



Impact of Cultural Variations on Autism Spectrum Disorder Treatment

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INTRODUCTION

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a group of neurodevelopmental disorders that is associated with lifelong impairment in socialisation, communication, and behaviour.¹ Risperidone and aripiprazole (RiAr) are the only approved drugs by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for the treatment of irritability associated with ASD in children and adolescents.¹ Cultural variations may impact the approach towards ASD treatment in India and Malta.

AIMS

The aim of the research was to develop and administer a questionnaire to psychiatrists in India and Malta to evaluate cultural variations which may impact the approach towards the treatment of ASD.

METHOD

- A questionnaire entitled Autism Spectrum Disorder Comparative Questionnaire India-Malta (ASD-Q_(IND-MT)) was developed, validated by 10 experts and disseminated to psychiatrists (N=47) in India (n=31) and Malta (n=16).
- ASD-Q_(IND-MT) consisted of six sections and 28 close-ended Likert scale questions ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

- The sections of ASD-Q_(IND-MT) were divided as below:

- Section 1: Demographics
- Section 2: Importance of Early Detection of ASD
- Section 3: Role of Pharmacists in Detection and Management of ASD
- Section 4: Accessibility of Antipsychotics
- Section 5: Influence of Screening Tool based on Scores Obtained
- Section 6: Interpretation of Final Scores obtained through Screening Tools

RESULTS

- Statistical analysis of the ASD-Q_(IND-MT) indicated a significant difference (p=0.040) in psychiatrists' prescribing behaviour of RiAr in India (n=31) and Malta (n=16).
- Thirteen Indian and 2 Maltese psychiatrists agreed to prescribe RiAr to patients with mild to moderate autism whilst 18 Indian and 14 Maltese psychiatrists agreed to prescribe RiAr in cases of severe autism only.
- A statistically significant difference (p<0.001) was noted between psychiatrists in India (Likert mean score 4.45±0.506) and Malta (Likert mean score 2.56±1.153) when asked whether screening tools could detect and differentiate between ASD and other developmental disorders.
- Table 1 shows responses from psychiatrists in India and Malta with respect to the evaluation of the role of pharmacists in managing ASD.

| Statements | Group | Mean | Standard Deviation | P Value (<0.05) |
|--|-------|------|--------------------|-----------------|
| Pharmacists are an essential part of the healthcare system in suggesting medical interventions | Malta | 4.13 | 0.342 | <0.001 |
| | India | 2.29 | 0.824 | |
| Clinical pharmacists can play an essential role in dosage adjustments for patients with ASD | Malta | 4.44 | 0.342 | <0.001 |
| | India | 2.84 | 0.824 | |
| Clinical pharmacists can design individual therapies for ASD patients | Malta | 4.50 | 0.342 | <0.001 |
| | India | 2.39 | 0.824 | |
| Clinical pharmacists can play a vital role in providing counselling to patients and caregivers | Malta | 4.44 | 0.342 | <0.001 |
| | India | 3.00 | 0.824 | |
| Pharmacists should be active members of a multidisciplinary team to treat ASD | Malta | 5.00 | 0.342 | <0.001 |
| | India | 2.35 | 0.824 | |

Table 1: Responses from psychiatrists in India and Malta with respect to the evaluation of the role of pharmacists in managing ASD

CONCLUSION

The study represents the first comparison of differences in culture in India and Malta and its impact on the management of Autism Spectrum Disorder by risperidone and aripiprazole. Culturally developed screening tools have a different influence on the prescribing behaviour of RiAr in India and Malta. While screening tools in India and Malta aim at assessing the severity of ASD, the interpretation of scoring is very different in both countries. This study suggests the need to improve and update the screening tools or develop a standard tool that can be efficaciously applied in different countries to assess ASD irrespective of cultural divergences.

REFERENCES

1. Posey DJ, Stigler KA, Erickson CA, McDougle CJ. Antipsychotics in the Treatment of Autism. The Journal of Clinical Investigation. 2008;118(1):6-14.