
THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA IN EDUCATING THE COMMUNITY ABOUT AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER FROM PARENTS' PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

The study aimed to identify the role of media in educating the community about Autism Spectrum Disorder from parents' perspective. The study used the descriptive analytical method, and it also used a questionnaire to cover the practical side of this study, where it was prepared for the objectives of the study according to recognizable scientific steps, which applied to the study sample. The number was 182 parents for the academic year 2016-2017.

To answer the main question of the study, descriptive analytical methods were used by using the statistical package (SPSS), frequencies and percentages have been extracted and Cronbach's alpha testing used to identify the reliability of the study. To answer the question of the study, arithmetic averages and statistical deviation have been used and unilateral variation test One Way Anova. Then the Scheffe test for comparisons posteriori, and Sample T-test Independent also have been used. The results have found that media has an important role in educating the community about Autism Spectrum Disorder.

Key Words the media, educate, autism, community, mothers

Introduction

Autism is considered one of the special education categories that were discovered during the first half of the 20th century. In this regard, autism was first defined by the American doctor Leo Kanner, 1943. There are various definitions of autism; where it was first defined in the diagnosis of children, it indicated specific behaviours including the inability to develop relationships with others ,delay in gaining speech ,non-communicative use of words/speech after it has developed, repeated prototype games, weak analysis, good literal memory and natural physical appearance (Aldahmashi, 2007).

In addition, autism is a disability that mainly affects the child's ability to communicate, establish relationships with the others and respond appropriately to the environment.

In fact, autism makes children fully closed on themselves and though such people may not show identical symptoms and similar forms of the deficiency, they share in communicative, social, movement and sensual problems that affect their behaviour through predictable ways.

This was confirmed by the American Psychiatric Association in 2002, as autism was defined as a weakness in the linguistic, social and oral growth, as well as severe weakness in non-oral communication and movement behaviour. This can be seen during the first three years of age, affecting the ability to learn, train and gain experience and the child may refuse any new experience; it is also linked to repeating specific syllables of specific words (Aldahmashi, 2007). The figure below shows three weak aspects in autism, as the child will have disturbance in imagination, communication and social interaction. Since autism is a developmental issue, this phenomenon varies according to age and ability ,even though the three features (lack of social interaction, communication and imagination) might exist in all age stages (Rispoli, Monday, 2011). In this regard, it is noted that the child suffers when learning language, in the ability for imagination, weakness of interest, deterioration in social relationships and showing lack of communication with those around them (even parents and siblings).And there are issues of repeated movements with deficiency in all development aspects such as attention, cognition, learning, language, social skills as well as bodily and behavioural movements (Ganz et al., 2012). The role of the media at this time gained its features from the technology diversity and evolution; this in turn makes it constitute an active presence within the social power units, under its negative and positive impact on the vocabulary of each unit through the family and ending with the international community.

This age witnesses remarkable progress in techniques and possibilities of media in both terms of efficiency and ease of use and its impact on the recipient according to the capabilities of each method. This technical development in the capabilities of these methods has a vital and perceptible role in the field of awareness and education due to its ability to reach out to multiple and different groups in society and lead an organized awareness through its broadcast simultaneously to millions of people which enabling it to lead the community(Belcher & Maich 2014). This is achieved healthily, socially and culturally with each other while achieving the goals of identifying the social priorities, supporting and promoting the values and constants in the community, while coordinating and cooperating with institutions that have the same targets .The media in its various forms is considered one of the important means for awareness as being an important source of individual acquisition, knowledge and awareness of social issues such as autism spectrum disorder, and a direct means to communicate with individuals, it reaches a large number of individuals without the need for a direct relation between the sender and receiver(Brawley,2003). Journals, radio, television, books, magazines, and social media are considered sources of knowledge in general, and social knowledge in particular, due to its attractiveness and ease of use by the largest sector of member of society .Media works through the availability of resources, the transfer of knowledge and direct or indirect of individuals' awareness. Media has a remarkable and effective role in identifying individuals with disability issues that

afflict society, such as autism, which has become a worrying phenomenon for community members (Harpe & Malcolm, 2005). Therefore, media increases the awareness of individuals of this sensitive issue, which has taken hold in the thinking of many members of the community. Media plays an important role in the field of education and its ability has a great effect. It conveys a specific product, which affects intellectually and culturally to varying degrees. The developed techniques have helped in the field of communication for this. This includes what matters intellectually, the value aspects and the components of religious and linguistics identity while some are interested in economic and political aspects (Hottentot, 2004).

