

Abstract

Background: Autism (Autism spectrum disorder) refers to a group of clinical conditions, characterized by atypical pattern of behaviors, abnormalities in social interaction and communication. Autism is in an accelerating pattern globally, as well as in Sri Lanka. Having awareness on autism is a necessity, specially in mothers of children of first 2 years of age. This study is also focused the same idea.

Objective: To assess the awareness on autism, knowledge level on autism and the associated factors among mothers of one year old children who visits MCH (maternal and child health) centers in CMC (Colombo municipal council) area.

Methods: This is a descriptive cross sectional study, carried out among 363 mothers, selected by systematic sampling methods from all 14 MCH centers in the Colombo Municipal Council area. Mothers who come for their children's JE vaccination at one year completion were included in the study. Data was collected by an interviewer administered questionnaire from the selected mothers. Data analysis was carried out using SPSS 26 (Statistical Products and Services Solutions). Ethical clearance was obtained from the Postgraduate Institute of Medicine, Colombo. Awareness on autism and the association of the factors were assessed using Chi square test and the knowledge level assessed by giving knowledge score, the association of the knowledge score and the factors were assessed using independent sample t test and one way ANOVA.

Results: Among the 363 study participants, majority of the mothers were between 20=29 years old, (n=195, 53.4%) Muslims (n=131, 36.1%), Islamic (n=131, 36.1%), married (n=322, 88.7%), living in extended family (n=237, 65.3%), having 1 child (n=137, 37.7%) and (n=274, 75.5%) home makers. Only 35.5% (n=129) of them were aware of autism, able to recognize the body part it affected (n=115, 89.1%), knowing the association of mental retardation (n=88, 68.2%), didn't know whether autistic children would express pain (n=104, 80.6), followed by knowing whether they like cuddling (n=103, 79.8%) not knowing genetically association of autism (n=30, 23.3%), followed by lack of eye contact of the autistic children (n=28, 21.7%), 59.7% (n=77) of them knew availability of treatment for autism, fair level of knowledge (n=61, 47.3%), followed poor level of knowledge (n=50, 38.8%), Only 3.9% (n=5) of the mothers who knew about autism had excellent level of knowledge on autism. Educational level of mother and partner showed significant association with awareness of autism ($p < 0.001$) as well as knowledge score on autism, on the other hand mother's age ($p = 0.124$), number of children (0.438), type of family (0.611), and marital status (0.551) did not show significant association with knowledge on autism.

Conclusion: The study findings indicates, only one third of mothers were having awareness on autism. Even among the mothers who were aware, the knowledge level on autism is very poor. Awareness on autism have to be given to the mothers and their partners and systematic interventions are necessary to do so. This will help to identify children with autism in very early stage and to seek for prompt treatment.

Key words: Autism, Awareness on autism, CMC area, Knowledge on autism, mothers