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## Perceptions of People Towards Youth with Autism Spectrum Disorder and Intellectual Disability in North Eastern Nigeria

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### Abstract

*This paper examined people's perception towards youth with Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and intellectual disability. In-depth interviews were conducted separately with a with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), Intellectual disabilities (ID) While their mothers were thoroughly investigated in order to ascertain the level of victimization in the form of bullying on these categories of youth constructs from the interview were utilized to compare groups on the frequency type and impact of victimization. The outcomes of the interview conducted reveals that youth with ASD are being victimized more frequently than their ID peers and that the form of bullying being subdued differs from each group to another. In view of submission our findings show that higher internalizing problem and conflicts in relationship are found to be a significant predictor of victimization. The paper, therefore, recommends among others that observation of extrinsic and intrinsic behaviors for proper adjustment in a classroom setting should be taken care off.*

**Keywords:** ASD autism spectrum disorder, ID intellectual disability, victimization

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### Introduction

Victims of intimidation often endure repeated exposure to intentional negative actions on the part of one or more individuals, the problems of behavior are persistent especially if there is an imbalance of behavior in the relationship among individuals (Olweus, 1994). This problematic behavior is prevalent among all adolescents in the U.S. and in some part of African including Nigeria with 28–30% of students reported to be involved in bullying behaviors (Carlyle & Stenman, 2007; Nansel 2001) National Center for Educational Statistics, 2011). Sadly, there is reason to believe that youth with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) or intellectual disability (ID) experience even more bullying than their peers This study focuses on the frequency, type, and impact of victimization by incorporating the perspectives of three groups of youth—ASD,

and Victimization of ASD and ID youth nearly seven decades ago, Hans Asperger wrote about the tendency of children with autism to be tormented and rejected by their classmates (Asperger, 1944). This situation has not changed much today, with high rates of victimization reported for children and youth with ASD at school. For example, Cappadocia, Weiss, and Pepler (2012) found that 70% of parents reported that their child with ASD, aged 5–21 years, had been bullied at school within the reporting even more frequent victimization (i.e., “once per week” or “several times per week”)

The role of friendships in adolescence Friendships are important in adolescence, possibly providing some protection against bullying, as friends serve a variety of functions, including emotional security, advice, validation, and opportunities for



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intimate disclosure. Potentially, they also can increase self-esteem and social skills and provide a context for continued exploration of the impact of an adolescent's personal actions on himself and others (Rubin, Bukowski, & Parker, 2006; Rubin, Fredstrom, & Bowker, 2008).

Similarly, Friendship difficulties as a risk factor the role of friendship in bullying is unclear. Bowker, Rubin, Burgess, Booth-LaForce, and Rose-Krasnor (2006) found that, children with no best friend experienced significantly more victimization than those with stable best friendships or those who gained a best friend over the course of the school year. Yet studies of youth with ASD and friendship contain contradictions. Rowley et al. (2012) reported that while those with ASD and less severe social and communication impairments had more meaningful friendships, this group also experienced higher levels of bullying. The authors suggested that youth with ASD who were less impaired socially may have been more aware of their social relationships and thus better able to report experiences of victimization. Alternatively, it may be that those with more friendships may have had more exposure to social situations, adolescents and adults with ASD (Orsmond et al., 2004). Along the same vein, it was found that higher levels of internalizing behavior to be predictive of higher levels of warm and close friendships for adolescents with ID, whereas the opposite was true for TD youth. To claim that friendships may be anything but positive for any adolescent may seem contrary to theory. However, for those with ASD or ID, these studies suggest that the relationship between friendships and victimization may be more complicated than would be found among TD adolescents. 1.4. Present study Although risk factors and predictors have been identified for those with ASD and ID, some inconsistencies have been found.

