

MEDIA REPRESENTATION AND STATISTICAL IMPACT OF STEREOTYPES ASSOCIATED WITH AUTISM

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MEDIA VA STATISTIKADA AUTIZM SINDROMI BILAN BOG'LIQ STEREOTIPLARNING TA'SIRI

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ВЛИЯНИЕ НА МЕДИА И СТАТИСТИКУ СТЕРЕОТИПОВ, СВЯЗАННЫХ С СИНДРОМОМ АУТИЗМА

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Abstract. This article explores the impact of media representation and existing stereotypes on public perception and statistical visibility of individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). The research focuses on how media portrayals influence both social attitudes and the availability of reliable statistical data. A sociological survey conducted as part of the study revealed key factors contributing to the social isolation of individuals with ASD.

Analysis of media content — both international and Uzbek — demonstrates that autism is often depicted through the lens of exceptionality, associating it with extraordinary talents or “magical” abilities. Such portrayals, while seemingly positive, contribute to an idealized and often misleading perception of the condition, overshadowing real-life challenges faced by individuals with ASD. The study also highlights a significant gap in Uzbekistan’s statistical data regarding autism. This lack of accurate information is largely rooted in persistent societal stereotypes and insufficient public awareness. The article argues that if the media provided more accurate and comprehensive coverage of autism, it would help shift public opinion, encourage formal recognition and registration of individuals with ASD, and support the development of targeted assistance programs. Ultimately, such efforts could foster the establishment of foundations and non-governmental organizations dedicated to supporting individuals with autism across the country.

Keywords: autism; stereotype; syndrome; values; public opinion.

Annotatsiya. Ushbu maqola autizm spektr buzilishlari (ASB) bo'lgan shaxslar haqidagi jamiyat tasavvurini shakllantirishda ommaviy axborot vositalari va stereotiplarning ta'sirini tahlil qilishga bag'ishlangan. Tadqiqot markazida — autizmning media orqali yoritilishi va buning statistik ma'lumotlar shakllanishiga qanday ta'sir ko'rsatayotgani tahlil qilinadi. Ijtimoiy so'rov natijalari ASB bo'lgan shaxslarning ijtimoiy inkor va izolyatsiyaga uchrashi sabablari aniqlanishiga yordam berdi. Media materiallar tahlili shuni ko'rsatdiki, ko'pincha autizm “geniallik” yoki g'ayrioddiy qobiliyatlar bilan bog'langan holda yoritiladi. Bu esa jamiyatda haqiqatga mos kelmaydigan, ideal tasavvurlarni yuzaga keltiradi. Bunday holat autizmning murakkabligi va real ehtiyojlarini e'tiborsiz qoldiradi. Tadqiqotda, shuningdek, O'zbekistonda autizm bo'yicha ishonchli statistik ma'lumotlarning yo'qligiga ham e'tibor qaratilgan. Bu holat, asosan, jamiyatdagi mavjud stereotiplar va noto'g'ri axborotlar bilan bog'liq. Agar OAV autizmni xolis va keng qamrovli yoritganida, bu nafaqat jamoatchilik fikrini o'zgartirishga, balki bu shaxslarni rasmiy hisobga olish va ularga yordam ko'rsatish mexanizmlarini yaratishga ham turtki bo'lardi. Tadqiqotda bunday yondashuv O'zbekistonda autizmga ega shaxslarni qo'llab-quvvatlovchi jamg'armalar va nodavlat notijorat tashkilotlarini yaratish uchun muhim qadam sifatida ko'riladi.

Kalit so'zlar: autizm; stereotip; sindrom; qadiryat; ijtimoiy fikr.

