
Factors Determining the Perceptions and Attitudes of People with Autism Spectrum Disorder in Russia

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Abstract

Over the past several decades, the topic of autism spectrum disorder (ASD) has become more widely discussed in society. This is not solely due to an actual increase in the number of cases but largely reflects improved diagnostic criteria, a better understanding, and a greater awareness among professionals including psychiatrists, psychologists, and educators. In contrast, the general public tends to have limited knowledge of ASD. Many people are only vaguely familiar with the term “autism” and may perceive individuals with ASD as unusual or different. Social perceptions and attitudes toward individuals with ASD affect how they are treated in society.

In Russia, topics like ASD are rarely discussed openly, resulting in limited research on the social perceptions and attitudes towards individuals with ASD. While most people are aware of ASD, the majority are not prepared for social interaction with individuals on the spectrum. A lack of knowledge and a fear of unpredictable or possibly aggressive behavior contribute to the development of stereotypical and stigmatized views, which can lead to negative attitudes and hostile behavior toward people with ASD.

The main goal of this study is to understand what factors are determinants of people's perceptions and attitudes towards people with ASD.

First, we determine what perceptions there are about people with ASD. The hypothesis states that some perceptions might be based on stereotypes and/or based on the stigmatization of people with ASD.

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Second, we study how the social perceptions and attitudes of ordinary people (about people with ASD) might be related to characteristics such as their level of objective knowledge of ASD, interest in ASD, having experience of communicating with a person with ASD, sex, age, having children, and place of residence. The concept of social attitude to ASD is defined as a socially acquired predisposition or tendency to react or have a prejudice towards a person with ASD.

This is a quantitative study; the data were collected through an online social media survey. Respondents were recruited via the social network VKontakte, and channels in the Telegram messenger. A questionnaire was distributed in communities dedicated to the topic of ASD and among other communities (dedicated to psychology, evidence-based medicine, parenting, and so on). Members of these groups may not have direct experience with ASD, but they are interested in topics related to ASD and are more likely to have different attitudes toward people with ASD. A total of 1690 respondents were invited to participate, of which 1347 people completed the survey completely. The following quotas were used during data collection: age, place of residence, sex, experience of conscious communication with a person with ASD.

The data analysis methods are agglomerative hierarchical clustering of text data and confirmatory factor analysis.

Four types of perception of people with ASD were found: “People with ASD have developmental defects”, “People with ASD have problems with communication and socialization”, “People with ASD have behavioral problems”, “People with ASD live in their own world”.

The study found significant factors influencing perceptions and attitudes toward individuals with ASD. Older respondents and parents are more likely to view individuals with ASD as “living in their own world”. Women tend to hold less negative attitudes toward aggressive behaviors associated with ASD. Moscow and Saint Petersburg residents slightly more often perceive people with ASD as having communication difficulties. Greater interest in ASD correlates with less judgmental attitudes, and higher objective knowledge promotes more science-based perceptions. Experience observing someone with ASD shows a weak positive association with more judgmental attitudes.

Keywords: *social attitude, social perception, autism spectrum disorder (ASD), autism, people with disabilities, inclusion, social policy*

The number of people diagnosed with ASD has been increasing rapidly throughout the world. For example, in the United States in the 1980s, the prevalence of ASD was estimated at 5 people per 10,000, and by 2018 it was estimated at 1% of the population [Newschaffer et al. 2007; Baio et al. 2018]. However, this should not be seen only as an increase of the number of people with ASD, but as an improvement in diagnostics, a greater knowledge and deeper understanding of what ASD is among experts such as psychiatrists, psychologists, tutors, sociologists and others.

The majority of ordinary people have a little knowledge of ASD. Most people have only heard the word ‘autism’ and probably have not knowingly met a person with autism [Dillenburger et al. 2013] and therefore have an understanding of a person with ASD as being strange and unusual. However, the way people with ASD are perceived by others should influence social attitudes towards people with ASD and how people with ASD are perceived and treated in the society.

Russian people do not often talk openly about topics like ASD or other disabilities. This lack of public discussion means there is not enough research on how

society views individuals with ASD in Russia, leaving us without a complete picture of the situation. According to one recent study on ASD in Russia,¹ despite the fact that most people have a general idea of what ASD is, the majority of the population is not ready to socially interact with people with ASD. Supposedly, such things as a lack of knowledge and a fear of strange, unpredictable, and possibly aggressive behavior led to the formation of stereotypical and stigmatized perceptions of people with ASD. Such inaccurate and stigmatized perceptions may lead to the formation of negative attitudes and hostile behavior towards people with ASD.

