

# Autism

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IMPACTS OF SOCIAL INTERACTION ON AUTISTIC INDIVIDUALS

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## ABSTRACT

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a developmental disability with various indications of significant social and behavioral differences. The purpose of this research is to examine how social interactions affect individuals with ASD. This study involves qualitative research, which includes data collection, analysis, and the depiction of conclusions. The research design is a model of descriptive field study. It involves a non-experimental study with randomized participants and manipulation of variables. The experiment takes place at a facility specializing in individuals with different levels of Autism Spectrum Disorder. The dependent variables are the social interactions, while the independent variables are the individuals with Autism. The research mainly focuses on social interaction at a family, school, and workplace for individuals with Autism. Besides, it reveals the pros and cons of social interaction for autistic individuals.

## INTRODUCTION

ASD is a developmental disability with various indications of significant social and behavioral differences. It is often accompanied by stereotypical and repetitive behaviors such as rocking, nodding, biting, and screaming, among others (Lai et al., 2017). Besides, individuals with Autism Disorder are usually resistant to changes in their daily routines and even environmental change. ASD is characteristically diagnosed in childhood and has a wide variety of signs and symptoms, with effects varying from one level to another. Over the years, there has been an increased diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder, with male children being more affected than female. The most appealing feature of Autism Disorder is social withdrawal. Individuals diagnosed with Autism often appear not to be interested in the social world. They act

as if they are emotionally blind to human interaction and may even relate better with objects than people. Autism is associated with communication, developmental, language, interest deficiency, and learning disabilities. These symptoms make it hard for Autistic individuals to interact well with others or form any positive relationships.

Autistic patients usually communicate in different ways. Some can speak verbally while some are not and hence communicate using gestures, while others can do both. Research done has shown that autistic individuals often tend not to focus on human faces or voices. They also find it hard to form joint attention, making it very hard to interact with them. Hence, to improve their relationship with people, they must be taught social skills. The development of these skills gives them hope of forming strong and positive bonds, success in school and even in employment places when they grow up, and enable them to become more valuable members of a society (Fletcher-Watson et al., 2019). Besides, these skills also support healthy adult relationships with family and friends and make them more interactive.

Because of the difficulties in social interaction experienced by Autistic individuals, their peers usually deem them socially obstinate. These individuals typically exhibit inappropriate behaviors such as avoiding eye contact, lack of basic etiquette, and standing or sitting too close to people, among many others. Individuals with ASD also experience sensory difficulties that may make them hypo-sensitive or hypersensitive to sensual stimuli (Robertson & Baron-Cohen, 2017). Therefore, people need to understand the behaviors exhibited by ASD individuals and try as much as possible to relate appropriately with them. Since these individuals have social interaction problems, it should be up to those around them to initiate the interactions in a way that will not cause harm to them. It is also essential to avoid some behaviors, characters, and gestures that may upset an Autistic individual as we interact with them

to prevent any negative consequences.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Autism Spectrum disorder (ASD) was officially diagnosed as a clinical disorder in 1943 by Dr. Leo Kanner. Initially, this disorder was a rare occurrence and wasn't known to many. Whenever a child exhibits Autistic characteristics and symptoms, it would be classified as an emotional disturbance. However, after acknowledging the disorder, people became more versed with the idea and started to adapt to the condition. Much research has been done, and specialists have come up with a way of dealing with this disorder.

<sup>2</sup> One of the significant symptoms of Autism Spectrum Disorder is social disconnection. This is seen in a wide range of behaviors, from completely dominating a conversation to focus on one topic to not interacting with people at all. There is no stable outline to social dysfunction, but it is usually the symptom that stands out whenever one is interacting with an Autistic person. Social disconnection usually differs from High-Functioning autistic individuals to Low-Functioning Autistic individuals. While High-Functioning Individuals experience a minor social skills deficit that is almost unnoticeable, Low-Functioning individuals, on the other hand, have immediate and apparent difficulties in social interactions. HFA individuals can frequently acquire social skills and make significant progress in social interaction than LFA individuals. However, they also struggle with uneasiness in social interaction, just like the Low-Functioning Autistic individuals (Holingue et al., 2018).