Аннотация. Статья посвящена анализу влияния медиа и стереотипов на формирование общественного мнения и статистического представления о людях с расстройствами аутистического спектра (РАС). В центре внимания — то, как стереотипное освещение аутизма в информационном пространстве мешает объективному учёту и полноценному включению таких людей в общественную жизнь. В рамках исследования был проведён социологический опрос, результаты которого выявили ключевые причины социальной изоляции лиц с РАС. Особое внимание уделено анализу медиа-репрезентаций аутизма: в большинстве узбекских и зарубежных материалов синдром изображается через призму исключительности — как состояние, сопровождающееся «гениальностью» или необычными способностями. Подобная художественная гиперболизация, как показано в исследовании, приводит к искажённому восприятию аутизма, игнорируя реальные трудности и потребности людей с РАС. В работе подчёркивается, что медиа-влияние способствует укоренению стереотипов, которые, в свою очередь, препятствуют формированию точной статистики по данному диагнозу в Узбекистане. Отсутствие достоверной информации затрудняет создание эффективных программ поддержки и институтов помощи. В качестве возможного решения предложено усиление роли СМИ в формировании достоверного и инклюзивного образа людей с аутизмом и внедрение систематизированного статистического учёта.

Ключевые слова: аутизм; медиа; стереотип; статистика; общественное мнение.

Introduction

The formation of a nation is deeply rooted in its unique system of values. These values are often built upon traditions and customs specific to that nation. While values typically carry a positive connotation, they can also reflect negative aspects — stereotypes. When a society lacks a

sufficient level of social awareness, it becomes challenging to distinguish between values and stereotypes. This confusion may cause significant societal problems, hindering progress across various sectors and preventing the nation from advancing alongside developed countries.

The term "stereotype" was introduced into academic discourse by American journalist, political commentator, and writer Walter Lippmann (1889–1974). In his seminal work *Public Opinion* (1922), Lippmann stated, "Stereotypes affirm our identity and position within society, and they reflect the values embedded in our consciousness, including our rights" [Dilek İmançer 2004, page 4]. He emphasized that stereotypes carry an emotional dimension. Lippmann argues that before external information reaches our rational understanding, it is first filtered through our emotions, which shape how we perceive and react to that information, ultimately giving rise to stereotypes.

In social psychology, a **stereotype** is any commonly accepted idea intended to represent an entire group of people or behaviors, typically regarding certain categories of individuals or specific behavior patterns. These ideas or beliefs **may or may not reflect reality**. As in other fields, in psychology, there are various conceptualizations and theories about stereotypes that are often general but can also include contradictory elements [Zuckerman & Hamilton 2002: 34].

Stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination are interrelated but recognized as distinct concepts. Stereotypes are often the **cognitive component**, usually unconscious; **prejudice** represents the **affective (emotional) component** of stereotypes, while **discrimination** constitutes the **behavioral component** of inappropriate responses. Stereotypes related to **intergroup relations** reflect assumptions and beliefs about traits that are attributed to group members as a whole, rather than their individual characteristics [Fiske 1998: 87].

In order to identify stereotype-based perceptions surrounding autism spectrum disorder — an issue that has become a global concern — a small-scale study was conducted. Consistent with Lippmann's assertion regarding the emotional roots of stereotypes, the research process further confirmed this connection. The survey involved parents of children diagnosed with ASD. However, due to the emotional sensitivity of the topic, especially when discussing their own children, only 15 individuals out of a total of 1,065 contacted participants agreed to take part in the survey.

Before discussing the results of the survey, let us first provide some information about autism spectrum disorder. So, what is autism?

Autism (from the Greek word "*autos*" meaning "*self*") is a unique psychological condition in which the individual does not seek communication with the outside world or people around them. They prefer solitude. The person may repeat the same behaviors and words. A child diagnosed with autism lives in their own world. Their way of thinking is different from that of others. Their behavior is often unrelated to real-world situations. Emotional experiences play a central role in their actions (*Interview with defektologist Imomkhojayeva, kun.uz, 2018*).

Autism arises due to a disruption in the development or functioning of the brain. The first signs of autism usually appear in children around the age of 2. In most cases, this condition is considered congenital. According to

medical classification, autism is categorized as a neurological disorder, but there is also the view that autism is not a disease, but rather a distinct developmental condition.