### Statement of the problem

This study focuses on the perception of people by incorporating the perspectives of youth with autism spectrum disorder and those with

intellectual disabilities, Hans Asperger wrote about the tendency of children with autism to be tormented and rejected by their classmates (Asperger, 1944). This situation has not changed much today, with high rates of victimization reported for children and youth with ASD at school. For example, Cappadocia, Weiss, and Pegler (2012) found that 77% of 100 parents reported that their child with ASD, aged 5–21 years, had been bullied at school within the last month, with 46% reporting even more frequent victimization (i.e., “once per week” or “several times per week”). The attitude of people within the immediate environment of children with ASD and ID youth is negative on the part of social interaction with those children with different categories of special needs condition having of less advantage in terms social interaction in the society when it comes to community activities must of the people neglect those categories of children with either ASD or ID. Majority of people in the community they consider those children with ASD and ID are slow learners do not better in school because of the presence of their condition and they also perceived them as dependent.

### Research question

The following are the research question

1. What are the perception of people toward youth with Autism spectrum disorder.?
2. Is there any negative attitude from part of the community members toward youth with Autism spectrum disorder?
3. What are the perception of people toward youth with intellectual disabilities?
4. What are the perception of people toward youth with Autism spectrum disorder and intellectual disabilities?

### Methodology

It is important that all the steps used under methodology should be properly described and justified. One of the methodological elements that must be reported is the research design. For the purpose of conducting this research a survey design was adapted in particular whereby that the data was collected across five



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state of the north eastern part of Nigeria which include (Gombe, Bauchi, Yobe, Adamawa and Taraba).

Interview was conducted verbally from teachers, social workers and caregivers in some selected special education centers across all five states and also another responses was collected from parent and some group of adult within the immediate community. The mothers of the affected children after being diagnosed with the condition were also interviewed in some selected schools. The targeted area of interest in the interview include the following construct, attitude of some people toward them, perception of people toward them, warmth, closeness in friendship positive reciprocity between friends and element of bullying. Reliability checks were conducted on 20% of the interview while reliability criteria require all coders to meet over 70% of exact agreement.

Sample is a small portion of the population. For the purpose of conducting this research a sample of hundred (100) were randomly selected a total of 50 mothers were interviewed across all five states of the north eastern part of Nigeria which means 10 mothers from each state were randomly

selected and interviewed 6 teachers were also selected from each state which make 30 across all state 20 social workers were still interviewed and taking into consideration of 100 respondents.

### Result

The people perception Autism spectrum disorder and intellectual disability toward youth is determined based on the finding across the selected states. Mother of the affected children reported of the type of victimizations (Physical, verbal or relational) did not show significant group differences. However, mothers of youth with Autism spectrum disorder ASD reported significantly more chronic (i.e. frequent) than the mother of intellectual disabilities (ID).

The research or collected the result with a sample of mothers who have either Autism spectrum disorder child and or intellectually disabled child and collecting the perception of people towards them in their various places of the researchers' interest. For ASD group 43% of the mothers reported that their children with ASD may not have a deformity in their physique but rather some appearances of some disorders which interferes learning.

**Table 1: Perceptions toward youth with Autism Spectrum Disorder, Intellectual Disability across state.**

States		Frequency	Percentage
Gombe	Male Respondent	12	12%
	Female Respondent	8	8%
	Total Respondent	20	20%
Yobe	Male Respondent	8	8%
	Female Respondent	7	7%
	Total Respondent	15	15%
Adamawa	Male Respondent	15	15%
	Female Respondent	10	10%
	Total Respondent	25	25%
Bauchi	Male Respondent	18	18%
	Female Respondent	12	12%
	Total Respondent	30	30%
Taraba	Male Respondent	7	7%
	Female Respondent	3	3%
	Total Respondent	10	10%
Total		= 100	100%



From the table 1 above shows that the perception of people on youth with Autism Spectrum Disorder and Intellectual Disability shows the result as indicated above that they are very few in the community in term of Education and other social interactions because of their conditions which may directly or indirectly interfere within learning because of their cognitive deficiency as well as attention problem across learning areas. Broad assessment in three domains of social skills, problem behaviors, and academic competence. The present analyses utilized the Social Skills standard score, which is comprised of five subscales: responsibility, cooperation, self-control, assertiveness, and empathy. It has been shown to have high test-retest reliability (.90) and validity, as well adequate internal consistency for Social Skills, ranging from .83 to .94 (Gresham & Elliott, 1990).

