CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES OBSERVED OVER THE YEARS IN THE AUTISM SPECTRUM

Selma SAITI, Buniamin MEMEDI

Department of Special Education, Faculty of Pedagogy, University of Tetova
Corresponding Author e-mail: Selmaasaitti@gmail.com , Buniamin.memedi@unite.edu.mk

Abstract

This study analyzes the causes and consequences of autism spectrum disorder, examining potential contributing factors, developmental characteristics, and the importance of early diagnosis. Attention is given to communication, social interaction, behavior, and educational support for children with autism.
The research was conducted using a qualitative approach through semi-structured interviews. The sample consists of 60 participants: 20 parents of children with autism, 20 physicians, and 20 special educators and rehabilitation specialists. Responses were analyzed to identify the experiences, difficulties, and attitudes of the groups involved. The results reveal difficulties in verbal and nonverbal communication, social interaction, repetitive behaviors, and sensory sensitivities. Participants emphasize the association of autism with complex factors, particularly genetic ones, and the need for individualized support. The study highlights the importance of early intervention, family involvement, and cooperation among physicians, educators, and rehabilitation specialists for children's development and inclusion. These findings indicate that ongoing support can also ease families' everyday challenges.

Keywords: autism; autism spectrum disorder; parents; special educators; early intervention; multidisciplinary collaboration.

1. Introduction

The possibility of being born autistic or becoming autistic exists for every individual, regardless of gender, race, or social background. In recent years, a significant increase has been observed in the number of children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder, making this phenomenon an important social and scientific issue. Children with autism often face difficulties with speech; some have limited language development, while others do not communicate verbally at all.
However, it is important to emphasize that these children should not be judged or stigmatized, as they are part of society and have the right to understanding, support, and inclusion. Despite the difficulties they encounter, many children with autism possess particular abilities and talents in various fields, such as art, music, mathematics, or technology.
Autism is defined as a neurobiological developmental disorder characterized by difficulties in communication and social interaction, as well as the presence of repetitive behaviors and restricted interests. The first symptoms usually appear before the age of two, while the degree of difficulty in these areas varies from one individual to another, making autism a broad spectrum
This paper aims to provide deeper knowledge about autism by explaining what autism really is, what causes and factors influence its occurrence, and the ways in which the development of children with this disorder can be supported. The paper will also present specific cases of several children affected by autism, through which the particular difficulties they face in everyday life can be understood more clearly.
In conclusion, this paper finds that autism should not be viewed as an illness but as a developmental disorder that, through early interventions, appropriate therapies, and professional and family support, can improve significantly and enable these children to lead a better-quality and more independent life, with varying forms and intensities.
The first chapter contains the introduction to the paper, presenting the issue of autism and the importance of studying it. This chapter provides basic information about autism, including key

concepts, the fundamental characteristics of the disorder, and its effects on children's daily lives.

The second chapter focuses on autism terminology, causes, consequences, treatments, and support. This section presents the scientific and theoretical concepts used to describe autism, including classifications, types of the disorder, and its spectrum. It also discusses genetic, neurobiological, and environmental factors that may influence the occurrence of autism, as well as the effects on children's social, emotional, communicative, and educational development. The section on treatments and support provides an overview of different therapeutic strategies, educational interventions, and methods for improving the quality of life of children with autism.

The third chapter of the paper focuses on relevant international and domestic research on autism. It presents empirical studies providing data on prevalence, treatments, intervention effectiveness, and the impact of professional and family support. Analyzing this research helps identify gaps in the existing literature, places this study within its scientific context, and offers a more complete understanding of autism.

The fourth chapter contains the research methodology, describing the approaches, instruments, and procedures used to collect and process data. It provides detailed information on sample selection, the instruments used (e.g., questionnaires, interviews), the data collection process, and methods of analysis. The aim is to ensure a transparent and comprehensive presentation of the methods used so that the results are reliable, valid, and based on scientific procedures.

In this way, the structure of the paper ensures a logical and academic progression, beginning with basic knowledge of autism, presenting its theories and concepts, analyzing the scientific literature, and finally describing the research methodology that enables reliable and well-supported results.

2. Research Aim and Questions

The main aim of this research is to draw people's attention to the fact that autism is not an illness, much less a contagious one, but a disorder that can affect anyone, and also to examine its causes and risk factors. Through this research, we also seek to raise public awareness that this disorder is not a disease and that individuals affected by it bear no blame whatsoever.

The aims of this research are:

- To clearly understand what autism is.
- To identify the factors that favor the onset of this disorder.
- To identify its consequences and the types of autism.
- To identify the needs of people affected by this disorder.
- To identify the conditions and methods of caring for children with autism.

Research Questions

As part of the study, we have included several research questions intended to focus our efforts on answering them:

Question 1: What are the perceptions of parents of children with autism, physicians, and special educators?