In Uzbek society, there are many negative descriptions and misconceptions related to the topic of autism. These include the widespread misunderstanding and misinterpretation of autism among the general public, harmful narratives, ineffectiveness of government rehabilitation programs, parents' inability to recognize early signs, and the stigmatized views toward individuals with autism in society.

There are several pressing issues related to autism in our society.

The first issue is the improper formation of statistics on children diagnosed with autism. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), in 2021, 1 in every 270 people worldwide was identified as having an autism spectrum disorder. The figures reported by the international organization are alarming. It states that currently, more than 10 million children around the world have been diagnosed with autism. This number increases by 11% each year. While in the 1990s only 1 in every 5,000 children was diagnosed with autism, today that figure has risen to 1 in every 50 children [Asrarxanova 2023: 3].

The United Kingdom has the highest rate of autism in the world, with a prevalence of 700.07 per 100,000 people. The UK has achieved remarkable progress in understanding and caring for individuals living with autism. In comparison, in Uzbekistan, autism is found in 384 out of every 100,000 children. Among countries worldwide, Uzbekistan ranks 78th. The Republican Center for Social Adaptation of Children is currently the main state institution providing free services to children with autism in the country [Asrarxanova 2023: 5]. However, this is insufficient to meet the needs of the large number of diagnosed individuals.

In Uzbekistan's statistical reports, it is still notable that autism is categorized under general mental and behavioral disorders, with the total number listed as 141,780. While WHO warns that the number of people affected by the syndrome is rapidly increasing, the inaccuracy of statistical figures in Uzbekistan suggests that this global issue is not being addressed with sufficient seriousness in the country. Many experts attribute this to the negative stereotypes present among the population.

According to defectologist Farhod Ortiqboyev, the lack of statistical data on ASD (Autism Spectrum Disorder) stems from stereotypes masked under the notion of "Uzbekness." That is, parents of children with autism often hide the condition out of concern for what neighbors and relatives might say. They experience shame because having a child "registered" with such a condition carries a social stigma [Interview with defectologist Ortiqboyev, *Daryo.uz*, 2024]. Since the diagnosis is given by a psychiatrist, parents fear that their child will be labelled officially, and that at school or kindergarten, their child will be pointed out by others. Apart from this, there are serious concerns among mothers that if they announce their child's condition to the public, they might face domestic abuse from their husband, criticism from in-laws or neighbors.

The research aimed to clarify such stereotypes. The survey was conducted online in a special social media group comprising 1,065 parents raising children with autism. A total of 15 women participated in the survey.

Although the questions were directed to both parents, all respondents turned out to be women.

Table 1.
Demographic information of the respondents

By age group:	20-28	26.7 %,
	28-35	53.3 %,
	35-45	20 %
	Above 45	0 %
By gender:	Female	100
	Male	0
By place of residence:	Andijan	13.3 %
	Bukhara	0
	Fergana	13.3 %
	Jizzakh	0
	Namangan	6.7 %
	Navoi	0
	Kashkadarya	13.3 %
	Karakalpakstan	0
	Samarkand	0
	Syrdarya	0
	Surkhandarya	13.3 %
	Tashkent	0
	Region	
	Khorezm	40 %
	Tashkent City	

There are many cases where parents of children with autism spectrum disorder choose to keep the diagnosis a secret due to negative feedbacks from others about their child. In some cases, they do not even want to inform their own family members. The reason for this is the violation of gender equality within the family. In most cases, mothers of children diagnosed with such conditions are considered guilty by their mothers-in-law or husbands, and such attitudes negatively affect family relationships. In order to prove this idea, we presented the following questionnaire to parents:

Table 2.
The Most Common Stereotypes Faced by Parents Raising Children with Autism

In your opinion, who is the most commonly blamed for the birth of a child diagnosed with autism?		
Mothers-in-law frequently blame their daughters-in-law	Husbands often blame their wives	Daughters-in-law blame their mothers-in-law(for instance, not allowing rest during pregnancy, not providing desired foods, etc.)
46,7 %	33,3%	20%

The negative opinions people have about children with autism spectrum disorder are often linked to a lack of understanding or knowledge about the diagnosis. This is one of the major issues in society. It is common for people to misinterpret the distinctive behaviors of such children as a sign of poor upbringing and to try to scold them, especially in public areas. There are even cases where they are kicked off public transport, or the parents are blamed for spoiling the child too much.

