

# HealthGuard 2025: Global Forum on Public Health & Preventive Medicine

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## Early Identification of Autism Spectrum Disorder among Children in Hargeisa, Somaliland

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### Background

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a neurodevelopmental condition marked by difficulties in social communication, repetitive behaviors, and restricted interests. Early identification of autism is vital, as research consistently shows that early intervention.

Which is to manifest in early childhood, with subtle signs often observable between 12 to 18 months of age. These signs can include delayed speech development, lack of eye contact, limited social engagement, and repetitive behaviors. Research suggests that early intervention before the age of 3 can positively impact cognitive, language, and adaptive skills, providing a foundation of better living and integration into school and society.

The growing recognition of autism has led to widespread efforts in screening and public awareness campaigns.

### Research Aim and Questions

#### Aim

The aim of this research is to explore and evaluate the effectiveness of early identification strategies for Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in children, with a focus on recognizing early behavioral, social, and communication signs before the age of 3. The study seeks to assess the reliability of existing diagnostic tools, the role of parental and healthcare provider observations, and the impact of early detection on intervention outcomes. Additionally, it aims to identify barriers to early diagnosis in diverse populations and propose methods to enhance early screening and intervention efforts.

#### Research Questions

To determine the level of knowledge among mothers towards their own children and to improve the accuracy and timeliness of diagnosing autism disorder spectrum (ASD) and exploring how do healthcare access, cultural beliefs, and socioeconomic factors affect the early identification of autism.

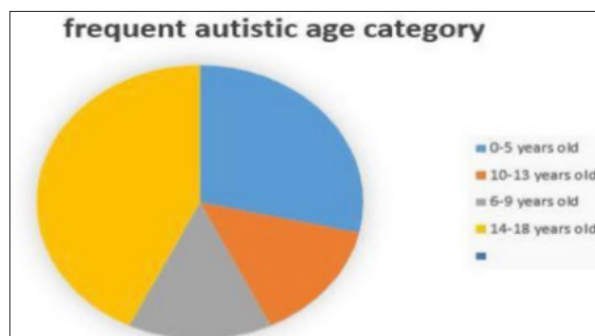
#### Methodology

A qualitative interview study research design was conducted, involving the collection of mothers who have one specific autistic child and also mothers who have more than one autistic child and still in a denial situation.

This study was also collected from autistic school centers in depth interview.

This study site was chosen at autistic schools centers at Hargeisa, Somaliland and the site was chosen for several reasons:

- The selection of autistic school centers as the site for this study is based on its relevance to the research topic, accessibility, availability of participants, ethical considerations, community engagement, and alignment with the literature by conducting the study in autistic school centers, the research aims to generate meaningful and contextually grounded findings that contribute to knowledge advancement in the field.

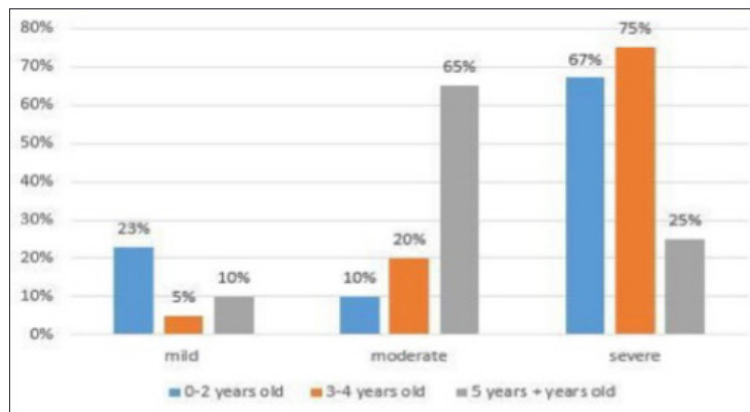


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- This chart interprets that the most frequent age category is the 14-18 years due to the delayed diagnosis and identification is apparently seen
- 6-9 and 10-13 years are closely age years which can be characterized as same
- Despite the fact, 0-5 years ages are accurate age to diagnose yet our community doesn't release it much to characterize it as autism



- The findings show that parents who have autistic children are really hard for them to accept the fact that their children are actually suffering from autism spectrum disorder (ASD) or most of them in a denial situation.
- major challenges identified in this research is parental denial or delay in recognizing the early signs of autism
- neighbors are keeping away their children from the autistic children on the playground, resulting where parents of the autistic children feeling guilty or in shame position

## Conclusion

This study highlights the importance of timely diagnosis and intervention during the early years, emphasizing that children who receive early support are more likely to develop essential social, communication, and adaptive skills.

Also this study demonstrates that integrating multiple behavior and biological markers improves the accuracy of diagnosing autism among children under three years old

There is still a need for comprehensive efforts to educate parents, reduce stigma, and address disparities in access to care. By focusing on early diagnosis and intervention, we can ensure that children with autism receive the support they need to reach their full potential.

## References

Johnson CP, Myers SM. "Identification and evaluation of children with autism spectrum disorders." *Pediatrics*, Robins. DL, et al. "Validation of the Modified Checklist for Autism in Toddlers, Revised with Follow-up (M-CHAT-R/F)." *Pediatrics*, 2014. 2007Chawarska, K.. et al. "Early detection of autism spectrum disorders." *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 2007.