These social skills deficits are all associated with some primary elements of Autism Spectrum Disorder. These elements include; deferments and hitches in acquiring uttered communication, devastating sensory inputs, inability to connect and read unspoken

communication cues, repetitive behaviors, and resistance to environment and routine changes (Simonoff et al., 2020). These traits make it almost impossible for ASD patients to acquire basic social skills; hence interacting with others is usually very difficult. However, most people typically misread this social deficit as a desire to avoid people, while the truth is that ASD individuals often long so much to interact with others but are unable to because they lack the skills to do so. In turn, this misunderstanding may sometimes result in frustrations and outbursts as they try to figure out their place in social interactions or seek to be understood.

Autism is becoming more predominant as time goes by. Research recently showed that ASD is now affecting 1 out of every 110 children born with an increasingly growing rate every year. Gender plays a significant role <sup>7</sup> in the predominance of Autism Spectrum Disorder. A study <sup>10</sup> done by the Autism Development Disabilities Monitoring (ADDM) showed that more diagnosis is found in males than female (Tartaglia et al., 2017). The study showed that in boys, ASD prevalence is 14.4 per 1000 males, and in girls, the occurrence is 3.2 per 1000 females. Besides gender, ASD prevalence is also affected by ethnicity. For example, a study showed that ASD is <sup>4</sup> more common among non-Hispanic white children than in black children and Hispanic children. Early identification and treatment of ASD are essential in controlling its rapidly increasing prevalence. As much as it may be challenging to deal with social disconnection among Autistic individuals, we all need to try. Social interaction is as important to them as it is to us. To understand this concept, we will look at <sup>3</sup> the impact of social interaction on individuals with Autism Disorder at a family level, school, and workplace.

Interaction at a family level

Often, when a child is diagnosed with ASD, the family usually finds it hard to accept the news. Even though the family experiences relief that they know the cause of their child's symptoms, this does not do away with the stress and difficulties experienced in bringing up the child. The news usually has different impacts on different <sup>9</sup> members of the family. To the parents whose child is diagnosed with ASD, stress automatically sets in, and some even see it as a loss. They find it stressful to adapt to the dynamic changes that the family has to experience and find the appropriate facilities and experienced caregivers who can deal well with the child. In a marriage where one partner is ignorant of the condition, the diagnosis may lead to serious marital problems. In adverse situations, it may even lead to divorce—additionally, the parents also financial constraints and, at times, isolation from friends and other family members. Most importantly, parents often feel frustrated due to their inability to express themselves, making it very difficult to know their needs (McNeil, Quetsch & Anderson, 2019).

To siblings, this condition is usually taken as a form of embarrassment, especially among their peers. This is because their sibling, Autistic, may behave in a way that is not acceptable to others, which may cause an awkward condition when they are around friends. Further, siblings find it hard to cope with the drastic changes in the family, and at times, jealousy may set in due to the amount of time and care the parents give to their autistic sibling. This feeling of being ignored or inadequately loved by the parent may make the other siblings hate their brother or sister who is autistic (Kovshoff et al., 2017). Besides, siblings usually get frustrated and stressed because they cannot connect and engage well with their autistic siblings. Generally, this condition usually stresses the whole family, both nuclear and extended family members.

However, even though dealing with an Autistic child may be difficult, it is possible to foster positive interaction within the family. Once the family accepts the situation and learns to

cope with it, the process becomes less tedious. The family can put siblings diagnosed with Autism under a routine, and once they become accustomed to these routines, it becomes easier for them to control their behavior. These routines also train autistic individuals on social skills, and with time they slowly improve their interaction with other family members. After the other siblings adapt to the changes and learn to understand their autistic siblings, they can appreciate them, and their relationship dramatically improves.