Children with autism may be overly active, or due to experiencing embarrassment in noisy places, they may behave unusually or express their discomfort through various sounds, screaming, or crying. To strangers, this may seem like a spoiled child throwing a tantrum. Since they look physically healthy and do not appear different on the outside, people often fail to recognize that these children are simply individuals with a unique world and behavioral differences. They may be unusually serious and mature for their age, or conversely, so innocent and childlike that they don't understand jokes or humor. As a result, such children often appear "abnormal" to others and are subject to various negative judgments. To identify these negative perceptions, we asked parents of children with autism the question: "What stereotypical attitudes have you noticed from others toward children with autism?" Participants shared their experiences by voting. According to the results, 66.6% of participants reported that religious stereotypes are the most frequently encountered. Common beliefs include statements such as, "The child was born with this diagnosis as a punishment for the parent's sins." When a child with autism displays unusual behavior, people often advice things like: "Take him to religious leader who prays over him and helps be spiritually healed." The remaining 33.3% of participants said they are often accused of not being able to raise their child properly or of excessively spoiling them.

In addition, the belief among parents of children with syndromes that society does not accept their children as they are also rooted in existing stereotypes. To identify stereotypes formed among parents in relation to society, we asked the question: **"Why do you think most parents try to hide the fact that their child has autism?"** 20 % responded, "The reason is they are ashamed of what people might say, or afraid that others will assault them or their child." 40 % said, "Because they are afraid of being excluded from society or being pointed at." 33.3 % answered, "Because they believe it will negatively affect their child's future." 6.7% said, "Because they don't want others to look at them with pity or show inappropriate sympathy."

Such stereotypes can hinder the accurate formation of statistics related to autism. If a family with a child diagnosed with autism chooses to keep the diagnosis a secret and does not contact the appropriate medical institutions, the state may remain unaware of these families and, as a result, may not provide them with the necessary support. For the government to effectively support such families, it is essential that statistical data include accurate figures.

There are also several other stereotypes that have emerged due to misconceptions about autism. For example: *"All autistic people are non-verbal"* — this is a false belief. Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a

broad and still-developing subject with various forms. Some individuals on the spectrum are capable of communicating freely.

Another stereotypical view is: *"All autistic people are gifted (e.g., in math or music, as often portrayed in the media)."* This is an overgeneralization. While some individuals may indeed possess exceptional talents, discovering and developing these abilities requires special attention and rehabilitation.

At this point, it is appropriate to clarify the narratives related to autism. In Uzbek society, there are significant gaps in understanding this concept. When people hear the word "autistic," many imagine either someone with "magical abilities" or, on the contrary, someone with intellectual disabilities who cannot control their actions. There are even quite a few who believe that autism and intellectual disability are the same. However, intellectual disability and autism are entirely separate concepts—an autistic person may have intellectual abilities superior to a neurotypical individual, or conversely, a non-autistic person may exhibit signs of cognitive delay. But this does not mean that all autistic individuals have intellectual disabilities.

The overly "positive" perception of autism — as extraordinary talent — or the excessively "negative" view — as madness — among the public is largely due to misinformation spread by the media. We saw an example of the former in the film "Rain Man", where the character "Raymond" is portrayed as a person with highly positive traits associated with the syndrome. The opposite portrayal can be seen in the Turkish TV series "Çukur", where the character "Alicho," an autistic man depicted as "crazy," sparked significant controversy in the Turkish media. This series was also widely watched by Uzbek audiences.

