



Role of Television in Managing Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) Stigmatization And Discrimination In Lagos State

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ABSTRACT

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) stigmatization and discrimination is a negative consequence of the low level of awareness of Nigerians on ASD. The low level of awareness has greatly affected how people view those living with the disorder, as most families living with ASD persons are ashamed and embarrassed of having such children, and see them as burden. To find out the level of awareness, perception and attitude of people towards ASD persons, this study investigated the role of television media in managing ASD stigmatization and discrimination in Lagos state. The study was premised on social responsibility theory and social learning theory. The study made use of descriptive design using survey method with questionnaire as its research instrument. Simple random sampling was used to select Kosofe and Ojo Local Government Areas in Lagos state, and proportionate sampling technique was employed to select 385 respondents. The study revealed that about 27% of the respondents do not have any knowledge of ASD, only 55% of the respondents were exposed to television programme on ASD. This study revealed that about 60% of the respondents confirmed that there are not adequate television programmes on ASD for creating awareness to prevent stigmatization and discrimination. The study also revealed that about 58% of the respondents agreed that exposure to television programs on ASD influenced their perception and attitude positively towards ASD persons and their family. Therefore, there is need for improvement in producing more programmes on ASD that will be aired frequently to enlighten and sensitize people on ASD to prevent discrimination and stigmatization.

KEYWORDS: Autism spectrum disorder, Awareness, Discrimination, Stigmatization, Television, Lagos

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I. INTRODUCTION

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), a neurodevelopment disorder, is a behavioral syndrome of neurological dysfunction characterized by impaired reciprocal social interaction, impaired verbal and nonverbal communication, impoverished imaginative social activity, and a noticeably constrained collection of activities and interests [1]. People with ASD can experience overwhelming anxiety, frustration people with ASD have some form of restricted and/or repetitive behaviors which can include: repetitive speech or movements; strong desire for sameness, predictability and routine; intense or unusually specific interests; and hypo or hyper sensitivity to sensory experiences such as lights, sounds and physical sensations. These symptoms present in different combinations and with great variability in their presentation and impact on a person's daily functioning [2] when faced with making sense of the everyday demands of life. In recent statistics, according to the World Health Organization, one in 160 children lives with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) worldwide. Further statistics shows that with 135 million established cases of autism in the world, more than one million children and teenagers suffer from the condition in Nigeria. [3]. Unfortunately, for autistic persons in the country, Nigerians choose to believe in superstitions and myths, and with majority of the children are labelled as

imbeciles, fools and even witches. Diagnosis and management of the condition has been a major casualty due to the derisory belief system of the society; consequently, it is one of the most neglected health issue in the country regardless of the high number of cases of autistic persons in the country [4].

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) stigmatization and discrimination is often common especially in countries where few or zero knowledge is known about the disorder. Stigma has its origin deep within the social structure of society as a whole and in the norms and values that govern everyday life, [5, 6]. Stigmatization directed at people who suffer from ASD not only makes life more difficult for them but also their families. In many underdeveloped countries, autistic persons lack access to services, which would support, on an equal basis with others, their right to health, education, employment, and living in the community. When available, services are too often far from human rights friendly or evidence-based [7]. However, developed countries make proper provision for persons suffering from ASD. For example, the United Kingdom has a well-established system for early detection of those presenting with “red flag” for ASD [8]. In addition, autistic persons have some legal rights, especially if they have a formal diagnosis of autism, as the government believes autism to be a disability. Autistic persons have rights under the Equality Act (2010) or the Disability Discrimination Act (1995) and subsequent amending legislation. These Acts require employers and service providers to make ‘reasonable adjustments’ in order to ensure they do not discriminate against autistic persons [8]. In Nigeria, the Discrimination against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act, 2018, was signed into law in 2019 [9]. Discrimination on the basis of disability is prohibited by the law, and sanctions including fines and prison sentences are imposed on those who breach it.

