

CROSS-CULTURAL DIFFERENCES IN ATTITUDE TOWARDS
INDIVIDUALS WITH AUTISM

Kilicheva Karomat

Professor and Doctor of Science, Department of Pedagogy,
University of Tashkent for Applied Sciences,
Tashkent, Uzbekistan

karomatkilicheva320@gmail.com

Abstract

In individualistic cultures, individual success and career growth are valued and welcomed, the individual is required to take responsibility for himself and his family. On the other hand, collectivist cultures the individual is, first of all, a member of the community, and he is expected to submit to the group and, first of all, to take care of its well-being and prosperity. Several research studies have been conducted to identify the differences in perception, knowledge of, and attitude towards neurodivergent individuals among Westerners and Easterners. However, there were few studies that have offered an effective intervention that could be applied across cultures. Therefore, the objective of this paper is to review prior research studies to analyze attitude toward autistic individuals in individualistic and collectivistic cultures to propose a possible intervention in order to raise neurodiversity awareness and acceptance in both Western and Eastern societies.

Key words: *autism spectrum disorder (ASD), collectivism, individualism, eastern culture, western culture*

Introduction

Culture is one of the factors that can influence how people think and behave. One factor often studied by cross-cultural psychologists is the differences and similarities between individualistic and collectivist cultures. Cultural upbringing may affect understanding of and attitude toward autism, influencing willingness to interact. We aim to look at whether there are any differences between American/Europeans and Koreans in terms of beliefs, knowledge, acceptance, and attitude toward neurodivergent individuals, specifically individuals with autism. Neurodivergent is a non-medical term that describes individuals with various neurological conditions, such as Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), Down syndrome, Attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and learning disabilities such as Dyscalculia, Dyslexia, Dysgraphia, Dyspraxia, and etc. Autism, or Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a neurological and developmental disorder that can disrupt how people interact with others, communicate, learn, and behave. The latest edition of Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) characterized ASD by impairments in two domains:

- 1) Deficits in social communication and social interaction:
 - Social approach;
 - Having conversation;
 - Understanding/expressing emotions.
- 2) Repetitive and restricted patterns of behavior:
 - Repetitive movements and use of objects (e.g., lining up objects perfectly);
 - Being insistent on the same patterns, routines or rituals (e.g., needing to eat the same food every day).

Symptoms of ASD typically start to become evident in childhood and in most cases is diagnosed by age 3. Early indicators of ASD in childhood may include lack of response to one's name and discomfort with maintaining eye contact. Most symptoms of ASD continue into adulthood, especially the ones regarding the social functioning and cognitive ability. Symptoms, particularly communication skills, can be improved over time. However, intellectual functioning tends to stay relatively the same (Sauer et al. 2021).

103	ISSN 2277-3630 (online), Published by International journal of Social Sciences & Interdisciplinary Research., under Volume: 12 Issue: 05 in May-2023 https://www.gejournal.net/index.php/IJSSIR
	Copyright (c) 2023 Author (s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of Creative Commons Attribution License (CC BY). To view a copy of this license, visit https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/

American/European (individualistic) culture and autism

Individualistic cultures are cultures in which the needs of the individual are placed above the needs of the group as a whole. In this type of culture, people are perceived as independent and autonomous. Social behavior is usually dictated by the attitudes and preferences of individuals. The cultures of North America and Western Europe tend to be individualistic. Western culture is considered to be heterogeneous (diverse) and individualistic that prioritizes independence and individual characteristics. In individualistic cultures, the individual is seen as an independent and individual being that is more important than the group. It is the well-being, success and goals of the individual that are important. Dependence on the group is low since in such cultures the individual relies on groups and institutions other than the family: the main source of information is the mass media, in situations requiring support, members of individualistic societies can turn to self-government institutions, neighborhood groups and public organizations with a request for support. Several common characteristics of individualistic cultures include:

- Dependence on others is often considered shameful
- Independence is highly valued
- Individual rights take center stage
- People often place more value on standing out and being unique
- People tend to be self-sufficient
- Individual rights usually take precedence.