"Autism goes away in childhood or can be cured" — is also an incorrect stereotype. Autism is a lifelong condition and cannot be "cured." Although it is often referred to as a disease in the media, autism is a syndrome. It is a neurological condition in which individuals with autism differ from neurotypical individuals primarily in terms of social and communication skills. Autism is not a disease, and therefore, it cannot be cured [xabar.uz, 2023]. However, with proper support from society, the quality of life for individuals with autism can be significantly improved.

"They have no emotions" — this is also a misconception. A person with such a diagnosis may struggle to form emotional connections with the outside world. Although expressing their own emotional state and understanding others can be a challenging process for them, it is still possible.

They may face some difficulties in making eye contact, using gestures, facial expressions, and intonations to communicate with others. However, this does not mean they lack emotions. Autistic individuals feel emotions just like anyone else, but their way of expressing those emotions may be different.

"Autism is the result of parental mistakes or vaccines" — has been scientifically disproven. The exact causes of autism have not been fully determined to date, but genetic and environmental factors are considered to contribute to its development. It should not be misunderstood that autism is always inherited. It may remain dormant in certain parts of human

genetics, not appear for generations, and then, due to some reason or even for no clear reason, emerge again in a newborn child [xabar.uz, 2023].

“The idea that phones cause autism is also unfounded.” A large portion of the public claims that gadgets are a cause of ASD (Autism Spectrum Disorder). In particular, within the Uzbek mentality, this issue has become a family conflict. There are many cases where mothers-in-law, spouses, and even some unprofessional doctors blame mothers—especially daughters-in-law—for neglecting their children and “causing” the syndrome by keeping them occupied with phones or televisions.

However, autism should not be directly linked to phone use. While phone usage can influence the development of certain autistic traits, it is important to understand that autistic children often prefer solitude and one-on-one time. They tend to avoid social interaction and prefer to spend time alone with a phone. In this sense, phone use may be indirectly associated with autism-related behaviors, but that does not mean the condition is caused by phones [Interview with pediatrician Fotima Xoltayeva, *Daryo.uz*, 2024].

The existence of such stereotypes indicates that the general public lacks sufficient knowledge about autism spectrum disorder. These stereotypes, in turn, adapt to, change with, and manifest through the local mentality. Addressing and eliminating these harmful misconceptions should be a top priority for the media.

Stereotypes about People with Autism in the Media

Foreign researchers have proven that most of the content created and shared through mass media and social networks to raise awareness about autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is far from the realities of everyday life. One such researcher, Theodoto Ressa, analyzed television shows and more than 20 films related to autism featured in mass media. His analysis shows that the media has ingrained the stereotype of individuals with autism as “geniuses” into the public consciousness. By examining various media products portraying the lives of people with ASD, the researcher concluded that mass media often misrepresents the autistic community. In his small-scale scientific study, he highlighted this issue in detail.

The research concludes that individuals with autism are not necessarily magical savants like the character in the 1988 film *Rain Man*, and that media products should be created with the understanding that, in real life, the condition is not always as “positive” as often portrayed [Ressa 2022: 25]

Modern U.S. media increasingly depicts autism in an overly “positive” light. For example, fictional characters with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) traits are portrayed in shows like *Atypical*, *Touch*, and *The Good Doctor*. These portrayals idealize ASD traits to the extent that they do not reflect the real-life experiences of most individuals on the spectrum. In these American comedy-dramas, autistic individuals are often shown as white, heterosexual men from middle-class backgrounds who possess extraordinary talents. These depictions fail to represent the true diversity within the autism community.

As a result, two major misleading strategies have emerged in media representation: false balance and false identification.

From the above analysis, it can be concluded that American media is not neutral in its portrayal of ASD. Today, media functions as an informative, entertaining, educational, and persuasive force. Therefore, it is essential for media consumers to develop critical literacy when engaging with content based on autism spectrum disorder [Ressa 2022].

Supporting evidence for Theodoto Ressa's arguments can also be found in the joint research of Turkish scholars Sirri Serhat Serter and Serdar Yıldız. These researchers conducted extensive academic work on how autism is represented in the media.

