

Abstract

The purpose of this quantitative study is to test individuals' knowledge of High Functioning Autism (HFA) to see if there is relationship to their experiences with HFA. In other words, individuals who have a close personal relative with an HFA diagnosis should know more about HFA than someone who does not. Autism diagnoses are on the rise, and the opportunities to encounter individuals on the spectrum are increasing. Autism awareness has long been promoted as a necessary step to aid intervention. However, Autism is a spectrum; each individual on the spectrum is different depending on the level of severity. An individual who is High Functioning may live independently and be capable of relatively normal daily activities. However, others may mistake these individuals for not having HFA or have an inaccurate perception of their actual capabilities leading to poor interactions or worse. To estimate the current knowledge of pre-professionals (i.e., college students), a 25-item survey was constructed asking participants to agree or disagree with (factual) statements regarding HFA. These statements were taken from the DSM-V and several current research studies. The researchers expected those with more experience to score higher on the 25-item survey. If experience with HFA does lead to better knowledge regarding the disorder, in other words, awareness conversations about autism could move away from awareness and towards treatment and prevention.

PURPOSE

Does the knowledge regarding high-functioning autism vary in respect to experience with family members who are diagnosed with HFA?

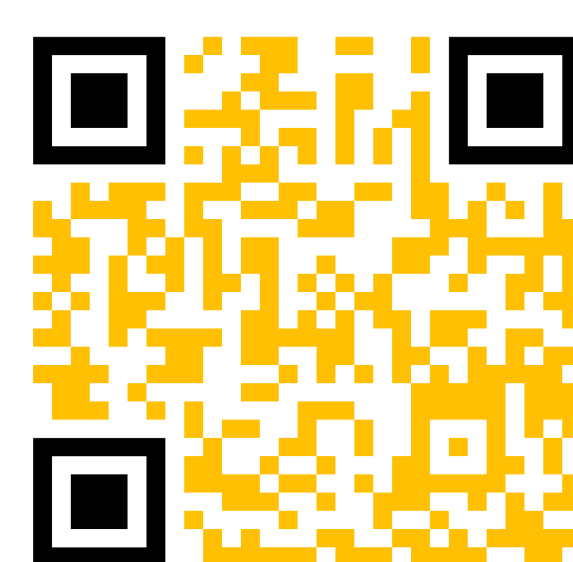
INTRODUCTION

- Autism is a lifelong neurodevelopmental condition interfering with a person's ability to communicate and relate to others (Elsabbagh, 2012).
- Autism can impair an individual in three major areas: communication, social interaction, and stereotypical repetitive behaviors (Faras, 2010).
- Unlike other medical diagnoses, there is no blood test, a genetic marker, or any other biological sign of the condition. Instead, the diagnosis is made when the behavioral criteria set out in the DSM-V are met.
- Knowing about ASDs is therefore vital to not only societal knowledge but to the safety of the autistic community, considering autism affects over 75,000,000 people (Therpathways, 2021).
- There have been times when the education system fails a child for not being able to recognize the deficits presented in a child with HFA (Gomez-Mari, 2021).
- Times when law enforcement mistakes autistic symptoms as a lack of cooperation resulting in the killing an autistic individual (Copenhaver, 2018)

METHODS

- To test the knowledge of survey participants, the lead PI constructed a 25-item survey asking participants to agree or disagree with statements about HFA.
- The participants were students from Texas A&M University-Kingsville (TAMUK) that are over 18 years of age.
- The researchers found this population of interest since members of this population will be the professionals of the future
- The Materials needed for this research were Microsoft Forms, Excel, and SPSS Software.
- The data was first collected through Microsoft Forms, then entered into Excel, and lastly, analyzed through SPSS software.
- The participants were divided into two groups which was Group 1 who said yes to having a family member diagnosed with HFA and Group 2 those who do not have a family member diagnosed with HFA.
- With the data collected, we were able to also analyze the questions that most people answered correctly or incorrectly, gaining a better understanding of their knowledge of autism.

RESULTS



To access the results to the survey please scan the QR code.

ANOVA					
Total points	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	.663	1	.663	.038	.846
Within Groups	1709.047	98	17.439		
Total	1709.710	99			

- A one-way ANOVA was conducted to assess differences in test scores over the knowledge of autism in participants with a family member diagnosed with autism versus those who do not. There was no significant difference.
- A Pearson's correlation coefficient was calculated for the relationship between the years they had known the individual and the test scores. There was no correlation.

DISCUSSION

- The average score on the survey was 72% which includes both participants who had a family member diagnosed with HFA and those who did not.
- The questions that were frequently answered incorrectly were questions regarding social interaction.
- Most importantly, experience with HFA does not show a relationship to knowledge of HFA. In other words, despite increasing interactions and "awareness" of HFA, most participants still have an incomplete representation of the characteristics of HFA
- Knowing how to interact with the autistic community is a key factor to help make social interaction better in many aspects

CONCLUSIONS

- Not being able to recognize the characteristics of autism has led to an autistic individual being killed because law enforcement mistook characteristics of the disorder as hostile behavior.
- Participants in this study were not able to recognize all the characteristics of autism and this may lead to more incidents where society fails an autistic individual.
- The results of this study suggest that researchers and educators work to expand the knowledge of HFA throughout all disciplines.

REFERENCES



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