The World Autism Awareness Day founded by the United Nations in 2007, is marked on April 2 every year to encourage awareness about the existence of the disorder and remember millions of persons living with autism globally [10] First World Autism Awareness Day (WAAD) was celebrated in 2008. WAAD highlights the need to help and improve the quality of life of those with autism so that they can live full and meaningful lives as an integral part of the society. Nigeria is not left behind as various programmes on television and radio shows, as well as newspaper features, about people with autism and their lives, exhibition of art work by artists with autism, the display of posters and banners to increase public awareness of autism [11]. Guarantee Trust Bank (GTB) raised ASD awareness by producing a short film titled “A Mother Knows” this film is created to raise awareness about Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) in Nigeria. The film narrates the story of a young boy growing up with autism and the effect of the ASD on his family as they raise him. The film, A Mother Knows, is part of the Bank’s effort in addressing the neglect and stigmatization of children living with Autism face, daily [12]. Television has always played pivotal roles in educating and creating awareness of health related issues.

Majority of Non-Governmental organisations (NGOs) and schools that provide Autism support in Nigeria are located in Lagos State. Though it is the smallest state in the country, Lagos remains to be the most populous and a major financial centre [13]. There are no specific statistics of ASD in Nigeria because the condition is hardly diagnosed and rarely understood, sufferers of this condition lack medical and psychosocial help [3]. Every year, there are thousands of children born with ASD in Nigeria and their families due to the shame of having a child with intellectual/cognitive disability see them as burden. In fact, ASD persons suffer from menace of cultural beliefs superstition and myths as they are being called isolate witches, imbeciles and fools [3] Due to the fact that in Nigeria, ASD condition is hardly diagnosed and rarely understood, children with ASD often suffer neglect and stigmatization, therefore, this study aims to find out the role of television in managing Autism Spectrum Disorder stigmatization and discrimination in Lagos State.

II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

In Africa, parents whose children suffer from ASD noted their children had difficulty fitting into educational systems, and required specialized, individualized educational programs. They felt that the absence of a physical marker of disability in their child caused people to blame them for the child’s “poor behavior”. These negative experiences from the broader community resulted in increased family isolation [8]. Parents also spoke of the need to “develop a rhino skin” providing them with the strength to fight stigma by asserting their rights to socialization and freedom of movements for their children [8]. The ignorance of Nigerians on ASD has tremendously affected how they view people living with the disorder, children with autism are rejected, abused and stigmatised within the family circles and society, and the high rate of discrimination has prevented lots of parents from seeking help for their wards. [14]. Most of the people living with ASD are killed by their families, to avoid the embarrassment or shame of having such children [3]. Previous studies have contributed substantially to the subject of ASD in Nigeria, but there is a dearth of information to the contributions of broadcast media’s role in creating awareness on ASD. Therefore this examined the role of the broadcast (television) media in managing ASD stigmatization and discrimination in Nigeria by raising the following research questions:

- i. What is the level of awareness of ASD?

- ii. What is the level of awareness of, and exposure to, television programs on ASD?
- iii. How adequate are the television programmes for creating awareness on ASD?
- iv. What is the attitude of Lagos State residents towards people who have ASD after being exposed to television programs on ASD?

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

Autism Spectrum Disorder in Nigeria

Autism represents one of the most common developmental disorders affecting children, but there are few reports on autism in African children. Nigeria has scant data on the population of people with autism, but the World Health Organisation (WHO) estimates one in 160 children have autism spectrum disorder (ASD) globally. Thousands, if not millions of children and adults living with autism, who instead of being given special care and attention, are branded as witch, heady, naughty and an irredeemable fools who require spiritual cleansing or liberation. Nigeria is still a country steeped in superstition and give spiritual tag and interpretation to an issue that requires proper enlightenment, unfortunately the management of Autism in Nigeria is a challenging task (15 allAfrica.com 2019). Unfortunately, in Nigeria there is no government intervention programme available for sufferers and families of children and people suffering from neurodevelopment disabilities [16]. As part of efforts to address Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) among children in Nigeria, experts have called on all stakeholders and government to develop interventions against it [17]. In addition, Nigerian Autistic Society (NAS) was created for autistic children and adults in Nigeria. NAS is made up of parents, friends, professionals and students dedicated to the education and welfare of autistic people and to raise the visibility of autism and broadens services for individuals who have autism and related disorders of communication and behaviours in Nigeria [18].

