with peers because of deficit in understanding affectiveness and perspective of peers which is important for the development of social relationship and friends (Rao et al., 2008).

Table 1: *Distribution of Children with Autism based on their demographic characters*

S. No	Variables	No. of Respondents (n=200)	Percentage(%)
1.	Age		
	3 - 6 Years	83	41.5
	6 - 9 Years	60	30.0
	9 - 12 Years	57	28.5
2.	Gender		
	Male	144	72.0
	Female	64	28.0
5.	Type of Family		
	Joint Family	78	39.0
	Nuclear Family	122	61.0

From the table 1 it is evident that 41.5% of the children were between 3-6 years and 30 % of the children were between 6-9 years, 28.5 % of them were between 9-12 years. Most of the children with autism chosen for the study (72%) were

male while negligible proportion (28%) was female. It is apparent that nearly 61% of children come from nuclear families and 39 % of children come from joint families.

Table 2: *Association between the Age of Children with Autism and Affective Understanding and Perspective Taking of Social*

Age	PARENTS				Statistical Inference	TEACHERS				Statistical Inference		
	Level of Affective Understanding and Perspective Taking Skills					Low	High	n:114	%		n:86	%
	Low		High									
	n:114	%	n:86	%								
3-6 years	38	45.8	45	54.2	$X^2 = 7.430$ $df = 2$ $P < 0.05$ Significant	47	56.6	36	43.4	$X^2 = 0.982$ $df = 2$ $P > 0.05$ Not Significant		
7-9 years	40	66.7	20	33.3		37	61.7	23	38.3			
10-12 years	36	63.2	21	36.8		30	52.6	27	47.4			

From the table 2 it is evident that there exists an association between age of children with autism and their level of affective understanding and perspective taking skills. From the above table it is evident that there exists no significant association between age of children with autism and their social skills. the age of diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder starts at an early age of 3 years, the core features continue to persist throughout their childhood, adolescence and adulthood. Hence age has a meagre role to play in social skill development in children with autism. On examining the severity of the feature of autism, few cross sectional and longitudinal studies have reported that core features appear to be decreased as age progress during adolescence and adulthood (Fecteau et al., 2003; Mawhood et al., 2000; Shattuck et al., 2007). Factors like early identification, appropriate intervention and

educational services play a significant role in reducing the core feature of autism as the age progresses (Volkmar 2005b).

With regard to parent opinion on the perspective of social skills in children with autism, significant association was observed between the age of children and their affective understanding and perspective taking. The affective understanding and perspective taking skill of autistic children deals with various skills involved in empathic understanding of others emotion, facial expression and body language. Due to constant proximity and observation of parents, children with autism have developed understanding of their expression and emotion. Henceforth we find a significant association between age and affective understanding and perspective taking. When the same comes to

social context responses of children with autism has varied which is reflected in the findings of teacher perspective. There is no significant association between age of the children with autism and their level of affective understanding and perspective taking skills as perceived by the teachers. Studies pertaining to discriminating emotional states and perspective taking among autistic and normally developing children, has revealed that children with autism show considerable skill on identifying the emotional

states though, not up to the standard of normally developing children (Sigman et al., 1992). Children with autism were also reported to show the qualities of friendship like sharing, intimacy and sense of self worth which is again a proof of better affective understanding and perspective taking (Bauminger, 2003). On overall Robinson et al., (2011) evidenced that the traits related to autism will be stable throughout the lifespan of autistic children without age discrimination.

Table 3: *Distribution of Children with Autism by Gender and their level of affective understanding and perspective taking of social skills on respondents' perspective*

Gender	PARENTS			TEACHERS		
	Mean	S.D	Statistical Inference	Mean	SD	Statistical Inference
Male	16.80	4.020	T = 0.021 df = 198 P>0.05, Not Significant	20.35	5.697	T = -0.800 df = 198 P>0.05, Not Significant
Female	16.79	3.463		21.07	5.877	

Table 3 indicates that there is no significant difference between the gender of the child and the affective understanding and perspective taking of social skills as perceived by the parents and teachers of children with autism. Parents stated that male children have high level of affective understanding and perspective taking skills and teachers stated that female children have high level affective understanding and perspective taking skills. So, it is proved that gender of the children with autism does not influence the social skills of children with autism. The results find that affective understanding and perspective taking is all about understanding how children with autism sees the world to be able to work together, communicate and show empathy. Hence it becomes necessary for parents and teachers of children with autism to serve as good role models in perspective taking as young children learn by watching elders, teach children to talk about their feelings, acknowledging and respecting them for what they are and help the child build the cause-effect connections in their environment.

Though autism spectrum disorder is found more dominant in male than female in the ratio of 4:1 (Brugha et al. 2011; Chakrabarti and Fombonne 2005; Fombonne 2009; Kim et al. 2011), female with considerable deficits in social

communication, interaction and behavioral pattern alone are diagnosed with autism. Since deficit in social skills is a core feature of autism diagnosis, gender does not seem to have an impact on the dimensions of social skill development in children with autism. Syriopoulou-Delli et al (2018) reported there is no significant difference in the affective understanding and perspective taking of social skills which is in correlation with the present work. Parents expect more social relationship in girls and insist them more to be socially responsible than boys. All these are performed by parents to mask the symptoms of autism in girl children with autism (Holtmann et al. 2007). The works of Harrop et al. (2014) found no difference in socialization skills between male and female children with autism. Frazier et al. (2013) and Dean et al. (2014) explained that female children have more social communication impairment and less acceptance of peers than male children with autism. But the research work of Shattuck et al. (2009) with 491 girl children with autism and surveys done by Fountain et al. (2011) and Fujiwara et al. (2011) stated that gender of children with autism does not influence the social skills of children with autism especially affective understanding and perspective of social inter relationship with peers.

Table 4: *Distribution of Children with Autism by Family Type and their level of affective understanding and perspective taking of social skills on respondents perspective*

Family type of the child	PARENTS			TEACHERS		
	Mean	Standard Deviation	Statistical Inference	Mean	Standard Deviation	Statistical Inference
Joint	16.44	3.785	T = -1.051	19.59	5.861	T = -1.903
Nuclear	17.02	3.911	df = 198 P>0.05 Not Significant	21.16	5.603	df = 198 P>0.05 Not Significant

The above table 4 shows that there exists no significant difference in the level of affective understanding and perspective taking of social skill of children as perceived by parents and teachers based on the type of family of children with autism. As parents perception children from nuclear family show more affective understanding and perspective taking social skill while teachers express that children from joint family show high level of affective understanding and perspective taking social skill when compared to nuclear family. It showed that type of family does not influence the social skills of children with autism.

Type of family and family members play a major role in affective understanding and perspective taking from peers by the children with autism (Howe and Recchia, 2014). The conversation between the family members during play activities will increase the perspective skills (Siegler et al., 2014). The children those who are involved in play activities with family members and siblings have shown increased rate of understanding of others emotion and thinking (Howe et al., 2005). According to Haddock et al. (2017) family environment plays major role in developing affective understanding and perspective taking skills.

CONCLUSION

The role of affective understanding and perspective taking in day-to-day life is very essential to get along with the community and family. Its deficits and impact in the life of children autism is even higher when compared to others. They are a need for parents and teacher to give their focus on developing this empathetic understanding along with other essential skills. Appropriate interventions focusing on affective understanding and perspective taking in children

with autism can lead to improvement in other social skills in these children. Better social development can show way for success in peer acceptance, positive mental health and effective relationship of children with autism with other. Social inclusion will also be made easy for children with autism if they are reinforced and trained appropriately in social skills with regard to affective understanding and perspective taking.

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