The goal of the study is to explore the determinants of the perception and attitudes of ordinary people towards those with ASD in Russia.

The first task is to determine what perceptions there are about people with ASD. The hypothesis states that some perceptions might be based on stereotypes and/or under the stigmatization of people with ASD.

The second task is to study how the perceptions and attitudes about people with ASD by ordinary people might be related to characteristics such as the level of objective knowledge of ASD, interest in ASD, having experience of communicating with a person with ASD, sex, age, having children, and type of settlement.

A quantitative online survey was used to collect data collection. The data analysis methods are agglomerative hierarchical clustering and confirmatory factor analysis.

The paper is organized as follows. The first passage describes how autism spectrum disorder is understood and viewed. The second passage gives a literature review. The third passage states the methodology of the research: the methods used, the concepts measured, the description of the online survey and the sample collected. Finally, a description of the analysis, discussion, and conclusion are presented.

Overview

What is autism spectrum disorder (ASD)?

ASD is a series of chronic genetic mental disorders that occur in a person from birth and are present and manifest throughout their life. The identification and diagnosis of ASD symptoms is based on 2 international classifications: ICD (International Classification of Diseases and Health Problems) and DSM (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders). The latest edition of the ICD-11 was approved in 2018, DSM (DSM-V) in 2013. Both of those classifications are based on an almost identical list of symptoms of ASD:

- Violations and deficits in the social and communicative spheres, the complexity of the manifestation of social interaction;
- Manifestation in limited interests and repeating patterns of behavior.

ASD is a serious mental disorder that dramatically affects the lives of those for those who have this disease. People with ASD feel predicament in normalized socially accepted behavior and face a number of difficulties: from the inability to cope independently

¹ What Do We Know about Autism? (2021). WCIOM, April 2, 2021. Available at: <https://wciom.ru/analytical-reviews/analiticheskii-obzor/chto-my-znaem-ob-autizme>, accessed 10.04.2025 (in Russian).

with the fulfillment of the functions to ensure their own household life to the inability to establish typical communication with other people.

Perceptions of ASD and people with ASD

Perception is a complex sociological concept encompassing different interpretations. At its broadest level, perception involves identifying and utilizing social cues to derive meaning and make judgments about different social phenomena.

One of the foundational theories of perception is Attribution Theory, which originated with Fritz Heider and was further developed by social psychologists such as Harold Kelley and Bernard Weiner. Attribution Theory explores how social perceivers utilize information to form causal explanations for events. It investigates the types of the collected information and how it is synthesized to form causal judgments [Fiske, Taylor 1991]. According to Attribution Theory, individuals generate subjective interpretations and knowledge about events based on their observations and the characteristics of those events.

In this study, the perception of individuals with ASD is conceptualized as a collective set of beliefs, assumptions, myths, and knowledge that people commonly hold regarding individuals with ASD.

ASD is surrounded by myths and stereotypes. These misconceptions significantly influence public attitudes towards ASD. It is essential to distinguish between objective, proven facts and false beliefs about ASD. Some prevalent myths about ASD include:

- ***Autism spectrum disorders were less common in the past.***

It was not the number of people with ASD that increased dramatically, but the frequency of diagnosing autism. In the 1980s, ASD prevalence was 5 per 10,000 people [Newschaffer et al. 2007]. By 2009, it was 1 in 150 [Fombonne 2009], and by 2018, 1 in 59 in the US [Baio et al. 2018]. This rise is due to changes in diagnostic criteria, more accessible services, and higher awareness [Wing, Potter 2002].

Believing this myth leads people to wrongly think ASD is a new epidemic, when in reality, it's better recognition and diagnosis that have increased.

- ***All people with ASD have unusual mental abilities in certain areas.***

For example, Raymond Babbitt, played by Dustin Hoffman in Rain Man, reinforces this myth. Many with ASD have heightened sensory perception and attention abilities, but only 1 in 10 have extraordinary abilities [Grant, Davis 2009; Treffert 2009].

Believing this myth leads people to wrongly think all individuals with ASD possess special abilities, which is far from reality.