Stigmatization and Discrimination

Stigma can be said to be society's negative evaluation of the particular features or behaviour of certain individuals. When a person is stigmatized, their physical imperfections become a negative form of identity by which several some improper responses are elicited from the people. These reactions usually come from close acquaintances, neighbours, and even unfamiliar persons and may be resonated by the media [19]. Stigma is a main reason for discrimination and exclusion, it affects people's self-esteem, aids disruption of family relationships and restricts their dexterity to socialize and acquire housing and jobs. It impedes the preclusion of mental health disorders, the elevation of mental well-being and the provision of effective treatment and care. It also contributes to the abuse of human rights [20]. Stigmatization exists not only for the autistic patient but also in persons with HIV/AIDS, Leprosy and obvious deformities. Discrimination is a consequence of stigma, defined by [21, 6] as "when, in the absence of objective justification, a distinction is made against a person that results in that person being treated unfairly and unjustly on the basis of belonging or being perceived to belong, to a particular group." Previously, stigmatization was set in the law of some countries, prohibiting those with physical disfigurements to be seen in public. This affects the self-worth of these persons, which in turn affects their interpersonal relationships, giving rise to withdrawal from family and community [19]. For persons with mental health issues, the social stigma and discrimination they undergo can aggravate their predicaments, making their recovery to be harder. It may trigger the avoidance of getting the necessary help needed by the person, due to the trepidation of being stigmatized. Some of the consequences of stigma include; feelings of humiliation, ignominy, despondency and loneliness, and lack of empathy by family and friends. Autism Spectrum disorder (ASD) has uniquely stigmatizing aspects because children with ASD have no physical markers of their condition, symptoms may be obvious, yet the child's appearance may not suggest it. With autism, the stigmatization is unique because the people know and understand very little about the illness, parents are usually blamed and judgment from others is often internalized (felt stigma) [22].

Theoretical framework

The study is grounded on social responsibility theory and Social learning theory. Social responsibility theory is base on the assumption that media serve essential functions in the society. Therefore, it should accept and fulfill certain obligations in the society [23]. The social responsibility theory function include but not limited to the following; providing information, discussion, and debate on public affairs. The theory opines that the different entities have different responsibilities, in so much as state should ensure the civil rights of their citizens, Therefore, it is the responsibility of the broadcast media to sensitize the populace on critical issues especially those bothering on discrimination of others [6]. Therefore, broadcast media should have programmes on health issues. In other to create more awareness, enlightenment, and sensitize the people on various health issues. Knowing that the press plays vital role in the society, this theory will be relevant to this study, as it will reveal the responsibility of the broadcast media (Television) in influencing the attitude of people towards ASD persons.

Social learning theory focuses on the learning that occurs in a social context. It considers that people learn from another, including such concepts as observational learning, imitation and modeling. If people observe positive, desired outcome in the observed behaviour, they are more likely to model, imitate, and adopt the behaviour themselves [6]. Social Learning Theory draws heavily on three types of modeling stimuli; Live models, where a person is demonstrating the desired behavior, Verbal instruction, in which an individual describes the desired behaviour in detail and instructs the participant on how to engage in the behavior and Symbolic, in which modeling occurs by means of the media, including movies, televisions, Internet, literature, and radio [24]. Looking at the symbolic modeling stimuli, positive attitude formation against stigmatization and discrimination of autism from characters (role models) seen on TV can be imitated, observed and learnt. Television assists viewers to perceive their social veracity. Television representations can gain influence when people's social constructions of reality depend heavily on what they see, hear and read rather than what they experience directly. The Social Learning theory approach has been used successfully in many reproductive health programmes in sub-Saharan African as evidenced from evaluation studies. Several notable examples include the "soul city" television serial in South Africa, the "twendeNaWakati" radio drama programme in Tanzania, and "choices," a song about sexual responsibility performed by Nigerians music stars King Sunny Ade and Onyeka Owenu [6]. This theory is relevant to this study because television can bring about change in the society's attitude towards autistic persons by adopting the different modeling stimuli.

Empirical Studies

[25] posits in their study that the level of awareness of autism is still low in Nigeria. Children with autism are sometimes referred to as mentally retarded, schizophrenic or suffering from maternal deprivation. Spiritual factors have also been used to explain its aetiology. Most parents' lack of knowledge make them to keep away their autistic children from families and friends because of the trepidation of being stigmatized or discriminated against. To back up [25] study, [1] in their study observed that the burden of care of persons with autism (PWA) for family members or caregivers usually involves emotional burden and essential resources, for example time, finances, in addition to health care and rehabilitation services needed to manage ASD. Another important problem of autism is the stigma and culturally determined preconceptions against PWA which comprise of native expressions and appellations employed to explain developmental disorders such as ASD and far reaching societal discrimination against the family members and caregivers. Additionally, the culturally influenced belief among some Africans that autism can be caused by supernatural forces, makes health-seeking behaviour for PWA tortuous, with consequent delay of presentation for most cases.

