



KNOWLEDGE ON AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDERS AMONG PRE-SCHOOL TEACHERS IN THE COLOMBO DISTRICT AND FACTORS AFFECTED WITH THIS KNOWLEDGE

Perera M.N.* , Gunawardena L.G.A.S., Fernando K.K.D.H.M., Gunawardana D.I. and Premadasa W.A.C.Y.

Faculty of Medical Sciences, University of Sri Jayewardenepura, Sri Lanka
mininduperera178@gmail.com

Abstract

Autism spectrum disorders (ASD) are increasingly prevalent conditions in the modern world in which early diagnosis and commencement of intervention services are shown to be effective in the management of symptoms. In this sense, preschool teachers can play an important role in the early identification of children with ASD. However, limited studies have been carried out assessing pre-school teachers' knowledge about ASD, especially in identifying ASD affected children. A descriptive cross-sectional study was carried out to determine the knowledge level of 211 preschool teachers from the Colombo District of Sri Lanka: these teachers were selected using cluster sampling with randomly selected pre-schools in the Colombo district. A self-administered questionnaire, distributed as a Google form, was used to collect the data regarding the pre-school teachers' knowledge, their attitudes regarding ASD, and their knowledge sources, and to assess the proportion of pre-school teachers who had encountered a child with ASD. Most teachers had good knowledge level regarding the signs, symptoms, and identification features of ASD. Seminars, diplomas which included developmental disorders, books, workshops, and training programs on ASD and other developmental disorders were found to be the most effective sources of knowledge. 70% of teachers had encountered children with ASD, and most have positive attitudes towards ASD: however only 54% of teachers had good overall knowledge, and specific knowledge about the risk factors of ASD, which could be improved according to the recommendations suggested in the study.

Keywords: *Autism, Autism Spectrum Disorders, Preschool teachers, Autism awareness, Knowledge and Attitudes on ASD*