- ***People with ASD do not feel emotion and lack empathy.***

People with ASD are not emotionless, they are able to feel and experience emotions. However, since people with ASD have some difficulties in expressing their emotions, those around and unfamiliar with the characteristics of these problems are prone to the stereotype and belief that people with ASD lack empathy [Brewer, Murphy 2016; Bauminger, Kasari 2000; Losh et al. 2009].

Myths and stereotypes surrounding ASD significantly contribute to negative societal perceptions. For many individuals who have never personally interacted with someone diagnosed with ASD, these misconceptions often serve as their primary source of understanding.

Social attitudes towards people with ASD

Social attitude is a complex concept in psychology and sociology. Over time, its definition has evolved. Today, most researchers define it as a socially acquired predisposition or tendency to react or have a prejudice towards a certain object, which can be a person, object, phenomenon, or idea [DeLamater 2000]. This study adopts this definition. Additionally, it is essential to define “stereotype,” which is a type of social attitude—an established, generalized, and often false prejudice about a social group. Stereotypes can be positive or negative [DeLamater 2000].

Social attitudes towards people with ASD are often based on negative stereotypes. The classic ABC model of attitudes divides social attitudes into three components: affective (emotional predisposition), behavioral (tendency to behave in a certain way), and cognitive (beliefs about an object). Proposed by Rosenberg and Hovland in 1960, this model is widely accepted [Rosenberg, Hovland 1960; Myers 1997; Hogg, Vaughan 2010; McLeod 2018]. However, it has limitations, particularly when applied to attitudes towards ASD, as the cognitive component—objective knowledge—may not be a part of the attitude but rather a predictor of it.

Studies suggest that objective knowledge predicts how people emotionally relate to and behave towards people with ASD [Surmen *et al.* 2015; Kuzminski *et al.* 2019; Gemegah *et al.* 2021]. Therefore, in this study, “social attitude towards people with ASD” is defined by the affective and behavioral components, with the cognitive component as a predictor.

Thus, the key distinction between “perception” and “social attitude” towards individuals with ASD in this research lies in their scope. “Perception” refers to the subjective understanding and knowledge that others hold about individuals with ASD. In contrast, “social attitude” encompasses the emotions, biases, and prejudices that non-autistic individuals may possess, which could influence their behavior towards those with ASD.

ASD awareness in Russia

One key social aspect of ASD is awareness, which remains low globally. Studies from various countries [Alsehemi *et al.* 2017; Alyami *et al.* 2022] indicate that while most people recognize the diagnosis and understand ASD symptoms and challenges, they lack knowledge about appropriate treatments, medical care, and education for individuals with ASD. In Russia, a recent study shows that 58% of people claim some knowledge of ASD, yet their understanding is superficial. Despite gradual improvements in public awareness and social attitudes towards ASD in Russia, significant challenges and misconceptions persist.

Historically, ASD was largely misunderstood and stigmatized in Russia. People with ASD were often marginalized, facing discrimination and limited access to education, healthcare, and employment. This lack of understanding and support contributed to the isolation of individuals with ASD and their families.

In recent years, efforts have been made to increase public awareness and improve social attitudes towards individuals with ASD in Russia. Governmental

and non-governmental organizations have been working towards raising awareness about ASD through campaigns, conferences, workshops, and educational programs.

The Russian government has also taken steps to address the needs of individuals with ASD. In 2012, a federal law was passed that aimed to protect the rights of people with disabilities, including those with ASD. This law emphasized the importance of inclusive education and equal opportunities for individuals with disabilities.

Despite recent advancements, challenges persist in the understanding of autism in Russia. Many individuals continue to lack accurate information about ASD, leading to misconceptions. Commonly held but incorrect beliefs include the notion that ASD is associated with lower intelligence or that it results from inadequate parenting.

Research on public awareness and social attitudes towards ASD in Russia is limited. A 2019 study on parental experiences [Kuznetsova, Zinchenko, Grigorenko 2019] highlighted societal stigma and a lack of support for families. Another study using an online survey [Zaks, Reaven, Amaral 2016] found that while some awareness exists, misconceptions about autism's causes and treatments persist. These studies indicate that, similar to global trends, Russia has low awareness and understanding of ASD, underscoring the need for further research to promote accurate knowledge and effective support strategies.