[26] in their study, awareness and knowledge of autism and autism interventions, posits that recent figures show that Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) affects at least 1 in 88 of the population, but so far, the global awareness of ASD is still very limited. The study reveals that over the past 5-10 years intense efforts have been made to raise autism awareness in the general population in countries such as UK and US. In this study, autism awareness, knowledge about autism, and perceptions about autism interventions in Northern Ireland was accessed. High levels of autism awareness, was found. In fact, over 80% of the samples were aware of ASD and over 60% of these respondents knew someone with ASD in their own family, circle of friends or work colleagues. Findings revealed that worldwide autism awareness campaigns have generally been successful. [27] in their study Autism Spectrum Disorder in Popular Media explores how storied representations of characters with (ASD) are typified in a world that is increasingly influenced by popular media. In this study, twenty commercially published children's picture books, popular novels, mainstream television programs, and popular movies from 2006-2012 were selected using purposive, maximum variation sampling and analyzed through Krippendorff's six-step approach to social content analysis. Findings revealed that television characters with ASD were depicted as intellectually inspiring prodigies who make us hope to be like them. Movies tend to show Autistic persons as protagonists, surmounting ostensibly unattainable odds. [28] explores autism spectrum disorder in Africa using South Africa as a case study. He point out that despite the sharp global increase in prevalence, there is a paucity of South African research into autism spectrum disorders (ASD), so little is known about how ASD manifests in African children.

[29] in his study explored the attitudes and perceptions of Nigerian mothers toward children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). They opined that Most parents' lack of knowledge make them to keep away their autistic children from families and friends because of the trepidation of being stigmatized or discriminated against. Persons with ASD are branded as dumb or deaf or retarded. The attitudes and perceptions of Nigerian mothers toward their children with ASD were negatively influenced by lack of early detection, treatment and inadequate services. [30] in her study where she explored the impact of TV on real people with autism and their families posit that the impact of TV has been paradoxically positive and negative for people on the spectrum and their families. Lisa posits that reviews of shows featuring autistic people have been contradictory. Example of one of these shows is "ATYPICAL" a show that portrays a young man with autism coming of age and seeking a relationship. Lisa posits that "ATYPICAL" received positive and negative reviews among autistic adults and people who work in the autism field. [31] suggests that the public awareness about ASD needs improvement as

considerable misconceptions and misinformation were identified and this can be targeted by focused educational campaigns. [32] in their study discovered the population lack of awareness and knowledge regarding autism. With participant displaying poor knowledge scores, with a mean score of 5.59 in the section concerning correct opinions on autism and that of 6.84 in the section testing knowledge of signs and symptoms. To fill this gap they suggested that awareness programmes should be conducted to promote parent's knowledge regarding autism, so as to allow for early diagnosis and an appropriate treatment plan/therapy.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopts a descriptive research design using the survey method, with the questionnaire as tool for data gathering.

Population of the Study

The populations of this study are residents of Lagos state between the ages of 18years and above that are made of men and women who watch television across the state.

Sample Size and Sampling Procedure

Using the balloting technique of simple random sampling, 2 out of 20 local government areas (LGAs) in Lagos state were selected for the study, Kosofe and Ojo LGAs were picked. The same process was repeated to select 2 wards each from Kosofe and Ojo local government. Ojota/ Ogudu and Ketu/Alapere/Agidi/Orisigun/Kosofe/Ajelogo wards were randomly selected for Kosofe LGA while Ojo Town and Iba Wards were randomly picked for Ojo LGA. Four streets were then randomly selected from each ward using balloting technique. In all, the sample consists of 2 local governments, 4 wards and 16 streets. According to the Lagos state local governments abstract statistics of 2017, Kosofe local government area has a total population of 1321627 and Ojo local government area has a total population of 1331397 [33]. In other to get the sample size for the purpose of this study, an online sample size calculator [34] was used to calculate the sample size at 95% confidence level and Confidence Interval of 5, to arrive at 385. Proportionate sampling was used to get the sample size of 193 for Ojo Local government area and Kosofe local government at 192. Convenient sampling technique was used to select 385 respondents from the two local government areas.