The role of the media is not less than the role of educational institutions in socialization of individuals. Beside other socialization institutions, some researchers considered the enterprise media as a parallel school: others considered it a modern school, others considered entering media into mainstream school. This does not mean definitely its superiority in the traditional curriculum, but that it complements it. Many countries employed the media in specified educational purposes: these experiments were supported by regional and international organizations (Saltes, 2011). The Technological revolution caused in the field of media and communication radically shifts in the nature of the relationship between media and education. Even media became the core of the educational process within the educational programmes at school (Kirk & Gallagher, 1993). The role of media is in educating society through different programmes, which contributes in forming cultures. These programmes educate people about different issues, such as autism spectrum disorder. The news is considered the backbone of the media, whereas the media has an impact on different aspects of human, social, political, educational and healthy behavior, where it plays a key role in formation attitudes and public opinion (Olney, 2000). It has also an impact on the way in which humans realize things, and the way they behave towards their environments and their world. The influence of the media has concentrated on the cognitive side of individuals and groups through providing them with new information and amendment of individuals' mental images and transfer cultures to them (United Nations, 1988). On the phenomenon of autism in the media, Belcher & Maich (2014) conducted a study that aimed to examine The classification of the characters that keeps the owners of the phenomenon of autism in the media.

Problem of the study

For awareness and health education that have utmost importance in individuals and societies, life is especially geared to women. Due to their strong association with the concept of this side of awareness, it was important to know about the real role played by media in the field of health education and awareness of society by using scientific methods in arrangement of media means as sources of health education, usage patterns, following them up and how to take advantage of them in acquiring healthy and correct behaviour. Hence the study came to identify the role of media in educating the community about Autism Spectrum Disorder from the perspective of parents.

Questions of the study

The study aimed to identify the role of media in educating society about autism spectrum disorder from the perspective of parents of autistic children and the importance of media in the face of the autism spectrum disorder issue. It also set out to identify the role of mass communication in introducing society with its various sectors to parents of autistic children and improving the services provided to them.

Limitations of the study

1. **Temporal limits:** temporal limits of this study represented between 1/9/2016 - 1/12/2016.
2. **Spatial limits:** the study was applied to parents of autistic children in the Riyadh region.
3. **Applied limits:** the study focused on knowing the role of media in educating the community about autism spectrum disorder from the parents 'perspective.

Method and procedures

The study methodology

1. This study used descriptive analytical approach to identify the role of media in educating the community about autism spectrum disorder from the parents 'perspective.

The study sample

The study sample was selected randomly. It consisted of 182 examined persons of the academic year 2016-2017.

The study tool

The primary goal of scientific research is to answer a group of questions that discussed the problem which related to the problem of the study aspects. This would not be possible only by the collection of certain information. In order to identify all facts and information by scientific methods to get specified logical results of the problem faced by the study, in order to achieve the aim of the study, the research tool was designed in the form of a questionnaire, which consisted of 25 paragraphs to measure study variables .Thus, it was adopted as a tool of information.

Validity of study tool

The questionnaire was presented to a number of arbitrators of faculty members to verify the validity of its clauses until the study tool finally appeared .The study was conducted according to the arbitrators' opinions and edits as indication of validity of study tool content and its relevance and diversity clauses .After making the required amendment, a balance was achieved between study tool content in its clauses, which confirms standard validity.

Study tool stability

Consistency of each paragraph was cleared in the field each paragraph belonged to .The study used correlation coefficients between each paragraph of the test by using factor Cronbach Alpha, with values of Cronbach alpha of study tool, which is generally higher than(0.60), an acceptable ratio in research and humanities.

Results of the study and discussion

Table 1 shows arithmetic averages and statistical deviation to identify the level of media paragraphs' contribution in educating society about autism spectrum from the parents' perspective.

