

Knowledge on Autism among mothers of Kopay Medical Officer of Health area during their first year of motherhood

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Introduction and Objectives: Autism or Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), refers to a group of disorders characterized by abnormalities in communication and social interactions and restricted repetitive activities and interests. In the light of increasing prevalence of this condition around the globe and in Sri Lanka, this study was carried out among a group of mothers to assess their knowledge on Autism and to identify the influence of selected sociodemographic factors on the knowledge.

Methods: A descriptive cross-sectional study was carried out among 214 mothers, who were selected by random sampling, during their first year of motherhood in Kopay Medical Officer of Health (MOH) area. Selected mothers were reached through telephone and structured interview questionnaire was used for data collection. Data analysis was carried out using Statistical Products and Service Solutions (SPSS 25). Ethical clearance was obtained from Ethical Review Committee (ERC) of Faculty of Medicine, Jaffna.

Results: Among the 214 mothers, most of them were Hindus (90.65%) and home makers (74.17%) and all of them were Tamils (100%). Only 29% (n = 62) of them had heard about Autism. Among them, majority (66.12%, n = 41) understood it as a disability and more than three quarters of them (79.03%) acknowledged that the condition is on the increase. The educational level of mothers and their partners showed statistically significant difference (p = 0.0011 and 0.029 respectively) on the knowledge score. On the other hand, mothers' profession (p = 0.455), types of family (p = 0.325) and number of children (p = 0.126) did not show significant association with the mothers' knowledge on Autism.

Conclusion: The findings highlighted that only lesser than one third of the mothers were aware of Autism. Hence, systematic interventions are needed to create awareness on Autism among mothers in view of facilitating early recognition and prompt intervention.

Keywords: Autism, Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD), Autism Knowledge, First year of motherhood, Kopay MOH