Potential determinants of perceptions and attitudes towards people with ASD

Low awareness of ASD leads to false social attitudes and mistreatment towards individuals with ASD. People often form false attitudes and stereotypes due to a lack of knowledge about ASD. Studies show that a good level of ASD knowledge about ASD and personal contact with individuals with ASD lead to the formation of positive attitudes [Surmen et al. 2015; Kuzminski et al. 2019; Gemegah et al. 2021]. Thus, having accurate information or personal experience with ASD is likely to result in positive attitudes and reduce harm towards individuals with ASD.

Low public awareness about ASD symptoms, treatment, and therapy contributes to ignorance and negative stereotypes about the condition and those affected by it. Experience with individuals with ASD significantly determine perceptions and social attitudes. Communication with individuals with ASD positively affects cognitive attitudes [Mavropoulou 2014]. This study aims to test this among Russian residents.

Socio-demographic factors such as sex and age also determine perceptions and attitudes. Younger individuals and females tend to have more positive attitudes towards people with ASD [Tonnsen, Hahn 2016; Zangieva, Lesnykh 2020]. This study explores whether these characteristics similarly affect attitudes in the Russian context.

Having children might also influence perceptions and attitudes towards ASD. Parents might be more empathetic towards children with ASD, leading to positive attitudes. However, lack of knowledge might also cause fear for their own children's safety around children with ASD.

City of residence, especially in Russia's largest cities, might affect perceptions and attitudes due to better access to information and support services in Moscow and St. Petersburg. This study investigates whether living in these cities determines attitudes towards ASD.

Methods

Materials and Procedure

A quantitative online survey was used as the data collection method. Respondents were recruited via the social networks Facebook and VKontakte, and the channels in the Telegram messenger. The questionnaire was distributed in communities dedicated to the topic of ASD and among other communities (dedicated to psychology, evidence-based medicine, parenting, and so on).

This method of recruitment is justified by the wider coverage of potential respondents. One of the selection criteria is a survey of people who have some experience of communication with people with ASD. One of the available ways to reach these people is to publish a survey in online communities of people who are somehow related to ASD or are interested in this topic.

Participants

The data were collected in April-June of 2019. The type of sample in this study is a nonprobabilistic quota; the probability of getting into the survey for each representative of the entire population is not the same.

The following were selected as the main characteristics of respondents for the design and calculation of quotas:

- **Age** – 3 categories (18–25, 26–39, 40+).
- **Place of residence** – 2 categories (Moscow and St. Petersburg / Other)
- **Sex** – 2 categories (male / female)
- **Experience of conscious communication with a person with ASD** – 2 categories (experience / no experience of conscious communication with a person with ASD).

There were 1690 participants. Some respondents did not meet the criteria for the sample (for example, under the age of 18) and several respondents who did not complete the survey. The final data were the complete answers of 1347 respondents, the main socio-demographic characteristics of which are shown in *Table 1*.

Approximately half of the participants reside in Moscow, while the remaining respondents are distributed across other regions. A hypothesis of this study posits that attitudes towards individuals with ASD vary based on the place of residence, specifically comparing Moscow and St. Petersburg to other cities. Consequently, the sample is fairly evenly split according to this criterion: around half of the respondents live in Moscow and St. Petersburg, while the other half reside in cities from different regions.

A comparison of the planned and obtained distributions of quotas showed that the distribution is not uniform: for some characteristics an uneven distribution of categories can be observed. The most critical in this regard is sex: in the sample, the number of men predominates compared to women. The distribution by other quota attributes is satisfactory, no significant biases are observed.

Table 1. Main demographic information for participants, %

Sex (M:F)	(27%):(73%)
Age Groups	
% 18–25	25,2
% 26–39	57,5
% 40>	17,3
Presence of children	
% several children	21,6
% one child	26,7
% no children	50,8
Place of residence	
Moscow	43,7
St. Petersburg	10,5
>1 mln. people	19,5
>500 thsd. people	12,5
>100 thsd. people	9,3
>50 thsd. people	1,9
<50 thsd. people	2,6

The questionnaire was distributed in communities dedicated to the topic of ASD and in communities that do not directly specialize in this topic. The communities dedicated to psychology, evidence-based medicine, parenthood, and parenting were selected as non-specialized. Members of these groups may not be directly related to ASD, but they are interested in topics related to ASD and, therefore, are likely to have different attitudes toward people with ASD. However, the likelihood of completing a survey on the topic under consideration in these groups is higher than in some others.

