

The Role of Social Workers in the Care of Autism: A Systematic Literature Review

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Abstract

The Social Work profession is a caring professional whose primary mission is to assist in meeting the basic needs of individuals, families, and communities, especially the vulnerable, the oppressed, and other key populations, through different forms of empowerment. Included in these groups are persons with autism spectrum disorder, whose care involves various professionals. The role of professionals like psychiatric doctors and nurses, psychologists, behavioral therapists, and occupational therapists are well defined but the role of social workers, who are presumably the first contact with autistic people, is not yet clearly defined. This study explores the opinions of various scholars on the roles of social workers in the care of autism spectrum disorder with the aim of systematizing these different opinions, thereby delineating the professional responsibilities of social workers in the care of autism. The method used in this study is the systematic literature review of journal articles, books, and conference presentations whose main discussions concern the roles of social workers in the care of persons with autism. The review shows that social workers do have a significant role to play in the care of autism, even though the community of health professionals and the caregivers of persons with autism are not aware of the full scope of the role of social workers in the care of autism. The study recommends that this gap needs to be bridged with increased awareness and sensitization. Also, social work educators need to include the care of persons with disability in the social work curriculum in the various training institutions.

Keywords: Autism, Care, Role, Social Workers.

Introduction

Over the years, social workers have been involved in various community activities. Some of these efforts by social workers have been self-prompted without any government backing. Recognizing the need to clearly define the role of social workers, the international federation of social workers (IFSW) general meeting and the IASSW general assembly in July 2014 defined the social work profession as a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion and the empowerment and liberation of people [1]. Social work as a profession aims to

enhance the well-being of individuals and help to meet the basic needs of people, especially the vulnerable, and work towards empowering them, i.e., the vulnerable, oppressed, and those living in poverty [2]. The profession strives to involve people at all levels, systems, and structures. Social workers are change agents in the lives of the individuals, families, and communities they serve. Hence, one area social workers can and should function prominently is in the care of disability because the perception of people about disability is one major area that needs change.

One such disability, that is gaining traction in modern times is autism spectrum disorder. Leo

Kanner and Hans Asperger were the first to define the autism spectrum disorder (hereafter referred to as ASD/autistic/autism). Autism spectrum disorder is a neurodevelopmental disorder characterized by difficulty in social interaction, repetitive behaviors, and verbal, or nonverbal communication. People living with autism see, experience, and understand the world differently. Autism, however, affects everyone differently and at varying degrees [3]. Seeing autism as a disability precludes recognizing the potential in autistic people. As the prevalence of autism rises, so does healthcare utilization by this target population because individuals with autism, like others with developmental disabilities, are growing older, living longer, and acquiring many of the health concerns of the neuro-typical aging population [4]. The health needs of autistic individuals could be because of social challenges they experience so these may not be resolved unless the social disabilities are catered for. Catering for these social challenges is the domain of social workers.

Social workers tackle the issues surrounding autism using different approaches. One of the ways social workers effect change in the autistic community is through the person-in-environment approach. According to [5] person-in-environment perspective in social work is a practice-guiding principle that shows the importance of understanding an individual and the individual's behavior in his/her environment looking at the context where the individual lives and interacts.

Another approach has been discussed in this article is neuro-diversity, which is a term used to describe the unique differences in each person on the autism spectrum and those who have other neurological differences such as learning disorders or attention deficit disorder [6]. The proponents of neurodiversity argue that the concept of normality is subjective and contextual. [7] Supporters of the neurodiversity movement advocate the view that autistic differences are due to natural human variation and suggest that characteristics of persons on the

autism spectrum represent a distinctive cognitive style, not a flaw or disease [8]. Accurate knowledge on autism and the paradigms by the social worker will ensure them been able to provide support towards self-determination by persons with autism and their families. [9].

Delving into the experiences of people with autism, areas where the skills of social workers can be deployed become obvious. Therefore, it is the aim of this study to answer the research question: what is the role of social workers in the care of autism?

Materials and Methods

Study Area

This study is about the role of social workers in the care of autism with the aim of clearly defining the full scope of the role of social workers from the opinions of different researchers as found in various publications found on Google Scholar search of the title "the role of social workers in the care of autism. [10] posited that Google scholar is a good new source for bibliometric data.

The researchers argued that the use of Google scholar particularly benefits academics publishing in sources that are not well covered in Thomson ISI Web of Knowledge (ISI) and other sources of the database. [10] also stated that the Google scholar metrics provide additional advantages over the Journal Impact Factors (JIF) and that the free availability of Google scholar gives learners the opportunity to democratize their citation analysis and this makes it possible to access academically to citation data regardless of their institution's financial means.

