

Barbara Skawina
University of Rzeszów
College of Social Sciences

College of Social Sciences
Institute of Sociology

Thesis supervisor: Andrzej Lipczyński PhD

DOCTORAL DISSERTATION SUMMARY

Social adaptation of people with autism and Asperger syndrome

Sociological analysis

The objective of research conducted within this dissertation was to reveal the social situation of people with autism and Asperger syndrome and the level of their social adaptation. This dissertation is the attempt to focus attention on increase in the number of people with autism spectrum disorders in society, their growing difficulties in adaptation, low social awareness of the subject, and the lack of systemic health care, treatments, therapies, and educational programs for those people. The interpretation of gathered research material and conclusions based on conducted research analysis led to the affirmation that the problem analysed in this paper forms a significant issue in the light of social sciences.

It must be emphasised, that unprecedented civilisation progress and social development, that has been taking place since the beginning of 21st century, stimulates the growing number of medical conditions and disorders among children, teenagers and adults. Nowadays, due to gradually increasing incidence of health care problems and their economic, social, and legal implications, the matter becomes even more important. Apart from analysing the causes of growing incidence of disorders, it is equally important to solve the problems of education, treatment, and therapy, which might improve the ability of surveyed people to adapt socially and live independently.

Autism is characterised by difficulties with social interaction, deficiency in speech and communication skills, restricted behaviour, and impairment of activity and interest. Therefore, both autism and Asperger syndrome are permanent development disorders with poor prognosis for full treatment or regression of symptoms. The level of social adaptation of the surveyed that affects their daily life depends on early diagnosis

of the disorder, neuro-biological conditions, access to recovery methods, but what is also important, it relies on the commitment of family members in the process of socialisation, therapy, and rehabilitation.

Within the range of this work, it was assumed that social adaptation of a person is a result of the balance in all aspects of their voluntary activity, but is also conditioned by the environment consisting of all elements required for proper functioning of the individual. The subject matter of this dissertation, participation and empirical conclusions on diagnosing autism as a social problem confirm the research position concluding that social interaction and adaptation of people with autism and Asperger syndrome are based on family socialisation and secondary socialisation, together with language and communication skills learned through this socialisation. It is worth saying that both care specialists and family members may and should work out these skills with patients simultaneously, in a way that provides a complementary treatment. Otherwise, the chances of people with autism spectrum disorders, even those with high cognitive potential, to find a place in social structure are poor. The quality research conducted in reference to this dissertation on social adaptation of people with autism spectrum disorders proved that many of them could be actively socialised, trained and recovered, in order to participate in social life.

The paper consists of three parts. The first one is a theoretical base of conducted research including selected sociological and clinical concepts on social adaptation and autism spectrum, but also the concepts of socialisation, theory of symbolic interactionism by George H. Mead and Herbert Blumer, and socio-linguistic matters. The methodology part presents the research rules, objectives, selection of methods, description of research trial, and research problems stipulated in the paper. The research was conducted through detailed individual interviews, and the desk research method. The project covered 53 persons with autism spectrum disorders (children, teenagers and adults). The empirical part consists of the description of research in six aspects of social activity of people with autism spectrum disorders such as family environment, school, participation in public life, use of digital media, professional interaction, and social communication. The analysis was provided in the form of tables, charts, and diagrams complemented by comments of the persons with autism or Asperger syndrome, their parents, and opinions from teachers and educators.

The empirical analysis led to the extraction of three types of social adaptation within the group of people with autism or Asperger syndrome and determination of the criteria of this distinction. In order to present effective functional solutions, the concluding chapter of the paper features practical approach to teaching people with autism spectrum disorders their adaptation skills.

Key words: autism, Asperger syndrome, social adaptation, social development, socialisation, social personality, social communication

Abstract: Doctoral dissertation titled “*Social adaptation of people with autism and Asperger syndrome Sociological analysis*” inquires the problem of social adaptation abilities of persons with diagnosed autism spectrum disorders. The research was conducted through detailed individual interviews and the desk research method in major areas of social activity such as family, school, digital media, work, and social communication. The analysis and conclusions led to the presentation of typology of social adaptation in the group of people with autism spectrum disorders. Additionally, the practical solutions for shaping adaptation skills in researched group were proposed.

The paper consists of eight chapters, which are materially structured in three parts: theoretical, methodological, and empirical.