Measurement of main concepts

Several concepts require detailed definition of measurement methodologies:

The perception of people with ASD

This concept reflects the image of individuals with ASD as envisioned by respondents. It encompasses all the characteristics that respondents attribute to individuals with ASD based on their own opinions and perceptions.

To measure this concept, an open-ended question is used: “Describe who, in your understanding, are people diagnosed with autism?”. This approach was chosen for several reasons. Firstly, it was crucial to capture respondents’ views without any leading prompts that could bias their perceptions. Alternative response formats could

have constrained answers and potentially omitted significant aspects of respondents' perceptions. An open question facilitates a more comprehensive understanding of the various ways people perceive those with ASD.

Attitudes towards people with ASD

The study's primary focus is on social attitudes, divided into two components: Affective and Behavioral. The Cognitive component, while relevant, is excluded from this analysis and is explored as a potential determinant of social attitudes towards people with ASD.

- **Affective Component:** This reflects the subjective and often unconscious evaluative perceptions related to ASD. It is assessed by the propensity to experience different emotions towards individuals with ASD, including:
 - Rejection
 - Fear
 - Anger and aggression
- **Behavioral Component:** This reflects respondents' subjective evaluations of their likely behaviors towards people with ASD. It is measured by the tendency to exhibit specific behaviors, such as a desire to avoid individuals with ASD.

Nine judgments are used to gauge the emotional and behavioral components: six assess emotional reactions, while three evaluate behavioral tendencies. Respondents rate their emotional attitudes or potential behaviors in response to six hypothetical scenarios on a 1–7-point scale, combining features of the Thurstone scale and semantic differential. These scenarios vary based on two factors: the type of person with ASD (adult or child) and the nature of their behavior (general ASD characteristics, unusual atypical behavior, or aggressive atypical behavior). The range of possible values for expressing each of the 6 attitudes is 9–63.

Objective knowledge

This concept measures the accuracy of respondents' understanding of ASD. Given the prevalence of myths and stereotypes surrounding ASD, many people may lack accurate knowledge about the condition.

Objective knowledge is assessed through a question where respondents select from eight statements about ASD (four true and four myth-based). Respondents who correctly identify all four true statements are considered to possess high objective knowledge, while those who do not are categorized accordingly.

Although the ABC model of attitudes would place objective knowledge under the Cognitive component, this study focuses on the Affective and Behavioral components to evaluate the predictive power of objective knowledge (Cognitive component) on attitudes towards individuals with ASD (Affective and Behavioral components).

Involvement with people with ASD

This concept reflects the extent of respondents' familiarity with people with ASD. It encompasses personal interactions with individuals with ASD and their level of personal interest in the topic.

ASD involvement is characterized by five levels:

- Never encountered a person with ASD
- Consciously observed a person with ASD
- Consciously communicated with a person with ASD
- Has a friend with a diagnosis of ASD
- Has a relative with a diagnosis of ASD

Data Analysis

The first task of the research (the determination of perceptions of people with ASD) was done using text clustering. The answers of 1347 respondents to the open question “Describe who, in your understanding, are people diagnosed with autism?” measures the Perceptions of people with ASD. These were analyzed using Agglomerative Hierarchical Clustering.

First, all the texts were cleared of stop-words and all the meaningful words were tokenized. In order to measure the exclusivity of each token for the each respondent, the matrix of values of Term Frequency–Inverse Document Frequencies (TF-IDF) was calculated for each respondent and token. TF-IDF are further used as the parameters for clustering. This statistic was selected because it more effectively demonstrates the exclusivity of each token for individual respondents compared to a simple count.

Choosing the model involved several iterations of the parameters of the model as the number of tokens and the deletion of outliers. The final model contained 4 clusters. The metric used is Cosine Similarity and the Ward method of clustering.

The second task (studying how the types of perception about people with ASD and social attitudes might be related with other characteristics of common people) was completed using 6 models of Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA). The models were developed using the statistical software LISREL.

Six CFA models are developed and explored to measure the relation between types of perception and attitudes and each pair of signs of people with ASD.