Sample Size

This study is a bibliometric study, and a total of 41 journals written by various researchers working in different countries were used for this study. The journals were original journals written on the role of social workers in the care of autism.

Data Collection

The bibliometric data was collected using Google Scholar. Screening of the data was done using the PRISMA framework [11]; this framework is the standard for this systematic review. The eligibility and inclusion of articles in this review is critical and to have a very good review is to include the best possible articles for the study. Journals written in English was accepted, as it is the acceptable language due to its universal acceptability.

The research article from the database is selected only from one subject social science; also, papers from all journals of the database were considered for more better and quality results. The open-access articles are considered for the review [12].

The PRISMA framework outlines four stages:

1. Identification of data sources.
2. Screening of data.
3. Eligibility criteria.
4. Inclusion criteria.

Identification

Google Scholar has been shown to be a rich source of bibliometric data with some added advantages compared to more traditional sources like Web of Science and other databases. [10] A search was made on Google scholar using the keywords: role of social worker, care of autism with the advanced search option of “only in the title”. The result of the search was added to Mendeley software using the Mendeley plugin in Google Chrome. The initial search generated a total of 1338 documents which included books, published journals, online articles, and conference publications.

Screening of Data

After the initial search, the data table was imported into Zotero reference software and converted to CSV format. The CSV file was imported into Microsoft Excel 2016. First, non-English journals were removed to leave a total of 600. Then, duplicate copies and blank Google documents included in the initial data were

removed. 200 documents were removed from the 600 files so the remaining 400 documents. Screening by title was done those studies irrelevant to the topic of the review were removed, and those without records were also removed, leaving 100 documents. After full-text article assessment for eligibility and other reasons, there were 50 left. At the end of removing these files, a total of 41 documents were left. Groupings were made according to the similarity of the titles of the journal, books, and articles. Journal abstracts and books’ prefaces are read for thematic analysis, from which 5 themes were identified.

Eligibility Criteria

The following criteria are used to assess the data eligible for the bibliometric study:

1. The document must be written in English.
2. The document must address the role of social workers in the care of autism strictly.
3. The document must be on care provided by social workers.

Inclusion Criteria

The following inclusion criteria are adhered to:

1. The abstract of the document must be available.
2. The abstract must be complete.
3. Names of authors and publication information must be available.

Statistical Analysis

This study is a qualitative study, so descriptive analysis, content analysis, and thematic analysis were used.

Results and Discussion

The study is a systematic literature review that aims to explore the role of social workers in the care of autistic children. The study covers an analysis of books, journals, online articles, publications, and academic conference publications.

It was observed by the reviewer that there were few studies conducted in this area of study. A total of 41 documents were analyzed.

Table 1 shows that the earliest research work on the role of social workers was published in 1976.

Table 1. Publication Year and Number of Publications Per year

Year Wise Publications	
Publication Year	Count
1976	1
1996	1
2000	1
2005	1
2007	1
2008	1
2009	1
2012	5
2013	2
2014	2
2015	3
2016	9
2017	4
2018	1
2019	1
2020	4
2021	1
2022	2

The role of social workers in the care of autism has not been clearly defined. This is because little empirical research has been done to highlight the roles of social workers in the care of autistic children, adolescents, and adults. This can explain the data shown in Table 2, which indicates that only one book has been written on

the role of social workers in autism care. Also, only 2 conference presentations have been published on the role of social workers in the care of children with autism. This can be explained by the fact that interest in the role of social workers in the care of autism is still very low.

Table 2. Count of Journals and Books

Publication Base Count	
Item Type	Count
Journal Article publications	38
Books	1
Conference presentations	2

Table 3 shows a wide distribution of journals that have published articles on the role of social workers in autism care. Most of the journals have only published articles on the topic just

once. This can be a reflection of the general tendency of non-recognition of the importance of social workers in the care of autistic children.

This can partly be explained by the dominance of the medical model of care of autism compared to the social model of care of autism [13].