Their research shows that in Turkey, families directly affected by autism, as well as broader public awareness and understanding of the disorder, remain extremely limited. In general, the concerns and challenges reported by families are largely unchanged from previous autism-focused studies. The most frequently cited problems by families raising children with autism are still social exclusion and negative experiences in interpersonal relationships [Sirri Serhat Serter and Serdar Yıldız 2021]. Eliminating these problems depends heavily on how the media positions itself when covering ASD. Providing the public with accurate knowledge and drawing the attention of relevant authorities to the issue is a key responsibility of the media.

Turkish researchers conducted a survey through Instagram and Facebook. The participants included individuals from various geographic and demographic groups, even well-known bloggers, actors, and actresses. In response to the question, *"Do you think the media is accurately representing the topic of autism?"*, 13.7 % answered "Yes," 63.6% answered "No," and 22.7 % said "I have no opinion." When asked, *"Do you think the characters with autism depicted in the media accurately reflect real-life individuals with the diagnosis?"*, 23.6 % responded "Yes," 51.0% said "No," and 25.4% answered "I have no opinion" [Serter & Yıldız 2021: 19].

The stereotype of individuals with autism being "magical" or savant-like is also seen in Qatari print media. Qatari researchers conducted a content analysis study titled *"Portrayal of Autism Spectrum Disorder and Its Treatments in Qatar's Leading Newspapers."* They examined 178 journalistic articles published in the country's leading newspapers between August 2019 and September 2020. Of these, 88 were in English and 90 in Arabic.

Similar to the portrayals seen in American and Turkish media, Qatari print publications also depict autism in an overly positive and embellished manner. This leads to the formation of misconceptions among the public about people with this diagnosis. The coverage of autism in Qatar does not differ significantly from that in other countries; the articles often feature exaggerated language and are written in a monotonous style. Furthermore, these articles—despite addressing a global issue—are often placed in the middle sections or supplementary pages of newspapers, indicating that the matter is not being taken seriously within the country.

Media content addressing such a global issue should not merely highlight the positive attributes of people with autism but must also

present their real-life experiences and provide factual information about available treatments [Zolezzi, Habib, Saadia, & Elamin 2020: 12].

All three of the studies mentioned above emphasize the existence of a stereotypical view in the media that portrays individuals with autism as extremely intelligent, highly gifted, and talented. This contributes to the development of misconceptions among the audience. It is the responsibility of the media to reveal the true nature of the condition. If autism is presented to the public only through fictionalized portrayals, then efforts to address the issue in practical terms may also be taken less seriously, overshadowed by artistic embellishment.

Such a positive perception of ASD (Autism Spectrum Disorder) is also frequently observed in the Uzbek media landscape. Several articles from digital media sources can be cited as examples. In most of these articles, the lives of famous people with autism are presented as role models, creating the impression that all individuals diagnosed with autism possess similar extraordinary abilities. For example: *“...Albert Einstein, Michelangelo, Isaac Newton, Mozart — these geniuses were also believed to have had the same diagnosis (referring to autism). Nevertheless, they not only led normal lives but also gained fame through their intelligence and talent. Therefore, autism is neither a reason for exclusion from society nor a disability—it merely requires the right treatment...”* (kun.uz, 2019)

Another example: *“...They don’t make eye contact with you, rarely smile. They may seem indifferent to their surroundings, but great talents are hidden within them. They are the “rain children”...”* (kun.uz, 2020)

“...Look around, there are non-autistic people who are unemployed or stuck in low-status jobs. And there are autistic individuals who are scientists, actors, creatives, or millionaires. Autism does not hinder success. Autistic people live among us. We only need to understand them, accept them, and provide a little support early in life...” (xabar.uz, 2023)

“...Bill Gates, Charles Darwin, Steve Jobs, Isaac Newton—the list of famous figures associated with autism goes on. Many of the developers in Silicon Valley are also believed to be on the spectrum...” (daryo.uz, 2021)

Such examples artistically romanticize autism, leading media consumers to believe that all children with autism are prodigies. In reality, autism is divided into two main categories: **high-functioning autism** and **low-functioning autism**. People with high-functioning autism can often live relatively independently in everyday life. They may display repetitive behaviors, struggle with social interaction, and prefer routine tasks over interpersonal engagement. Meanwhile, low-functioning autism is frequently accompanied by comorbid health issues such as intellectual disability or motor impairments, requiring continuous care and support [xabar.uz, 2023].