Question 2: What strategies and methods are used to manage the behavior of children with autism in public settings and educational institutions, and how does collaboration with families and professionals contribute to this process?

Question 3: How do early interventions and multidisciplinary support affect the medical, educational, and social development of children with autism?

3. Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research method, using interviews as the technique and a semi-directive (semi-structured) interview protocol as the instrument.
These types of studies are subjective and make it possible to understand even matters that participants do not disclose when completing a questionnaire. The research topic was addressed from both theoretical and empirical perspectives and does not require an advanced empirical methodology. The methodology used includes the following elements:

- Collecting and selecting material (literature);
- Analyzing and structuring the collected material;
- Processing material containing real data.

3.1. Research Design and Participants

The sample comprised a total of 60 individuals, divided equally into three groups: 20 parents of children with ASD, 20 physicians (family physicians and pediatricians), and 20 special educators and rehabilitation specialists. Sampling was non-probabilistic; therefore, the results cannot be generalized to the wider population.

Participant Group	Number	Share of Sample
Parents of children with ASD	20	33,3%
Family physicians/pediatricians	20	33,3%
Special educators and rehabilitation specialists	20	33,3%
Total	60	100%

3.2. Instrument and Analysis

The interview protocols included eight questions for each group. Parents' responses addressed the recognition of early signs, the experience of diagnosis, emotional challenges, professional support, and school inclusion. Interviews with educators addressed behavior management, intervention, bullying, and collaboration; those with physicians addressed symptoms, assessment, possible causes, and service coordination. The material was organized into thematic categories and summarized through descriptions and frequencies reported in the thesis. The percentages below are descriptive and refer to interviewees' responses, not to the prevalence of autism in the population.

3.3. Ethical Considerations

According to the source thesis, participation was voluntary, participants were informed, and provisions were made to preserve anonymity and confidentiality. This article does not include identifying information about interviewees.

4. Results

The results in this study will be processed through a procedure called interim, which includes several important methodological steps. First, data will be collected from the research instruments, ensuring that the information gathered is complete and suitable for analysis. Next, the data will be systematized and grouped according to predefined categories in order to achieve a clear and structured organization of the collected material.
During the indexing phase, the data will be coded and arranged to facilitate processing and comparison among the groups involved in the study. In the final phase, the data will be interpreted, and the results obtained will be analyzed in relation to the study objectives and research questions. This procedure makes it possible to draw substantiated conclusions supported by concrete data, contributing to a deeper understanding of the topic.

4.1. Parents' Experiences

The early signs most frequently reported by parents usually appeared between 12 and 24 months of age. Approximately 75% mentioned a lack of response to their name or limited eye contact; 65% reported speech delays; and 55% reported limited social interaction. These are reported observations rather than independent diagnostic assessments. Approximately 70% of parents did not identify any particular event during pregnancy or after birth that they could associate with their child's development. Mentions of stress or other events do not establish causation.
Approximately 80% of parents described shock, fear, or uncertainty at the time of diagnosis. In everyday life, 70% reported sleep difficulties, 65% reported challenges with school adjustment, and 75% noticed various improvements in communication, behavior, or social skills after treatment and support began. Because there was no comparison group, the reported improvements cannot be attributed solely to therapies.

4.2. Experiences of Special Educators and Rehabilitation Specialists

Approximately 90% of educators and rehabilitation specialists emphasized the use of predictable routines, clear rules, and visual support; 85% mentioned positive reinforcement, and 80% mentioned breaking activities into small steps. They also discussed difficulties in adapting learning activities, the risk of bullying, parental guidance, and the need for coordination among school, family, and specialists. Approximately 90% of this group considered multidisciplinary teamwork essential.

4.3. Physicians' Perspectives

Family physicians and pediatricians described signs related to verbal and nonverbal communication, social interaction, repetitive behaviors, and sensory sensitivity. They stressed the importance of careful assessment and cooperation with psychologists, speech and language therapists, special educators, and other professionals. In their responses, genetic factors were considered important, and the claim that vaccines cause autism was rejected. Individual suggestions concerning nutrition, technology, or stress should be treated as interviewees' perceptions, not as established causes.