Table 3. Count Publication Per Journal

Publication per Journal	
Publication Title	Count
Academia	3
Journal of Research Innovation and Implications in Education (JRIIE)	1
ResearchGate	2
CSUSB ScholarWorks	1
University of St. Thomas, Minnesota St. St. Catherine University Social	1
University of St. Thomas, Minnesota St. St. Catherine University	1
Advances in Neurodevelopmental Disorders	1
Child Adolesc Soc Work J	1
Br. J. Social Wk.	1
J Autism Dev Disord	1
Journal of Intellectual Disability Research	1
Social Work in Health Care	2
Journal of Interprofessional Education & Practice	1
British Journal of Learning Disabilities	1
International Scholarly and Scientific Research & Innovation	1
e-Pedagogium	1
Louisiana State University LSU Digital Commons	1
Georgia State University ScholarWork	1
Canadian Journal of Family and Youth	1
British Journal of Social Work	1
Journal of Intellectual Disability	1
Revista de Investigaciones Universidad del Quindío	1
Health Services and Delivery Research	1
4th International Conference of Zakat Proceedings	1
Journal of Social Work Education	1
2013 NOHS National Conference Proceedings	1
Social Work in Mental Health ISSN:	1
Indian Social Science Journal	1
Asian Social Work Journal	1
Crisis Intervention	1
Health & Social Work Advance	1
Journal of Intellectual Disabilities	1
HPJSWP	1
Practice	1
Social Work Education	1

In a study exploring the emerging role of social workers in a primary health center in

Ontario, [14] reported that a main theme from the responses of the study participants was about

the challenges faced by social workers practicing in a medical model environment. Social workers who are more inclined to the social model of autistic care are relegated to a background role because of the confusion about their role created by the medical model.

As highlighted in [15] study, he quoted some responses given by some parents about the social workers they have met; he reported, “[Parents] characterized social workers as being judgmental, they are cold, and clinical in their approach and they lack knowledge about autism spectrum disorder. Some of the parents said they felt unclear about the social worker’s role on the staff “team” and they felt the social workers were unsure about this themselves. Some of the social workers were criticized by parents for

failing to follow through on promised referrals. In some instances, social workers were reported as making remarks such as, ‘*You are obviously neglecting this child*’ on their first meeting.

Table 4 shows that the most cited work is that of [16], followed closely by the works by [17] and [18]. The reason these three groups of researchers have been cited more than others could be that their studies involved issues in line with present thinking and model of care for autism. [16] view social workers as “Cultural Brokers”, in the sense that social workers try to understand and attune to the culture of the community they are serving and aim to provide a mix of services that factor in the culture of the people.

Table 4. Citation Count

Citation Count	
Author	Citation Count
Ridout, Susy	38
Mavole, Johnson; Mutisya, Mary; Wambulwa, Peter	5
Dlamini, Clement Nkosinathi	0
Theses, Electronic; Hopkins, Heather Nicole; Hopkins, Heather Nicole	0
Foster, Maureen V	6
Eveslage, Marnie	7
Anthony, Nicole; Campbell, Erica; Anthony, Nicole	3
Adams, Heidi; Sharon, Rueda; Kristen, J Bolin; Rankin, Lela; Eva, Williams	11
Preece, David	0
Werner, S	27
Dsw, Martin Nacman	32
Strunk, Julie; Leisen, Melissa; Schubert, Carolyn	39
Morrison, Aine; Bickerstaff, David; Taylor, Brian J; Trust, Social Care	4
Sahu, Jonathan; Aylott, Jill	2
Tomáš Hudec, Stanislava Ševčíková	0
Dinecola, Cassie	2
Littrell, Jill; Lacasse, Jeffrey R; Littrell, Jill; Lacasse, Jeffrey R	8
Kaitlyn Avery, Tricia van Rhijn and Kimberly Maich	0
Manthorpe, Jill; Cornes, Michelle; Halloran, Sue O; Joly, Louise	35
Summers, Jane; Bartha, Christina; Desarkar, Pushpal; Fineczko, Julia; Golding, Lew; Shahrami, Ali; Uranis, Christopher	7

Iannuzzi, Dorothea; Kennedy, Rob	14
Thuong, Nguyen Hiep; Tu, Kieu Van; Hieu, Nguyen Van	0
This, Reuse; Attribution, Creative Commons; By, C C; If, Takedown; Rose, White	4
Saleem, Shemaila	0
Martin, M.	39
Haney, Jolynn	2
Blankenship, Cecil; Langenbrunner, Mary; Kridler, Jamie; Taylor, Teresa Brooks; Walters, Alice	0
Haney, Jolynn L; Cullen, Jennifer A	11
Jasmine George	0
Social, Asian; Journal, Work	0
Wodarski, John S	10
Lindsay, Sally; Tétrault, Sylvie; Desmaris, Chantal; King, Gillian; Piérart, Genève	49
Wilkins, David	10
Karns, Heidi A	0
Kwan, Vivien; Cheung, Johnson Chun-sing; Kwan, Vivien	10
Roulstone, Alan; Roulstone, Alan	27
Morris, Rae; Muskat, Barbara; Greenblatt, Andrea	18
Preece & Jordan	17

The work of [19] on the dimension of culture has brought the importance of culture to both academic and professional communities. Hence, it is not a surprise that the work of [16] is most cited in the literature on the role of social workers in the care of autism. This could be a reflection on the increased awareness of the impact of culture in human interactions.

