

## Autism: Awareness and Perception among Malaysian Nursing Students in Sabah

### ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a developmental disability that can cause significant social, communication and behavioral challenges. According to the 2017 survey by the Ministry of Health Malaysia, children between the ages of 18 to 26 months showed ASD occurs approximately 1.6 in 1000 children. In Sabah, 400 autistic children had been registered under Sabah Autism Society (SAS). The increasing prevalence of ASD had become a major concern not only to the parents but to the community. A correct understanding and perception about ASD are crucial especially to the nursing profession as they must be able to educate caregiver on how to manage patients with ASD. **Methods:** This is a quantitative study using a cross-sectional approach. The respondents are all nursing students in Sabah. The type of sampling is purposive, which is using snowball sampling methods. Research instruments were developed and distributed to all nursing colleges in Sabah. **Results:** A total of 115 students responded. The majority of age is within range of 18–20 years old and female students. Fifty percents (50%) respondents perceived that of autism is a socio-emotional and neuro-developmental disorder with a non-verbal behaviors' impairment, curable disorder with proper treatment. More than fifty percent (50%) disagree that autistic child does not want friends and equivalent stand on the statement about autistic child can live independently. Ninety five percent (90%) agree that social media plays an important platform to deliver facts about autism, and health care provider remains as a key role to increase the level of awareness to the community. **Conclusion:** Results of this study revealed that nursing students in Sabah have a good awareness and perception towards autistic disorder. Nursing students in Sabah agree that social media plays a vital part to increase the level of awareness and perception.