As dependent variables, those models contain types of perception (clusters from the text clustering analysis) and each type of *attitude towards people with ASD*. The CFA models contain the following set of dependent variables:

- attitude towards adults with ASD with usual behavior and types of perception
- attitude towards children with ASD with usual behavior and types of perception
- attitude towards adults with ASD with strange behavior and types of perception
- attitude towards children with ASD with strange behavior and types of perception
- attitude towards adults with ASD with aggressive behavior and types of perception
- attitude towards children with ASD with aggressive behavior and types of perception
- As independent variables, all the models contain the following characteristics:
 - Objective Knowledge
 - Sources of knowledge about ASD
 - Interest in the topic of ASD
 - ASD Involvement
 - Social demographic characteristics
 - sex
 - age
 - number of children
 - city of residence.

The primary aim of the CFA models was to investigate the relationship between types of perception and attitudes towards individuals with ASD, and to identify the independent variables influencing this relationship. The most intriguing potential relationship lies between these perceptions and attitudes, considering different pairs of characteristics.

Results

Task 1. The types of perceptions of people with ASD

Text clustering was used to determine the perceptions of individuals with ASD. The analysis resulted in four distinct clusters. The names and interpretations of these clusters were derived from the tokens with the highest TF-IDF scores within each cluster:

- **Developmental Deficits**

(329 respondents)

People in this cluster believe that ASD is a defect, that people with ASD have problems with development. But this is not the correct understanding of ASD, people with ASD might have problems with development but it is not a significant characteristic. People with that perception might be characterized as the ones who have an incorrect and rather intolerant understanding of ASD.

- **Communication and Socialization Issues**

(202 respondents)

People in this cluster are believed to be the most familiar with ASD. They use the right terms like Problems, Socialization, and Communication. Those terms characterize the people with ASD in a tolerant way.

- **Behavioral Difficulties**

(715 respondents)

This cluster is the most difficult to interpret. The only thing that can be derived is that people view people with ASD as having difficulties with behavior and society. People in this cluster generally do not use any incorrect and intolerant words. Presumably, people in this cluster have some broad understanding of people with ASD and they are not keen to use any intolerant words.

- **Living in Their Own World**

(101 respondents)

People in this cluster mostly used the phrase “in their own world” while describing people with ASD. We consider this phrase to be neutral.

In the next part, the relations between perceptions and attitudes, and other characteristics are explained.

Task 2. The Relations between types of perceptions and attitudes, and other characteristics

Before the interpretation of CFA models, the descriptive statistics of concepts measured are stated in the *Tables 2, 3 and 4*. Several conclusions can be derived based on the analysis of 6 CFA models.

In *Table 5*, all significant correlations from all the models are presented. The correlations for relations are almost the same for all models.²

² There are a few cases, where correlations differed by about 0,01. *Table 5* contains mean values for those cases.

Next, we discuss the results of all CFA models, starting with correlations between perceptions and other characteristics, followed by correlations between attitudes and associated characteristics.

Table 2. Objective Knowledge of ASD

Statistics	Objective Knowledge
Mean	2.4
Standard deviation	1.7
Minimal value	0
25% – percentile	0
Median	3
75% – percentile	4
Maximum value	4

Table 3. Involvement with people with ASD

Type of ASD involvement	Amount or Respondents
Never encountered a person with ASD	620
Consciously observed a person with ASD	144
Consciously communicated with a person with ASD	110
Has a respondent has person with the diagnosis of ASD among friends	311
Has a person with the diagnosis of ASD among relatives	141

Table 4. Attitudes towards people with ASD

Statistics	Attitude towards adults with regular behavior	Attitude towards adults with unusual behavior	Attitude towards adults with aggressive behavior	Attitude towards children with regular behavior	Attitude towards children with unusual behavior	Attitude towards children with aggressive behavior
Mean	6,9	6,9	12,1	7,3	7,3	11,5
Standard deviation	3,6	3,9	6,0	4,4	4,6	6,4
Minimal value	4	4	4	4	4	4
25% – percentile	4	4	7	4	4	6
Median	6	5	12	5	5	10
75% – percentile	9	9	16	9	9	16
Maximum value	28	27	28	28	28	28

Table 5. Significant Correlations between Perceptions and Attitudes, and Characteristics of respondents