In individualistic cultures, people are considered "good" if they are strong, self-sufficient, assertive, and independent. This contrasts with collectivist cultures where qualities such as selflessness, dependability, generosity, and helping others are of greater importance. A few countries that are considered individualistic cultures include the United States, Germany, Ireland, South Africa, and Australia. Several research studies suggested that students from the US and Britain are more likely to have acceptive attitude toward autistic individuals (Vries et al. 2020 & Gillespie-Lynch, 2019).

Korean (collectivistic) culture and autism

South Korea, a collectivistic and homogeneous society with intense cultural tightness, is believed to have high levels of stigma towards individuals who face neurodivergent mental conditions and sometimes engage in behaviors considered "weird" from social norms. It is suggested by Kim et al. (2022) that South Koreans tend to value social norms and criticize individual differences. Therefore, those who cannot follow social norms, often have to face exclusion, stigma, or discrimination. High cultural tightness and homogeneity may contribute to heightened stigma toward autistic individuals, who sometimes exhibit behaviors that violate social norms. Indeed, early qualitative research conducted solely in South Korea revealed that parents reported, and often themselves expressed, high levels of stigma toward autistic people. Another recent study found that openness towards someone with autistic characteristics was lower among nursing students in South Korea than Britain (Mac Carthaigh & Lopez, 2020). It can be due to the fact that Koreans are less exposed to neurodiversity compared to American/Europeans. Neurodiversity is a movement that advocates to reframe autism as "a way of being" (Kim & Gillespie-Lynch, 2021).

Conclusion

Misconceptions about autism can be more evident among Koreans than American/Europeans. Koreans are considered to have clear ideas about how people should act, which subsequently means Koreans have "tighter" culture. Opposed to Koreans, Americans have "looser" culture and are freer to act as they wish. Autistic individuals often may not act as typical individuals do. This makes them stand out. It is believed that educational interventions are necessary and great start to tackle various misconceptions about neurodivergent individuals, especially in a society with "tighter" culture. It would help to encourage more positive contact between neurodivergent and neurotypical individuals,

which in turn, strengthen stigma resistance. Arrangement of peer support groups for autistic students on the campus can be another simple yet effective intervention.

References

Gillespie-Lynch, K., Daou, N., Sanchez-Ruiz, M., Kapp, S.K., Obeid, R., Brooks, P.J., Someki, F., Silton, N., & Abi-Habib, R. (2019). Factors underlying cross-cultural differences in stigma toward autism among college students in Lebanon and the United States. *Autism* 23(8), 1993-2006.

Kim, S.Y. & Gillespie-Lynch, K. (2021). Do autistic people’s support needs and non-autistic people’s support for the neurodiversity movement contribute to heightened autism stigma in South Korea vs. the US? *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 1-15.

Kim, S.Y., Cheon, J.E., Gillispie-Lynch, K. & Kim, Y.H. (2022). Is autism stigma higher in South Korea than the United States? Examining cultural tightness, intergroup bias, and concerns about heredity as contributors to heightened autism stigma. *Autism*, 26(2), 460-472.

Mac Carthaigh, S. & Lopez, B. (2020). Factually based autism awareness campaigns may not always be effective in changing attitudes towards autism: Evidence from British and South Korean nursing students. *Autism* 24(5), 1177-1190.

Sauer, A.K., Stanton, J.E., Hans, S., & Granbrucker, A.M. (2021). Autism Spectrum disorders: Etiology and pathology. *Exon Publications*, 1-15.

Vries, M., Cader, S., Colleer, L., Batteux, E., Yasdiman, M.B., Tan, Y.J. & Sheppard, E. (2020). University students’ notion of Autism Spectrum Conditions: A cross-cultural study. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 50, 1281-1294.

Yoon, J.H., Ellison, C. & Essl, P. (2021). Shifting the perspective from “incapable” to “capable” for artists with cognitive disability; case studies in Australia and South Korea. *Disability & Society*, 36(3), 443-467.