

# Parents’ Perception upon Receiving Diagnosis for Autism Spectrum Disorder of their Child in Nigeria

Chinomso Ihenagwam, M.Ed., MBA; Jennifer Hamrick, PhD, BCBA; Katy Wheeler, M.Ed., BCBA; Ugochi Iwuji, M.Ed., LPCA

### Abstract

Autism and Intellectual Developmental Disabilities (IDD) are some of the conditions that are ignored, rarely discussed, and lack adequate provision and management in Nigeria. This study examined Nigerian parents’ perceptions upon receiving an autism spectrum disorder (ASD) diagnosis for their child, their experienced stigma, their knowledge about autism, their perceived cause of ASD, and the type of intervention(s) they have received for their child. This study sampled a total of 247 parents in Nigeria about their overall informed knowledge of ASD/IDD. The result indicates that parents’ level of education, where they first seek help, perceived seriousness of the disorder, the total number of children they have, number of children with ASD/IDD, the belief that ASD/IDD could be cured, and other people’s belief that ASD could be transmitted significantly affected their experience of stigma.

### Methods

- Texas Tech University Institutional Review Board reviewed and approved this study.
- The survey was sent to persons in Nigeria who helped with distribution to schools, hospitals, and other institutions in Nigeria.
- Some of the administered surveys were completed online and others were printed, completed, and scanned due to the lack of Internet access for some of the parents in Nigeria.
- Data were collected within a period of 4 months. Data obtained were analyzed using (SPSS) (Version 20).
- A stepwise multiple linear regression was conducted to test whether any of the demographic and/or explanatory models were predictive of total Family Interview Schedule (FIS) stigma scores.
- The *P*-values of 0.05 and 0.01 were used for the test of statistical significance.

Table 1  
SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF RESPONDENTS

PARENT CHARACTERISTICS	<i>n</i>	%
<b>AGE RANGE</b>		
16-25	13	5.3
26-35	85	34.4
36-55	133	54.1
56+	15	6.1
<b>GENDER</b>		
Female	184	74.5
Male	44	17.8
<b>RELIGION</b>		
Christianity	141	57.1
Islam	97	39.3
Traditional	7	2.8
<b>PARENT LEVEL OF EDUCATION</b>		
Primary	16	6.5
Secondary	71	28.7
4-year university	108	43.7
Masters	34	13.8
Doctoral	5	2
<b>REGION</b>		
City	219	88.7
Urban	27	10.9

Table 2  
ASSOCIATIONS BETWEEN FIS AND SELECTED INDEPENDENT VARIABLES

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>Cronbach's α</i>
Parent Age	1.61	0.68	0.084	0.946	0.047	0.962	0.74
Parent gender			0.704	0.697	1.64	0.103	
Region			-1.679	1.776	-0.945	0.346	
Parent education			-1.365	0.494	-2.684	0.008	
Total children	2.71	0.99	-1.35	0.643	-2.101	0.037	
Children SPED	1.2	0.58	-0.39	1.222	-0.32	0.75	
Curable			-3.203	1.135	-2.823	0.005	
Seriousness			1.791	0.901	1.988	0.048	
First help location			1.558	0.657	2.371	0.019	
First help person			0.428	0.571	0.75	0.454	
Others Transmission			-2.158	0.811	-2.66	0.008	
Both ASD/IDD			7.202	2.868	2.511	0.013	



### Results

The experience of stigma was significantly associated with:

- The level of perceived seriousness of the disorder ( $\beta = -.144, p < .05$ ),
- Parent education level ( $\beta = -.168, p < .05$ )
- Whether the parent/guardian believes the disorder is curable ( $\beta = -.199, p < .05$ ),
- Location of where they first sought help ( $\beta = .183, p < .05$ ),
- Total number of children in the family ( $\beta = -1.350, p < .05$ ),
- Children with both ASD/IDD  $\beta = .7.202, p < .05$ ),
- If parent perceives that others believe that their child's condition is transmissible ( $\beta = -.2.158, p < .05$ ).

There was no significant association with:

- Parent age ( $\beta = 0.84, p = .929$ ),
- Parent gender ( $\beta = .76, p = .281$ ),
- Region ( $\beta = -2.40, p = .177$ ,
- Religion ( $\beta = 1.39, p = .116$ ),
- Total children with special needs ( $\beta = .68, p = .56$ ),
- First help person ( $\beta = .12, p = .839$ ).

### Conclusion

- The findings confirmed that parents of children with ASD in Nigeria face many challenges including stigma.
- Higher-level stigma was reported in parents/caregivers who sought help from traditional institutions or had lesser education.
- There seems to be a lack of knowledge of ASD among parents in Nigeria.
- Future research should focus on creating awareness about ASD in Nigeria and establishing proper diagnostic approaches for ASD in Nigeria.