Method of data collection

A total of three hundred and eighty five (385) copies of the questionnaire were administered by the researchers. All the copies of questionnaire were retrieved but only 371 were properly filled and used for analysis of data.

Method of Data Analysis

Simple frequency counts and percentages were used to analyse the data collected.

IV. RESULTS

Using the research questions as guide, the results of the study are presented in tables. When asked if the respondents have television sets at home, about 88% of the respondents affirmed that they have television sets, while about 96% has access to television. This implies that majority of the respondents own and have access to television sets.

Research Questions 1: What is the level of awareness of ASD?

The respondents were asked if they are aware of ASD, one hundred and four (27%) respondents responded that they are not aware of ASD. Only 281 (73%) of the respondents were aware of ASD, and they all attributed different meanings to ASD as shown in Table 1. This implies that some of the respondents (27%) do not have the knowledge of ASD, whilst respondents perceive ASD differently.

Table 1: Respondents Perception of ASD

Statement	Frequency	Percentage (%)
ASD is a communicative disease	126	44.8
ASD is a rich man's disease	114	40.1
ASD means people suffering from spiritual problems	95	33.8
ASD means people who have continual deficiency in social communication and interaction	155	55.2
ASD means people who have deficiency in emotional exchange or conversation	143	50.9
ASD means people who have deficiency in non-verbal communicative behavior.	131	46.6
ASD means people who have deficiency in developing, understanding and maintaining relationships	151	53.7

Table 1 implies that averagely, the respondents have knowledge of ASD but some of the respondents perceive ASD as a communicative disease.

Research Questions 2: What is the level of awareness of, and exposure to, television programs on ASD?

When the 281 respondents were asked of their awareness of television programmes on ASD, about 95% (267) of the respondents were aware of the programme, but when asked if they were exposed to Television programme on ASD. Only 211 out of the 267 respondents (79%) affirmed that they are exposed to the television programme on ASD. This implies that though the respondents have access to television and are aware of television programmes on ASD, but only an average percentage of 54.8% of the overall respondents are actually exposed to Television programme on ASD.

Table 2: Frequency of Exposure of Respondents to Television Programme on ASD

Statement	Very Often	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
I watch short movies and plays on ASD	7 (3.3%)	35 (16.6%)	131 (62.1%)	29 (13.7%)	9 (4.3%)
I watch enlightenment programmes on ASD	5 (2.4%)	47 (22.3%)	122 (57.8%)	30 (14.2%)	7 (3.3%)
I watch documentary programs on ASD	3 (1.4%)	41 (19.4%)	131 (62.1%)	27 (12.8%)	9 (4.3%)
I watch health programmes on ASD	11 (5.2%)	69 (32.7%)	117 (55.5.8%)	11 (5.2%)	3 (1.4%)

Table 2 implies that majority of the respondents are not frequently exposed to television programmes on ASD as most times, majority are just exposed sometimes, with very few of the respondents who affirmed that they rarely or never watch television programmes on ASD.

Research Questions3: How adequate are the television programmes for creating awareness on ASD?

Table 3: Adequacy of Television programmes for creating awareness on ASD

Statement	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
There are adequate short movies and plays on ASD	29 (13.7%)	101 (47.9%)	63 (29.9%)	18 (8.5%)
There are adequate enlightenment programmes on ASD	27 (12.8%)	81 (38.4%)	72 (34.1%)	31 (14.7%)
There are adequate documentary programs on ASD	46 (21.8%)	109 (51.7%)	34 (16.1%)	22 (10.4%)
There are adequate health programmes on ASD	31 (14.7%)	93 (44.1%)	66 (31.3%)	21 (9.9%)

Table 3 implied that the different television programmes on ASD are not adequate for creating awareness on ASD.

Research Questions 4: What is the attitude of Lagos State residents towards people who have ASD after being exposed to television programs on ASD?