The targeted areas of interest addressed in the interviews, such as the following constructs: warmth/closeness in friendship, positive reciprocity between friends and bullying. Reliability checks were conducted on 20% of the interviews. Reliability criteria required all coders to meet over 70% exact agreement with the master coder and 95% agreement within one scale point. In the interviews, bullying was defined as follows: “When someone intimidates or mistreats another person by saying or doing something to hurt him/her, or to make him/her feel bad. This can range from making fun of someone to physically hurting him/her.”

Emotional Impact on Youth (no/yes), behavioral impact on youth (no/yes), and 0–2 scale code of Severity (low/med/high). The mean of the youth bullying composite was 1.99 (SD = 1.29). The mean of the mother bullying composite was 2.97 (SD = 1.43). Friendship variables from interviews. To capture the three main factors of a friendship, a trained coding team analyzed youth and mother reports of warmth/closeness, positive reciprocity, and conflict. Warmth/closeness refers to, “A desire to spend time with the friend, affection, joint play and mutual liking,” and “The youths’ ability to provide social support to each other (standing up for each

other, confiding in secrets and being sensitive during difficult life circumstances).” This construct was coded on a scale from 0 to 4, with ‘00 indicating ‘no warm/close friendship’ and ‘4’ indicating ‘predominantly warm/close friendship.’

Those with ASD also reported experiencing significantly more verbal bullying than their peers with ID; however, this group did not differ significantly from the TD group. Mother reports of the types of victimization (i.e., physical, verbal, or relational) did not show significant group differences. However, mothers of youth with ASD reported significantly more chronic (i.e., frequent) bullying than the mothers of TD youth, whereas the ID group did not differ from either of the other groups according to mother report. Although there was fair-to-moderate agreement between adolescents and mothers on whether or not bullying occurred, mother and youth agreement for the ASD and ID groups on the types of bullying was found to be poor. Individuals with ASD have been shown to be poor self-reporters of bullying experiences in previous studies (van Roekel et al., 2010). A strength of the present study is the use of both youth and mother reports, as it is difficult to determine whether youth with ASD correctly interpret acts of bullying. Despite previous research to suggest that this group provides “poor” self-reports (e.g., Bauminger & Kasari, 2000; Rotheram-Fuller et al., 2010), our results suggest that many youths with ASD do see themselves as victims of bullying. In terms of how the adolescents who were victimized were impacted by the bullying, youth reports of emotional impact were significantly higher in the ASD and ID groups when compared with their TD peers.

Interestingly, for the ASD group, 43% of mothers reported their adolescent to be socially impacted by the bullying, whereas only 18% of the youth themselves reported social impact. Similarly, in another sample of adolescents with ASD, van Roekel et al. (2010) found differences between adolescent and teacher reports of victimization. The more impaired the adolescents’ Theory of Mind skills (i.e., the ability to infer intent in other’s



actions), the more adolescents made mistakes in their perceptions of bullying (e.g., perceiving bullying situations as non-bullying). Perhaps participants in our ASD sample misperceived the extent to which bullying affected them socially, whereas their mothers were able to more easily reached.

Generally, the perception of some people toward youth with autism spectrum disorder and intellectual developments comes into reality that the conditions interfere learning directly or indirectly based on the responses collected from various states which researcher selected. The youth gender (i.e., F/M) and classroom setting (i.e., general VS. special education).

### Discussion

Research was conducted based on interview and questionnaire to the respondent in various state across the north eastern part of Nigeria. Based on the perception of people toward youth with this condition shows that individuals see to it that their population is minimal considering to the level of their abilities and participation for either a community work or in a self-help activities and the level of their education is below standard and consider to be of less advantage in the society.