If the autistic sibling cannot speak, they develop gestures they both understand and can use to communicate. Hence, whenever the sick sibling needs something, they can easily share and receive help. A study showed that once siblings accept their autistic siblings, they learn to love them very much, and some even report that they love their playtime with their siblings. Parents and other family members also adapt and develop ways of relating with their autistic child. These positive interactions in the family are usually significant to Autistic children. When they feel loved and accepted, they become more social and spend more time with others. As a result, it becomes easier to interact with them and know whenever they need anything. With time, their social interaction skills may improve to the point that it becomes difficult for others to notice that they have ASD (Hyman, Levy & Myers, 2020).

#### Interaction at school

When dealing with Autistic individuals, school programs have often proved to be more effective than other programs offered in a different context. Schools give a more naturalistic approach and hence provide more hopes for bettering the social interaction condition of an autistic individual (Kara & Wolfe, 2018). Autistic children usually find it hard to cope in class since they have low concentration and understanding abilities. Besides, communicating and

learning a language also prove to be a challenge. However, special schools have been developed where Autistic individuals get to know under increased care and supervision from their teachers. As these children learn in groups and participate in group activities, they can develop social interaction and communication skills. Being with other children who are just like them gives them the will to interact more freely and even form excellent relationships. School also gives them hope for brighter futures as they learn other skills needed in future workplaces. Once <sup>8</sup> children with Autism disorder learn social skills at school, it becomes even easier for them to relate with people at home, reducing the burden to a family.

#### Interacting at workplace

Individuals with Autism often face a lot of challenges looking for jobs. The truth is even though they might have all the qualifications; employers are usually reluctant to hire them. Research done showed a high unemployment level among individuals with Autism, even in the most developed country. This is because ASD often affects one's physical and mental capacity to work. Autism limits the interests and types of activities that one can perform and makes it hard for an autistic individual to perform a task out of their physical strength or interest. Autism generally affects an individual's ability to communicate or to receive communication effectively. Many Autistic individuals often find it hard to manage a job that requires a lot of interaction. Although therapeutic methods can help people communicate and relate well with autistic individuals, many employers usually lack the willingness to go to these lengths and instead settle for normal individuals even if they are less qualified. As a result, most individuals with ASD end up remaining unemployed, devastated, and frustrated (Bishop-Fitzpatrick et al., 2019)

However, research has shown that an autistic individual can work well with others if given a chance. Bosses are advised to focus more on one's strengths than weaknesses. Instead of making assumptions due to one's disability, they should give everyone a chance to show their abilities. They should also be more open to reasonable accommodations and avoid discrimination against ASD individuals. Besides, they should show kindness, compassion, and fairness to all employees whether they are Autistic or not. When Autistic individuals are given a chance to work with others, they develop social skills as they interact with their colleagues and share ideas and work experiences. Being treated equally as the rest of the employees give them the will to work harder and match the same standards. Interacting at workplaces also enables them to form positive relationships with other employees, making it easier for them to communicate when they have issues. These social skills developed during an interaction at work enable them to create better relationships for a future family.

Generally, social interaction can be used as a form of therapy for individuals with ASD. This is because it trains on social skills and environment, and it is a more realistic and naturalistic approach. Most therapists suggest that it is helpful for ABA therapy since it aims to impact social skills in Autistic individuals. However, while interacting with Autistic individuals, it is essential to note any gesture or character that may annoy them and slow down developing social skills. Act such as hostility and strictness may scare an ASD patient and make them even more afraid to interact with others. Hence, it is essential to understand and try as much as we can not to annoy them.

## METHODOLOGY

### Participants

The first lot of participants was a random pool of staff at a facility with autism patients. The aim was to have ten male and ten female participants. The participants were to complete research designed to determine <sup>3</sup> the impact of social interaction on individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder. The second group of participants included 15 parents who had Autistic children at the facility and 20 siblings of the Autistic individuals. They were interviewed and given questioners. The aim was to find out how they felt about having an Autistic child for the parents and the siblings, how they felt about having an Autistic brother or sister. Besides, they were also to talk about how their interaction with the Autistic individual has been.

