Importance of Functional Skills for Children with Autism and its Influence on Life Satisfaction of their Parents

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ARTICLE DETAILS

ABSTRACT

Autistic children require functional skills training such as toileting, brushing, grooming, etc., due to the disorder. Teaching and training them to do their day to day activities is very challenging and herculean tasks for the parents and; has a tremendous influence on the parent’s life satisfaction thereby influencing their family life, financial aspect, socialization, health, job etc.

Thus an attempt has been made to assess the influence of functional skills on life satisfaction of parents of children with autism. Respondents were parents of children with autism who were between 5 to 10 years of age from various special schools in Bangalore city. Self-structured questionnaires developed by the investigator on the importance of functional skills and life satisfaction of parents of children with autism were used to obtain the information. The results of the study indicated that fathers worked to compensate for the household income and most of the mothers chose to be home makers to look after the needs of their children with autism. Children with autism have poor functional skills. The study revealed that when older children knew how to manage themselves, their mothers reported good life satisfaction. Therefore, there is a need to orient the parents to make an attempt to learn techniques for teaching the required functional skills to their children with autism as it will minimize the level of care involved in the day to day life. This will help the child with autism to learn and master the skills and become independent.

INTRODUCTION

Children with autism are those with neurological complex conditions impaired by social interaction and communication, restrictive, repetitive behavioural functions or inability to adjust to new situations [1, 2]. It is present during early childhood years but it typically manifests when social demands exceed limited capacities. It is a lifelong disorder. They are often limited in their independence with functional skills [3, 4, 5]. Functional skills are defined as —skills that are used every day, in different situations at home, school and community [6]. Most of the autistic children need assistance from their parents in performing functional skills. Raising a child with autism can be a daunting task for every parent of a child with autism, which in turn affect their well-being and life satisfaction. Life satisfaction is defined as an individual’s judgment of how they are satisfied with their present state of affairs based on a comparison with criteria which each individual sets for oneself [7]. It is necessary for parents to take personal care of themselves such as getting enough sleep, eating regular meals, taking a short walk, and doing the things that they really enjoy [8]. Children with autism should be trained in functional skills in order to help them improve in their self-help skills and develop independence to perform their day to day activities, reducing problem behaviour and facilitating them to become self-reliant both at home and at school.

METHODOLOGY

Objectives:

The objectives of the study was to assess the functional skills of children with autism based on their age and to study its influence on the life satisfaction of parents of children with autism based on the child’s age.

Sample:

A sample of 30 parents of children with autism in the age group of 5 to 10 years from various special schools catering to the educational needs of the children with autism in Bangalore city was identified for the pilot study.

Tool used:

1. A self-structured questionnaire to assess the existing knowledge of the parents on the importance of functional skills and
2. Life satisfaction scale was developed by the investigator to assess the life satisfaction of the parents of children with autism.

Method:
The investigator visited various special schools. The consent letter was submitted to the school authorities and permission was sought from the principal to participate in the study. Further, the investigator explained about the objective and method of study to the parents. The investigator also assured that the information obtained from them will be kept confidential and used only for the research purpose. Self-structured questionnaires were used to collect the data from the parents of children with autism. The data obtained was scored, analysed and tabulated using statistical measures. Findings of the study are interpreted as follows:

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Specifically, demographic variables for parent respondents consisted of age, educational qualification, occupation, household monthly income, type of family, family size and religion. Parent-reported demographic variables for their offspring with autism which consisted of the child’s age, date of birth, gender of the child, ordinal position of the child, name of the school. Most of the fathers (45%) were working for private job, 41% of them were business men, 11 % were government employees and 3% were labourers. 67 % of the mothers were housewife and only 33% were working. Research studies showed that fathers most likely did not quit job to become the primary care-giver for children diagnosed with autism, they often work to increase the income of the family. Mothers who worked outside the home often missed work, they were often required to accept part-time work or even give up on employment outside the home [9, 10], to accommodate the needs of their child with autism [11].

Table 1 indicates the mean level of functional skills of autistic children based on their age. The table reveals that autistic children between the age of 9 and 10 years have high mean score of self-care skills which indicates that as their age increases, self-care skill improve markedly with practice. There were no significant association between age of the children with autism and the other functional skills such as pre-academic skills, pre-vocational skills, social skills and community skills as parents do not take much care in teaching these skills regularly. Data showed that, on the whole, children with autism have difficulties in performing their day to day activities. Most of the studies also show that children with autism have difficulties in performing functional skills [12, 3]. They are likely to be more independent and have a more positive life outcome if they learn to perform day to day living activities independently [13, 14]. Hence they need to be oriented and trained in functional skills to become more independent and manage most of their activities and duties on their own with minimal guidance. These skills must be taught to them in a variety of settings such as vocational skills should be taught during activity time, personal hygiene skills should be taught to children with autism while bathing, dressing, toileting and washing etc., and social skills should be taught while interacting with people like teachers, peers, co-workers and community members [3].

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age (in Years)</th>
<th>No. of Children</th>
<th>Functional Skills of Children with Autism (Mean ± SD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Parent respondents</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Self-care Skill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 to 6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8.00 ± 2.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 to 8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>14.60 ± 4.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 to 10</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>18.14 ± 5.61</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Mean levels of Functional skills of Children with Autism according to their age

**Table 2:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age of Father (in Years)</th>
<th>No. of Father</th>
<th>Level of Life satisfaction (Mean ± SD)</th>
<th>Age of Mother (in Years)</th>
<th>No. of Mother</th>
<th>Level of Life satisfaction (Mean ± SD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>30 to 40</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>85.77 ± 5.49</td>
<td>20 to 30</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>74.00 ± 0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40 to 50</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>91.66 ± 12.40</td>
<td>30 to 40</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>87.22 ± 8.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50 to 60</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>91.50 ± 0.70</td>
<td>40 to 50</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>99.14 ±10.63</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Life Satisfaction of Parents of Children with Autism based on their Age

Table 2 depicts that majority of the fathers aged between 30 to 40 years have lower level of life satisfaction. There was no significant association between father’s age and their level of life satisfaction towards the autistic child. [15], in their study, found that fathers of children with autism experienced lower level of life satisfaction. The data also showed that mothers of children with autism in the age group of 20 to 30 years have a low life satisfaction. For mothers, there was significant association between their age and life satisfaction towards their child with autism. This indicates that as mother’s age advances, the mean level of their life satisfaction has significantly increased.

**CONCLUSION**

The study concludes that parents must take effort to teach children with autism the functional skills including the pre-
academic skills, pre-vocational skills, social skills and community skills which are important for the growing child in his/her day to day life.

Parents must learn to manage and strike a balance in their family life despite having a child with autism without any guilt feeling. They must make time for each other and support each other emotionally in order to improve their life satisfaction. Further they must make a conscious effort to be more focused on the other members of the family and give time for the other family details.

REFERENCES


