

Knowledge and attitude on autism spectrum disorder among public health midwives of Jaffna District

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Background and objective: Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a neurodevelopmental disorder characterized by persistent deficits in social communication and interaction, and restricted, repetitive patterns of behavior. A rising prevalence of ASD has been demonstrated globally; in Sri Lanka, 1 in 93 children are known to be affected. Adequate knowledge and favourable attitudes of public health midwives (PHM) regarding ASD may facilitate early detection of ASD and reduce complications. This study was conducted to assess the knowledge and attitude on ASD among PHM in the Jaffna district.

Methods: A descriptive cross-sectional study was conducted among all PHM working in the Jaffna district. Data were collected using a self-administered questionnaire and analyzed by SPSS (v23). The questionnaire included 12 questions on knowledge. A Likert ranking scale was used to measure attitude. Knowledge and attitudes were categorized based on pre-defined cutoff values.

Results: A total 176 PHM participated. Among them 49.4% had good knowledge on ASD; 35.2% and 15.3% had moderate and poor knowledge, respectively. The majority (92%) of participants correctly identified ASD as a neurodevelopmental disorder. About two-thirds (66.5%) believed that ASD was completely curable if detected early. Very few (1.1%) were aware of the Modified Checklist for Autism in Toddlers (M-CHAT) screening tool. A majority had good knowledge on signs and symptoms of ASD related to social interaction (79%), communication (98.3%), and behavioral patterns (88.7%). Many were not aware of the ASD centers existing in Sri Lanka (54%) and Jaffna (46.6%). In this study, all participants had favourable attitudes towards ASD.

Conclusion: A large proportion of PHM working in the Jaffna district do not have good knowledge on ASD. However, their attitudes are favourable towards ASD.

Keywords: Knowledge, Attitude, Autism Spectrum Disorder, Public Health Midwives, Jaffna