Independent Variables (characteristics of common people)	Dependent Variables (Perceptions and Attitudes)									
	Attitudes toward people with ASD						Perceptions (Clusters)			
	Adults with usual behavior	Children with usual behavior	Adults with strange behavior	Children with strange behavior	Adults with aggressive behavior	Children with aggressive behavior	Cluster 1: "Developmental Deficits"	Cluster 2: "Communication and Socialization Issues"	Cluster 3: "Behavioral Difficulties"	Cluster 4: "Living in Their Own World"
Objective knowledge								0,13	-0,38	
Interest in the topic	-0,29	-0,28	-0,28	-0,28	-0,37	-0,30				
Age										-0,25
Sex					-0,14					
Having Several Children										0,13
Having only One Child										0,23
Living in Moscow or Saint Petersburg						0,09		0,16		
Having an experience of observation of a person with ASD	0,09									

Several factors, including objective knowledge, age, having children, and living in Moscow or Saint Petersburg, showed statistically significant correlations with perceptions of individuals with ASD. Objective knowledge positively (0,13) correlates with Cluster 2 (Communication and Socialization Issues) and negatively (-0,38) with Cluster 3 (Behavioral Difficulties). This suggests that individuals with higher ASD knowledge tend to view people with ASD in a more scientifically informed manner, while those in Cluster 3 often associate ASD with behavioral challenges. Additionally, residents of Moscow or Saint Petersburg are more likely (0,16) to exhibit perceptions aligned with Cluster 2.

Age and parenthood also demonstrate significant correlations with perceptions. Older individuals (with each year of age increase) are less likely to perceive people with ASD as "living in their own world" (-0,25) while parents are more likely to hold this view (having several children—0,13 and having only one child—0,23).

Correlations between expressing attitudes and other characteristics were also examined. Interest in ASD, sex, living in Moscow or Saint Petersburg, and prior experience with individuals with ASD show statistically significant but weak correlations with attitudes (correlation coefficients < 0,3). Specifically, interest in ASD

correlates negatively with all attitude types, indicating that those with greater interest in ASD are less likely to base their behavior on whether someone has ASD. Women tend to express less negative attitudes toward adults exhibiting aggressive behavior. Furthermore, while there are correlations between attitudes and living in Moscow or Saint Petersburg and having experience of observation a person with ASD; these correlations are notably low ($< 0,1$).

Factors such as age, parenthood, place of residence, interest in ASD, level of objective knowledge of ASD, and having experience of observing a person with ASD have significant correlations with different perceptions and attitudes towards individuals with ASD.

Conclusion

Awareness of ASD in Russia is relatively limited, and a significant proportion of the population lacks detailed knowledge about the disorder, including its treatment and support.

The methodology for studying and analyzing the determinants of perception and social attitudes towards ASD was developed as part of this research. A total of 1,347 respondents were surveyed, and based on their answers, the following conclusions can be drawn:

Using Hierarchical Clustering, four distinct types of perceptions of people with ASD were identified:

- **Developmental Deficits:** This group views individuals with ASD primarily through the lens of developmental deficiencies, characterizing them as having developmental problems. Individuals in this cluster tend to have an incorrect and relatively intolerant understanding of ASD.
- **Communication and Socialization Issues:** This cluster represents respondents who perceive people with ASD in a more accurate and appropriate manner. They use terminology such as “problems with socialization” and “communication issues,” reflecting a more tolerant view of individuals with ASD.
- **Behavioral Difficulties:** Respondents in this category generally avoid using incorrect or intolerant language when describing people with ASD. It is inferred that they possess a broader understanding of ASD and are less likely to use negative or intolerant terms.
- **Living in Their Own World:** People in this cluster tend to use neutral terms to describe those with ASD, possibly to avoid negative connotations and maintain a more neutral perspective.

These findings highlight the varied ways in which people perceive and understand ASD, ranging from less informed and intolerant views to more nuanced and tolerant perspectives.

Several conclusions can be drawn regarding the relation between types of perceptions and attitudes, and other characteristics:

- **Age:** A statistically significant relation was found between age and perceptions of ASD. Older respondents are more likely to perceive individuals with ASD as “living in their own world”.