From the above, we can conclude that portraying autism realistically in the media helps society develop a proper understanding of people with the diagnosis. It also increases public awareness about ASD, dismantling entrenched stereotypes. As a result, parents of children with autism may become more confident in the community’s ability to accept their children as they are. Being “registered” is not a negative thing—it can open new doors and opportunities for building a better future for their children. Including children in statistical data could contribute to the emergence of a

larger autism community, potentially leading to the establishment of dedicated foundations or charitable organizations.

To eliminate the stereotypes analyzed in this study, several requirements must be established by society and the media. If these steps are implemented gradually, the role and position of autistic individuals in society will be strengthened. Below are the key demands and recommendations for the media:

— **Raising public awareness about autism spectrum disorder:** To achieve this, mass media must provide more information through public service announcements, documentaries, and roundtable discussions. Additionally, organizing autism-focused events, seminars, webinars, and charity campaigns with the involvement of professionals is essential for spreading accurate and widespread information.

The **United Nations** has designated **April 2** as *World Autism Awareness Day*. Since 2008, this day has been used to highlight the importance of early diagnosis, access to treatment for children with autism, and raising public awareness about the condition. In honor of this day, organizing training sessions in educational institutions could serve as an effective solution.

— **Media products must be based on real-life stories:** This helps families raising autistic children overcome confusion and fear, and aids in planning for the future. As previously discussed, an autism diagnosis does not always imply extraordinary abilities. Instead, it often requires structured rehabilitation steps to discover and support the child's true potential. Therefore, journalistic materials and interviews with specialists should focus on explaining this reality.

— **Producing media content that shares the life experiences of individuals with autism:** Such materials can support the integration of autistic individuals into society. Creating reports and interviews that show these individuals can live meaningful, inspirational lives helps to dismantle unfounded negative stereotypes.

— **Creating guides on treatment procedures and approaches:** This involves bringing in professionals and launching informative talk shows or podcasts. Such content helps regulate the actions of entrepreneurs who promote autism "cures" for profit. It also prevents families affected by autism from falling victim to misleading advertising and scams.

This increasingly relevant topic was recently addressed in a modern media format by the *Women's Club* project on YouTube. On **May 9, 2025**, they released a podcast titled "*Has Autism Become a Business?*" which garnered **34,779 views**. The episode raised critical issues, such as the absence of a standardized treatment system, a shortage of centers specializing in autism, high costs at private centers, and a lack of qualified specialists. However, the podcast did not offer any concrete solutions. The audience was not informed about how to properly rehabilitate an autistic child, which therapies are appropriate, or which services are profit-driven and unsuitable for diagnosed children.

— **The media should promote the protection and financial support of the growing autistic community:** This includes highlighting the importance of creating autistic communities, establishing funds and nonprofit organizations, and advocating for the inclusion, education,

treatment, and self-employment of individuals with autism. The media can draw the attention of policymakers to these issues and encourage the public to participate in charitable rehabilitation efforts.

Additionally, **disseminating accurate information through medical institutions** can also be an effective strategy. Creating autism information corners in clinics and distributing easy-to-understand brochures written in plain language through family doctors can prevent the spread of harmful stereotypes. Providing short-term training for medical professionals on the early detection of ASD and initial rehabilitation guidance can also help address this issue.

If these recommendations are effectively implemented, parents will develop the ability to recognize early signs of autism, and professionals will begin to approach the condition as a serious global issue that requires systematic life-adaptation strategies. As a result, families raising children with autism will receive meaningful support, leading to significant positive changes.

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