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Autism Awareness and Social Bias in Parents: The Role of Prior Interaction in Knowledge and Inclusion

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Abstract

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a neurodevelopmental disorder characterized by differences in social communication, behavior, and cognition. In spite of growing international awareness, stereotypes and stigma are still widespread, especially in the low- and middle-income setting. Parental awareness and attitudes are instrumental in influencing the help-seeking behavior, inclusion and developmental outcomes. This study examined the relationships between prior interaction with autistic individuals, ASD knowledge, and attitudinal outcomes related to stigma and inclusion. The study employed a cross-sectional survey design and included 144 participants. The chi-square tests showed that there were significant relationships between previous experience and knowledge in the fields of intellectual disability, social relationships, symptom variability, and strengths ($p < .001$). The participants with prior interaction demonstrated greater knowledge and reduced uncertainty. The independent samples t-tests revealed that more experienced respondents reported a much lower level of stigma, such as less worry, less distrust, and less attribution of difficulties to internal constraints, and more acceptance of inclusive practices ($p < .05$). Correlation analyses also indicated that higher knowledge level was related to lower stigma and higher inclusion. The results of the study indicate that knowledge and more inclusive attitudes are associated with previous exposure to autistic people. The findings confirm the involvement of contact and awareness in the minimization of stigma and emphasize the necessity of specific interventions to support autism acceptance and inclusive practices.

Keywords: Autism, Parental Awareness, Prior Interaction, Social Bias, Social Inclusion