- **Sex:** Women tend to hold less negative attitudes toward adults with ASD exhibiting aggressive behavior.
- **Place of Residence:** A weak correlation was observed between the place of residence and both perceptions and attitudes toward people with ASD. Residents of Moscow or Saint Petersburg are more likely to perceive individuals with ASD as experiencing communication and socialization difficulties. A positive but weak relation exists between attitudes and living in these cities.
- **Parenthood:** Parents are more likely to perceive individuals with ASD as being “in their own world”.
- **Interest in ASD:** Interest in ASD negatively correlates with all types of attitudes. This indicates that individuals with a greater interest in ASD are less likely to base their behavior on whether someone has ASD.
- **Objective Knowledge:** Objective knowledge about ASD significantly influences perceptions and attitudes. Individuals with higher levels of objective knowledge are more likely to describe people with ASD using accurate, science-based terminology, whereas those with lower knowledge are more likely to perceive individuals with ASD as being “in their own world”.
- **Experience of Observing a Person with ASD:** A weak positive correlation was observed between having experience with a person with ASD and attitudes toward adults with ASD.

The conclusions drawn from this research are specific to the situation regarding ASD in Russia. The distinctive cultural and social factors in Russia might influence the lack of apparent connections between different perceptions of ASD and attitudes towards individuals with it and other characteristics. To develop a fuller picture, future studies should broaden their scope to include data from different countries and cultural contexts.

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Факторы восприятия и установок по отношению к людям с расстройством аутистического спектра в России

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Аннотация

За последние десятилетия тема расстройств аутистического спектра (РАС) стала активно обсуждаться в российском обществе. Это связано не столько с увеличением количества людей с РАС, сколько с улучшением диагностических критериев, лучшим пониманием и осведомленностью таких специалистов, как психиатры, психологи и педагоги. В то же время у широкой общественности знания о РАС остаются ограниченными, и многие воспринимают людей с РАС как необычных или отличных от других. Нехватка знаний и страх перед непредсказуемым или потенциально агрессивным поведением людей с РАС способствуют формированию стереотипных и стигматизированных представлений о них и негативных установок, выражающихся во враждебном поведении по отношению к людям с РАС. Поэтому важно понимать, под влиянием каких факторов формируются восприятие и установки по отношению к людям с РАС. В России РАС редко обсуждается открыто, что приводит к ограниченному количеству исследований социального восприятия и отношения к людям с РАС. Несмотря на то, что большинство людей осведомлены о РАС, многие не готовы к социальному взаимодействию с такими людьми.

Основная цель данного исследования – определить факторы, влияющие на восприятие и установки по отношению к людям с РАС. Первая задача исследования – установить, какие представления о людях с РАС можно выявить. Гипотеза состоит в том, что некоторые виды представлений могут основываться на стереотипах и/или стигматизации людей с РАС. Вторая задача исследования – изучить, как типы восприятия и установки к людям с РАС среди обычных людей могут быть связаны с такими характеристиками, как уровень объективных знаний о РАС, личный интерес к РАС, опыт общения с человеком с РАС, пол, возраст, наличие детей и тип города проживания.

Исследование носит количественный характер; данные были собраны с помощью онлайн-опроса в социальных сетях – ВКонтакте и Telegram. Анкета распространялась в сообществах, посвященных теме РАС, и в других сообществах (психология,

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доказательная медицина, воспитание детей и др.). Всего были опрошены 1670 респондентов, из которых 1347 полностью завершили анкету. Также были учтены такие параметры, как возраст, тип города проживания, пол, опыт осознанного общения с человеком с РАС.

Методы анализа данных включают иерархический кластерный анализ текстовых данных и подтверждающий факторный анализ. Были выведены четыре типа восприятия аутичных людей:

- «люди с РАС имеют дефекты развития»;
- «люди с РАС имеют проблемы с общением и социализацией»;
- «люди с РАС имеют поведенческие проблемы»;
- «люди с РАС живут в своем собственном мире».

Также были определены детерминанты, влияющие на восприятие и отношение к людям с РАС. Более возрастные респонденты и родители чаще воспринимают людей с РАС как находящихся «в своем собственном мире». Женщины, как правило, менее негативно относятся к агрессивному поведению, связанному с РАС. Жители Москвы и Санкт-Петербурга чаще воспринимают людей с РАС как «имеющих проблемы с общением и социализацией». Больший интерес к РАС коррелирует с менее осуждающим отношением, а более высокий уровень объективных знаний о РАС способствует научно обоснованному восприятию людей с РАС. Кроме того, опыт наблюдения за человеком с РАС имеет слабую положительную связь с более осуждающим отношением.

Ключевые слова: социальная установка, восприятие, расстройства аутистического спектра (РАС), аутизм, люди с ограниченными возможностями, инклюзия, социальная политика

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