Mothers report however, did not differ significantly across status group or any of these two dimensions ASD and ID report show that the emotional impact of bullying was significantly higher for the ASD with 70% and for the ID 30% of people's perception, here two mothers report of emotional impact did not differ significantly across two groups.

100 participant in the sample 60 adolescents, 20 special education teachers and 20 mothers participated in the in-depth interview ASD autism spectrum disorder, ID intellectual disabilities means with the differing subscripts within row are significantly different 45 out of the total number of sixty (60) were of the view that youth with autism spectrum disorder are significantly than that of the youth with intellectual disabilities in terms of social, psychological and emotional

expectations 17 out of 20 mothers were of the same view with adolescent perception, likewise the teachers cover almost 20 which is equivalent to the total number of responses and perceive that Autism spectrum disorder may significantly differ to that of youth with intellectual disability.

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skills (i.e., the ability to infer intent in other's actions), the more adolescents made mistakes in their perceptions of bullying (e.g., perceiving bullying situations as non-bullying). Perhaps participants in our ASD sample misperceived the extent to which bullying affected them socially, whereas their mothers were able to more easily recognize this effect. This study utilized rich, detailed, interviews with both mothers and youth, contributing to the literature base on bullying by providing a more nuanced look into the perceived impact the bullying had on the youth, something that paper-and-pencil measures do not capture. Moreover, we aimed to identify risk and protective factors of victimization and to determine the extent to which these factors predicted victimization. Bullying composites were created for those youth who experienced bullying to represent severe and chronic bullying that had an impact upon the youth. Correlations revealed that increased internalizing and externalizing problems, decreased social skills, and more conflict in friendships were associated with more. Similarly, higher internalizing behavior problems and more conflict in friendships predicted bullying according to mothers' reports. Interestingly, ASD status was not found to be a significant predictor of the bullying composite when other variables were accounted for. This is not surprising, given that males were more likely to be bullied and that there were considerably more males in the ASD group. Our findings are consistent with Cappadocia et al. (2012), who found that internalizing (but not externalizing) behavior problems were a significant predictor of victimization in a sample of youth with ASD. Whitehouse et al. (2009) found conflict in friendships to be a significant predictor of depression among high functioning adolescents on the spectrum. There appears to be a relationship between internalizing problems and victimization/problems with peers among youth with ASD and that of ID.

### Conclusion

In conclusion youth with ASD have been found to have greater internalizing problems than their TD peers (Bauminger et al., 2010; Mazurek & Kanne, 2010; White et al., 2009), putting them at increased risk for victimization. 5. Conclusions and implications for youth with ASD, perhaps targeting their internalizing behavior problems in intervention settings would help to ameliorate their bullying experiences. A better understanding of the nature of the relationships among victimization in the form of bullying, friendships, and internalizing problems among adolescents with ASD and ID can assist researchers in designing interventions suited to meet their needs. Presently, there are social skills interventions aimed at improving social-communication, assertion, and conflict resolution skills among adolescents (Laugeson, Frankel, Gantman, Dillon, & Mogil, 2012; Learner, Mikami, & Levine, 2011; Strulovitch, Tagalakakis, Meng, & Fombonne, 2007; White, Koenig, & Scahill, 2010).

### Recommendations

1. Higher internalizing behavior problems and more conflict in friendships predicted bullying application and provide a sensible way in tackling the challenges of children with attention problem and those with autism spectrum disorder.
2. Classroom management and control to individual with autism spectrum disorder in learning is very vital in the improvement of the learning task
3. Observation of extrinsic and intrinsic behaviors for proper adjustment in a classroom setting
4. Curving typical behaviors among individual for appropriate measures. This include establishing cordial relationship with those categories of individuals with these two conditions i.e. those with Autism spectrum disorder and those with intellectual disabilities need to be taking care off.
5. Meet with different behavior challenges and ways of tackling them.



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