



# Autism - Effectiveness of Multidisciplinary Team Intervention

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## Abbreviations

ASD: Autism Spectrum Disorder; MMWR: Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report.

## Introduction

Autism is a developmental disorder caused by variations in the brain. It is usually diagnosed within 0-3 years. Symptoms may vary from child to child and it may include poor eye contact, poor socialization, speech delay, solitary play, toe walking, restricted and repetitive behaviour, obsessive interests, unusual eating and sleeping habits and verbal & motor stimming etc.

In 2023, One in 36 (2.8%) 8-year-old children have been identified with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), according to an analysis published today in CDC's Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR). The new findings are higher than the previous 2018 estimate that found a prevalence of 1 in 44 (2.3%) [1]. According to the WHO 2023, it is estimated that worldwide about 1 in 100 children has autism. According to a 2021 study conducted by the Indian Journal of Paediatrics, boys are more commonly affected by Autism than girls, with a male-to-female ratio of approximately 3:1. Early intervention services like speech therapy, behavioural therapy and occupational therapy can help support children with autism by improving their speech and language skills, socialization, and sensory integration. The combination of all therapies is much more effective when compare to single therapy [2].

A multidisciplinary, Holistic approach to these interventions has shown tremendous productive outcomes. Research has proven that multidisciplinary intervention for autistic children can show improved outcomes than single therapy

intervention. Here's what a multidisciplinary approach includes:

- Speech and language therapist,
- Occupational therapist,
- Behavioural therapist,
- Psychologist,
- Special educator,
- Audiologist,
- Physiotherapist,
- Yoga therapists.

A multidisciplinary team includes different professionals and they work collaboratively with an autistic child which makes the team approach more effective.

Professionals working with an autistic child can collaborate in many ways, include

- Conducting Multidisciplinary assessments,
- Monthly Multidisciplinary team discussion
- Regular Debriefing
- Goal setting followed by recording, documenting and tracking
- Monthly reviews
- Progress of the children achieved goals
- Regular Parents Meeting
- Felt need and Perceived need discussion

We, the multidisciplinary team of the Blooming Buds child development center, Hyderabad work with Autistic and ADHD children in a holistic approach [3]. We have done an experimental pilot study on our children to analyse clinical outcomes in terms of functional changes in children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), before and after receiving a multidisciplinary team intervention programme. The results were obtained in the areas of gross motor, language, fine motor and personal-social measures. The results were

measured with different assessment tools like DDST, and CARS.

The study results showed that there was a major improvement in developmental ages of language, gross & fine motor, and personal social skills in children who have undergone multidisciplinary intervention programs (Behavioural therapy, occupational therapy, speech therapy, and special education) and immense development in the major areas of the CARS [4].

A multidisciplinary team approach enhances overall development in children with ASD. As parents are unaware of this concept, that it's a holistic approach and all required therapies are mandated, they seek 1 or 2 therapies especially Speech therapy and Occupational or Behaviour therapy and ignore the rest [5]. Because of this, their children's progress becomes slow and they end up investing more time and money due to lack of counselling.

### Strategies Used

- Once the child starts intervention, continuing close collaboration between professionals and consistent parent counselling can lead to more progress and better outcomes.
- Treatment goals were parent-oriented. Speech therapists, Behavioural therapists, and other professionals asked parents what their priorities or concerns are for therapy, and create a treatment plan that focuses on those priorities.
- Therapists follow child's lead, interspersal of maintenance and acquisition tasks, task variations, natural reinforcers, reinforcing attempts, tasks variations and motivation.

Here are some ways communication and co-operation between professionals that made treatment more effective:

- Behavioural therapists shared strategies for behaviour management (such as Visual Schedules, Activities Schedule) to improve the child's participation.
- Speech therapists described the child's communication skills, like their comprehension level for following directions or strategies for encouraging the child to communicate during interactions or therapy activities.
- Occupational therapists have given recommendations for activities that helped the child with sensory regulation.
- Special educator helped them in academics, ADLs and school readiness.
- Yoga therapists helped them to increase body awareness, improve motor skills, helps with transition and to develop self-esteem and communication skills.

### References

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