We did another study at a facility that practiced inclusive classroom learning where both regular and Autistic children. Here, we interviewed 20 teachers. Five teachers were those teaching Autistic children, and another five were those teaching the normal pupils. The remaining 10 were assistant teachers who assisted in teaching both the Autistic and regular pupils. The aim was to determine the classroom experience and how children with ASD participated in class and their interaction with other children in the class and during playtime. Also, we selected a group of 30 children. Ten were Autistic individuals, and 20 were regular students. They were divided into groups and given activities to do. The aim was to determine how these pupils interacted in class and the effect of interaction on Autistic individuals.

Lastly, we also researched a company that had both regular and Autistic workers. Here, the participants involved five regular employees, three company managers, and five autistic employees. The aim was to determine how they found the Autistic individual's capabilities to work with others and the impact that socializing had on them.

Design

The research design was a model of Descriptive field study. It was a non-experimental study with randomized participants in different fields. One research took place at a facility that takes care of Autistic individuals. The other one took place at a school that practiced inclusive classroom learning, and the last one was at a company that hired both regular and Autistic individuals. The independent variables were the social interactions and involvement, while the dependent variables were the Autistic individuals.

#### Procedure

The first cohort with ten male and ten female staff from the care facility was administered a survey of 15 minutes each. The questions revolved around the impacts of social interaction on Autistic individuals. The second cohort with parents and siblings of the Autistic individuals was first divided into 5 with three siblings and two parents each and interviewed for 30 minutes. Later, they were then given questioners given 10 minutes to fill them. Both the interview and questioners had questions concerning how they felt about having an Autistic child and how they interacted with each other.

During the second research at the facility that practiced inclusive classroom teaching, the teachers and the assistant teachers were given survey forms to fill. Also, and also interviewed them. They were given 20minutes to fill the forms and 30 minutes for the interviews. The questions asked included how their experience taught in an inclusive classroom and how the Autistic children interacted with others and their interactions. Also, 30 children, ten being Autistic and 20 regular students who were selected, were further divided into three groups. One group had Autistic students only, the other group had a mixture of both Autistic and regular students, and the last group had regular students only. They were given similar tasks to perform,

and we made observations on how they achieved the particular functions and how they were interacting.

In the company's previous research, the employers were interviewed and asked how the Autistic individuals performed and how they interacted with the other employees. The group of employees chosen was given questioners that answered how they managed to work together and how their interaction was.

#### Instruments

One major instrument used in almost all the research was the questioners that contained questions on how the Autistic individuals managed to interact with others, the interactions' effect, and how people felt about interacting with them. The second instrument was the survey sheets of social interaction of Autistic children that included how they communicated, participated in group activities in inclusive classrooms, and generally, social interaction. Lastly, there were the interview forms of Autistic individual's interaction with their colleagues at work and with other students and teachers at school.

#### Data collection

Data was collected using correlation, survey research design, questioners, recorders from interviews, and observation. The questioners, survey sheets, and audio records were used in the statistical analysis of the respondents. Observation was also used, especially when students engaged in group activities.

## FINDINGS

The first research that had 10 male and ten female staff, established that social interaction positively impacted Autistic individuals. From the staff's survey sheets, most of them answered positively to the questions on the impact of social interaction on Autistic individuals. When parents brought the children to the institution, they said that most of them lacked social skills, and they could not even communicate whenever they had a need. However, after staying in the facility and interacting with each other, they noticed a great improvement in their communication and social skills.