| Number | Paragraph | Arithmetic Average | Statistical Deviation | Ranking | Level |
|-----------------------------------|--|--------------------|-----------------------|---------|--------|
| 1 | It can provide certain services for people with autism spectrum disorder in the case presented by the media. | 3.72 | 1.07 | 1 | High |
| 2 | Media is characterized in its ability to educate the community on health issues. | 3.71 | 0.84 | 2 | High |
| 3 | The proportion of programs about autism spectrum disorder in the media is weak | 3.70 | 1.09 | 3 | High |
| 4 | Media works to highlight the importance of behavioural disorders between children. | 3.59 | 1.04 | 4 | Medium |
| 5 | Media coverage of autism spectrum disorder in the media is not at the required level. | 3.58 | 1.01 | 5 | Medium |
| 6 | Media take parents of autistics care | 3.57 | 1.08 | 6 | Medium |
| 7 | Media take parents of autistics care at their special occasions | 3.55 | 1.05 | 7 | Medium |
| 8 | There is need to increase awareness by the media about health issues between members of the community . | 3.55 | 1.12 | 8 | Medium |
| 9 | Media generates a real feeling for autistic people that they are equal to members of the community | 3.54 | 1.04 | 9 | Medium |
| 10 | Media shows in limited ways autistic people's issues | 3.48 | 1.05 | 10 | Medium |
| 11 | Media aims through modern technology to highlight issues related to autism spectrum disorder professionally. | 3.46 | 1.04 | 11 | Medium |
| 12 | There is an urgent need to increase the number of programmes that deal with autistic behaviour. | 3.44 | 1.09 | 12 | Medium |
| 13 | Media helps in providing information about the needs of autistic people. | 3.43 | 1.07 | 13 | Medium |
| 14 | I think media has remarkable role in forming mental images for autistic people. | 3.42 | 0.97 | 14 | Medium |
| 15 | Media highlights autistic people's rights in leading their life in a normal way. | 3.39 | 1.03 | 15 | Medium |
| 16 | Media has adapted autistic people's rights in presenting their issues to the audience | 3.38 | 1.03 | 16 | Medium |
| 17 | Media produces information materials that lead to assimilating autistic people in the community. | 3.36 | 1.09 | 17 | Medium |
| 18 | Media presents realistic photos about the active role of autistic people. | 3.35 | 1.07 | 18 | Medium |
| 19 | Media provides chances to live and coexist for autistic people. | 3.30 | 1.06 | 19 | Medium |
| 20 | Media educates about international obligations in favour of autistics. | 3.29 | 1.11 | 20 | Medium |
| 21 | Media plays a guiding role through presenting autistic people's issues. | 3.27 | 1.01 | 21 | Medium |
| 22 | I think officials should participate in media programmes to attract attention towards health issues including autism | 3.24 | 1.19 | 22 | Medium |
| 23 | Media provides autistic people's rights in a fair way. | 3.19 | 1.19 | 23 | Medium |
| 24 | Media provides autistic people's photos in a remarkable way. | 2.96 | 1.07 | 24 | Medium |
| 25 | Media devotes appropriate space for autistic people. | 2.91 | 1.08 | 25 | Medium |
| General Arithmetic Average | | 3.42 | 0.52 | | Medium |

It is clear that averages of the media role in educating the community about autism spectrum disorder varied between (2.91-3.72). It had an average that tallied (3.42), which is medium level. Paragraph 1 had the highest average (3.72) and statistical deviation (1.07) and this is a high level. The paragraph included that it could provide services for autistic people in case it showed by media. This indicated the role of media in supporting autistic people's, public image and also who has the ability to help autistic people by information and photos. Thus, it yields a behavioural response represented in helping directly or indirectly and demanding their rights. This promotes the images of autistic people in the audience's mind, including study samples. Due to exposure to different media, the second paragraph came in the second rank with an average of (3.71) and statistical deviation (0.84) which is a high level. It included media characterized with its ability in educating society about health issues. This indicates media orientation towards educating society about autistic people and also some media interest in autistic people's issues as far as serving its objectives. Then it was devoted to the financial need to produce materials for this category, whereas programmes devoted to this category require experience and specialization and taking into account the psychological and social situation for this category in a positive way. This definitely needs both cognitive and financial effort, besides neglecting some media to deal with this category and intended to avoid them in their goals. Paragraph 3 came in the 3rd rank with an average of (3.70) and statistical deviation (1.09) which is a high level. The paragraph included that the percentage of devoted programmes for autism is weak. This confirms that the percentage of media that neglect this category is common, or those who do not deal with them due to cognitive or specialist deficit, and thus it must be mentioned that some media is governed by the priorities of the events around. In the 4th rank, paragraph number (4) with a average (3.59) and statistical deviation (1.04), which is medium level, the paragraph included that media highlights the importance of behavioural disorders among children. This result talked about the role of media to develop gradual adaptation by society with disturbed behaviours and work to accept them. In the last rank, paragraph number 25 with average (2.91) and statistical deviation (1.08), which is medium level, the paragraph included that media devoted appropriate space for autistic people. This means customizing the media means to a space, which may be filled with readers, viewers and news relating to autistic people, and granting this category a space in the middle. However, it shows an acceptable ratio among media meaning that interest in autistic people or those who do not have the ability to produce specialized programmes for them through providing space for those taking care of autistic people. Paragraph number (24) came in the pre-final rank with an average (2.96) and statistical deviation (1.07), which is the medium level. The paragraph included that the media provides photos of autistic people in a remarkable way, which means that media means contribute in forming autistic people's photos in a remarkable way in a middle level, according to the study sample perspective, and this explains that media means contribute in educating the community about autistic people in the middle level from the study sample perspective.

Recommendations

1. Develop the ability of media dealing with autism spectrum category and learn the correct way to deal with them and produce specialized programmes for them.
2. Motivate the organizations, societies and centre who take care of autistic people to emphasize the importance of official and private media in supporting autistic people.
3. Increase the space devoted to those who take care of autistic people, by media.
4. Focus on the human side in dealing with autistic people by media.
5. Motivate autistic people to appear in different programmes and present their success and experiences by media.
6. Contribution in forming positive images about autistic people at a larger level that is commensurate with the community.
7. Media focuses more on autistic people's issues and discusses their conditions and their rights.

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