4.4. Comparative Summary

Aspect	Parents	Special Educators	Physicians
Focus	Early signs and family life	Classroom adaptation and practical strategies	Clinical assessment and coordination
Challenges	Stress, sleep, school inclusion	Individual differences, resources, bullying	Communication during appointments and access to services
Needs	Counseling and emotional support	Training, materials, multidisciplinary team	Referral and interprofessional collaboration

5. Discussion

1. Regarding the first question, the interviews showed that all groups identify difficulties in the development and integration of children with autism. Parents reported speech delays, lack of eye contact, limited interest in social interaction, and unexpected emotional reactions. Physicians highlighted common symptoms such as difficulties in verbal and nonverbal communication, repetitive behaviors, and sensitivity to sounds, light, and movement, emphasizing that autism is primarily associated with genetic factors but also with environmental factors such as nutrition, technology, stress, and exposure to toxic substances. Educators and rehabilitation specialists emphasized the importance of early intervention, methods tailored to each child, and active family support, stressing that multidisciplinary collaboration is key to improving children's development and well-being.
2. Regarding the second question, the behavior of children with autism is managed through structured strategies adapted to each child's individual needs. These include visual schedules, dividing activities into small steps, positive reinforcement, and advance warnings of changes in routine, which help reduce anxiety and unexpected reactions. In public and educational settings, these methods help children focus, integrate, and feel more secure. Close collaboration with families and multidisciplinary professionals, including educators, psychologists, and therapists, is essential for ensuring continuity of approaches, consistency of routines, and improvement in children's social, communication, and educational skills.
3. Regarding the third question, early interventions and multidisciplinary support play a decisive role in improving the development of children with autism. Early interventions guided by professionals such as special educators, therapists, and pediatricians help develop communication, social, cognitive, and independent living skills. Multidisciplinary support ensures that children receive integrated care combining medical, educational, and social interventions, while families receive practical and emotional guidance in managing challenging behaviors.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

Through an analysis of the scientific literature and empirical research, including interviews with parents, physicians, and special educators, it was possible to clearly identify and describe early signs of autism, the challenges faced by children and their families, possible causes of the disorder, and forms of professional and family support.

From the physicians' perspective, autism is described as a disorder manifested primarily through communication difficulties, lack of eye contact, problems with social interaction, and repetitive behaviors. Physicians emphasize that the causes of autism are complex and are most often associated with genetic factors or a combination of genetics and environmental factors. They do not associate autism with vaccines and believe that the increase in diagnosed cases is primarily linked to greater awareness and improved diagnosis. The main challenges for physicians are communicating with children and dealing with strong reactions during examinations; therefore, they consider collaboration with other professionals very important.
Compared with physicians, special educators and rehabilitation specialists view autism more through children's behavior and functioning in the classroom. They report that children with autism need clear structure, stable routines, and simple instructions. Educators focus mainly on behavior management, early intervention, and the development of social, communication, and practical skills. According to them, major challenges include school adjustment and bullying, while support from teachers and assistants and collaboration with parents are very important for children's inclusion.
From the parents' perspective, autism is experienced as a difficult and emotional journey. Parents are the first to notice early signs, such as failure to respond to their name, speech delays, and limited interest in interaction.
Most of them do not report clear causes and feel uncertain about why autism occurs. Diagnosis is accompanied by strong emotions such as fear, stress, and anxiety. Parents focus mainly on the everyday consequences of autism, such as sleep disturbances, sensitivity to noise and changes, and difficulties with adaptation and communication.
In conclusion, the findings show that physicians, special educators, and parents view autism from different perspectives, but these perspectives complement one another. Physicians approach autism mainly from a scientific and medical standpoint, focusing on diagnosis, symptoms, and explanations of possible causes. Special educators and rehabilitation specialists observe autism in children's everyday school lives, concentrating on behavior, learning, classroom adaptation, and the development of social and practical skills. Parents, on the other hand, experience autism every day within the family and provide the most emotional picture of this condition, describing difficulties and concerns, but also their hopes and their child's progress. These differences show that no single group sees autism fully on its own; only together do they create a clear and realistic picture of the challenges and consequences associated with autism. Therefore, cooperation among physicians, special educators, and parents is very important for providing appropriate support.

7. Study Limitations

In any research, even when the best methods are used, results cannot be predicted with complete accuracy. During its implementation, this study encountered several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the results and assessing their reliability.

- One evident limitation is that the sample includes only parents, physicians, special educators, and rehabilitation specialists from a limited number of institutions and families, rather than from all regions or cities, which may limit the representativeness of the population in general.
- The unwillingness of some institutions or professionals to allow participation in the study affected the size and representativeness of the sample.
- The hesitation of some parents to provide complete information about their children or to participate in interviews limited the depth of the collected data.

- The lack of information about families' different socioeconomic circumstances and the history of care for children with special needs makes it more difficult to interpret the results in detail.
- Using interviews alone, although they offer rich, in-depth qualitative data, has limitations regarding specificity and sensitivity, meaning that some aspects of perceptions or experiences may not have been measured completely accurately.

Nevertheless, despite these limitations, this study provides valuable information and in-depth insights into the perceptions and practices of parents, physicians, special educators, and rehabilitation specialists regarding the care and support of children with special needs, contributing to a better understanding of their challenges and needs.

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