The group of parents and siblings interviewed also had positive responses to social interaction with Autistic children. For most of the young siblings, when they initially learned about their brother's or sister's condition, they took the news with a mixed reaction since they didn't know anything about ASD. However, as they grew up, they learned to accept that their sibling was different and adapted to the condition's changes. After adjusting and finding ways of connecting with their Autistic sibling, they would enjoy playing together. It was even easier for the sibling with Autism to communicate whenever they needed anything. For most parents, the diagnosis came with a lot of stress, but as the child grew up, they found ways of connecting and communicating with them. They report that positive interaction within the family helps the Autistic child to develop communication and social skills.

When the group of teachers and assistant teachers were interviewed and given survey forms to fill, we found out that most of them supported that an inclusive classroom setting was good therapy for Autistic children. All the teachers said that they have observed that once the children get used to learning with others, they become more vibrant, and their social skills improve a great deal. Even the regular students learned to relate with the Autistic children, and they even formed solid relationships. When the children were divided into groups and given

similar tasks to perform, we noticed that the group with regular students only finished first, followed by the group with normal and Autistic children, and the had Autistic children only. However, the duration of time between all the groups' finishing times was minimal, around five minutes only. They all and as did what the task required of them, and as they were working, they interacted with each other well, made jocks, and even laughed.

Finally, we researched at the company and showed that interaction at job places also had a huge impact on Autistic individuals. The interviewed employers confirmed that when workers with Autism are hired, their productivity is usually low since their condition affects their physical, mental, and social abilities. However, in their work, as they interact with other employees, they can improve and even perform better than the regular employees—the employees who were given questioners to fill also described their experience in working together as awesome. One Autistic employee even commented that he liked working with the regular employees because it poses a challenge for them to improve their skills and do satisfactory jobs.

## DISCUSSION

The research did clearly shows that social interaction indeed has a positive effect on an individual with Autism. Even though the condition comes with many difficulties in language, communication, and interaction, research has shown that people can connect, understand, communicate, work and even form positive relationships with Autistic individuals. Starting with research done at the care institute, we can see that the staff recommended social interaction as a very effective therapy for individuals with ASD. They report that once Autistic individuals learn to interact with others, they can improve their social skills and relate well with others. As they stay among people who are just like them, they feel safe and freer to express themselves as they

are not alone. As a result, dealing with them becomes a lot easier since they can now communicate when they need anything, making it easier to help them (Bottema-Beutel, Park & Kim, 2018).

Also, from the interview done on the parents and sibling with an autistic brother or sister, we can establish that as much as the condition usually comes with a lot of stress and anxiety for the family as a whole, it is possible to adapt and foster positive communication that will positively impact the Autistic child. Initially, the family experiences stress as they wonder how they will deal with the condition and adjust to the random changes that the family will have to experience. However, once they come up with a routine that they follow strictly, they all adapt, and everything becomes very easy. With time, the family comes up with ways in which they can communicate with the autistic child. Siblings learn to understand the one with Autism, and they actually get to connect, form a strong relationship and even play together. As a result, the Autistic child continually develops social and communication skills. When they feel loved, they feel freer to interact with others and communicate when they want something. That way, the ASD symptoms reduce, and in some cases, it even becomes harder to identify whether the child has Autism or not.

Moreover, from the inclusive school setting's information, we can see that social interaction helps Autistic children develop their physical and mental capabilities and even communication skills. When they are taken to school, they experience difficulties communicating, understanding, and producing language (Watkins et al., 2017). However, after learning in an inclusive classroom, they can interact with others and learn from them. When they are given a group activity, we see that they manage to work in a group and accomplish the task even if their pace is slower. While they are working, they communicate with each other and even

make fun. From this, we can see that learning with others positively influences them and enables them to develop their physical and mental capabilities.

Finally, the company set's research showed that working together and interacting with others in work also influences Autistic individuals positively. As they work, they can communicate with others while sharing ideas and work experience. With time, they improve their social skills and even their mental and physical capabilities. In some cases, they even become better than other normal employees. In conclusion, we can say that even though certain social interactions can influence an Autistic patient negatively, the result of social interaction in most cases is positive, and hence people should embrace it.

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