Table 4: Attitude of Respondents Towards ASD Person(s) and Family After Exposure to Television Programs on ASD

Statement	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
Television Programmes on ASD made me to stop distancing myself from families living with ASD persons because I now understand that ASD is not a communicable disease.	19 (9.0%)	73 (34.6%)	101 (47.9%)	18 (8.5%)
Television Programmes on ASD made me to stop blaming parents of ASD persons	17 (8.1%)	91 (43.1%)	102 (48.3%)	31 (14.7%)
Television Programmes on ASD made me to have the understanding that I can be friends with autistic person(s) and family	16 (7.6%)	74 (35.1%)	104 (49.3%)	17 (8.1%)
Television Programmes on ASD made me to be more aware of ASD behavioural characteristics, making me to show more understanding to autistic person(s)	15 (7.1%)	79 (37.4%)	91 (43.1%)	26 (12.8%)
Television Programmes on ASD made me to treat ASD person(s) better and accept them as an integral part of the society.	7 (3.3%)	81 (38.4.7%)	104 (49.3%)	19 (9.0%)

Television Programmes on ASD made me to avoid behaviours that might stigmatize ASD person(s) and their family	3 (1.4%)	85 (40.1%)	91 (43.1%)	32 (15.2%)
Television Programmes on ASD made me to avoid behaviours that might discriminate against ASD person(s) and their family	5 (2.4%)	84 (39.8%)	87 (41.2%)	35 (16.6%)

Table 5 implies that even after exposure to Television Programs on ASD, only about 58% of the respondents changed their attitude positively towards ASD persons and their family by not blaming the parents, showing more understanding and accepting them as integral members of the society to avoid stigmatization and discrimination.

V. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Research question one revealed that some of the respondents (27%) do not have the knowledge of ASD, whilst only 73% of the respondents have the knowledge of ASD but perceive ASD differently. The respondents attributed different meanings to ASD with about 45% of the respondents having misconception of what ASD really means. The study agrees with the findings of [25] which state that the level of awareness of autism is still low in Nigeria, and this was corroborated by the findings of [29] and [32] who opined that the population lack awareness and knowledge regarding autism.

Findings on Research question 2 reveals that respondents have access to television and are aware of television programmes on ASD, but only an average percentage of 54.8% of the overall respondents are actually exposed to Television programme on ASD. It can be concluded from the response of the respondents that despite their awareness of Television programme on ASD, there is low level of exposure to television programs on ASD because it was revealed that majority of the respondents indicated that they only sometimes watch television programs on ASD. This might be due to the inadequacy of television programs on ASD as revealed from the findings of research question 3, which implied that the different television programmes on ASD are not adequate for creating awareness on ASD as shown on Table 3. The inadequacy of television programmes may result to lack of awareness and negative perception towards people who have ASD, which can lead to stigmatization and discrimination of autistics persons. This finding also agrees with the study of [6] who asserts that enlightenment programmes and paid advertisements are needed on television media with the aim of increasing ASD awareness and education among the public. The results of this study shows that television media are not adequately socially responsible to the society as stipulated in the social responsibility theory because of the inadequate television programmes aired, which is not giving satisfactory sensitization and awareness on ASD.

Furthermore, findings on research question 4 revealed that about 58% of the respondents agreed that their perception and attitude changed positively towards people who have ASD after being exposed to television programs on ASD while about 42% of respondents disagreed. It can be concluded from the response of the respondents that exposure to television programs on ASD gave them more understanding of ASD behavioural characteristics as revealed in Table 4, this influenced the perception and attitude of people towards ASD person(s) and family positively because about 58% of the respondents indicated that Television Programmes on ASD made them to stop blaming parents of ASD persons and also made them to understand that they can be friends with autistic person(s) and family. This finding agrees with the study of [6] who opined that the important role media plays in the society as to informs, entertain and educate the public. Thus the role of the media among others involve informing and educating the public about what ASD is, in an attempt to change the public perception and attitude towards ASD person(s) and their family. It also collaborates the findings of [30], who posits that the impact of TV bring about greater awareness of and sympathy/empathy for people with high functioning autism and their families. This study also agreed with social learning theory because some of the respondents were able to learn from the television programmes on ASD which contributed to their social reality and awareness of ASD. However, more public awareness programmes on ASD still needs to be put in place by television stations to prevent stigmatization and discrimination of autistics persons, as considerable number of respondents (42%) still have negative perception and attitude towards persons with ASD. This agrees with the findings of [31] who suggested that the public awareness about ASD needs improvement as considerable misconceptions and misinformation were identified in their findings.

VI. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the television programmes on ASD is not satisfactorily providing adequate awareness on ASD, though it influenced some of the respondents who were exposed to television programmes on ASD. There was a positive change in their perception and attitude towards autistic person(s) and their family after such exposure. However, the Nigerian television media still needs to work more in terms of producing

more programmes on autism that will be aired frequently to enlighten and sensitize people on ASD to prevent discrimination and stigmatization.

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