[17] emphasizes the support model of social work. This is in keeping with the modern trend of increased involvement of social workers in establishing support groups for different health-related issues. [18], in keeping with the 21st-century paradigm of collaborative efforts among the healthcare team, encourage that social workers should be visible and contributing members of the autism care team.

Thematic Analysis

The traditional role of social workers in the care of autism are usually in the area of counselling, referrals and linkages to needed resources and/or services; in this respect they do not only give information, but they follow up to

ensure the needed resources are obtained by the individual and/or their families. Also, the social workers' responsibilities include but are not limited to the following: assessing the client, creating and implementing a treatment plan, securing and refer needed resources, evaluating and monitor improvement as well as serve as client's advocate [20]. However, the social work profession is involved in much more than these. Some of these professional roles include organizers, advocates, case managers, educators, and facilitators, and they provide social support [21]. They are also involved in group therapy sessions in the multi-disciplinary team and are involved in the establishment of Autism Caregivers' Respite Services. Social workers' professional role is to assist autistic individuals, their families, and their communities to improve their capacities to meet their needs and strengthen social functions.

From all the journals selected, five main themes were identified. These include:

1. Advocacy to policymakers

2. Social support services
3. Linking to resources/services
4. Multi-disciplinary Approach to care
5. Awareness and sensitization of the public.

Advocacy to Policymakers

In 2000, the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) announced a new definition of social work that prominently included social justice. This underscores the primacy of social justice in the practice of social work. One of the core goals of social work is to establish and sustain social justice. [22] clearly affirms that social justice should be the organizing value of the social work profession. One of the most potent ways of achieving social justice is through advocacy [23]. Advocacy is one of the core functions of social workers as it positions social workers as unwavering support to ensure that service users are independent of service providers in the long run. They stand and speak for marginalized and vulnerable group until their voice is heard and acknowledged [24].

One of the recurring themes in the literature review about the role of social workers in the care of autism is advocacy to policymakers. The work of [25] adequately discussed the role of social workers advocating for social justice in policymaking. [26] also supports that social workers have a duty to promote the human rights, safety and well-being of autistic persons and ensure that they have access to the right services in a way that gives them a voice, and helps them stay safe and live a fulfilled life. Social workers play an integral role in advocating for social justice, delivering clinical services, and influencing policy [27]. The representation by social workers are invaluable to this high-profile population [28].

Social workers are better positioned to advocate for better policies and a more robust approach towards promoting social justice, they can also hone their skills in the process of diagnosis and participate in offering the best treatment through best practices as they promote the acceptance of neurodiversity. This becomes

useful as the autistic children's quality of life is improved if intervention is carried out early [29]. As advocates, they push forward the rights of others and work to obtain the resources they need by convincing the decision-makers of the legitimate needs and the rights of members of society, especially vulnerable groups [30]. Social work is very legally based, is policy-heavy, and relies upon a firm understanding of translating policy and guidance into real-world practice contexts [31]. Social workers as organizers are involved in organizing community activities which may include but are not limited to economic development, social gatherings, research, and policy meetings. Social workers also use evidence-based research to facilitate interventions and advocate for children and families [32]. As case managers, they are better able to influence policy change and advocate on a larger scale; this advocacy can occur at the local, state, national and international levels.

Social Support Services

Another theme identified from the literature is the role of social workers in offering social support to individuals with autism and their families. Social support is both formal and informal resources that provides instrumental, informational, and practical support to the target audience [33]. The model of care, support, and intervention for autistic children and their families has taken a holistic approach as it emphasizes the role of social work services [34]. The burden of care for autistic children is not only on the immediate family but also on the community and the larger society [33]. [3] explained that after the diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder, the immediate family are the primary provider of care and support to the autistic child but in order to prevent burnout, stress and depression, these caregivers need formal support [25]. To reinforce this supportive role, their immediate community needs education and awareness, while health providers (including social workers) need the knowledge

to educate parents on what services and support are available.

[3] in her study wrote extensively on the need for social support for autistic children and their families, as well as on home-based care as a form of support to the families. Also, in the study other kinds of support were discussed, and these include social care services for autistic children and their families, peer and/or caregiver support groups, and home-based care. [35] also discussed respite care for caregivers as a form of social support. Social care service is provided through counseling and referral to resources and services. Social workers and other health providers have established support groups that bring together caregivers of autistic individuals to support and strengthen one another. Social workers were encouraged to increase their home visit appointments to better help autistic children and their families navigate rough times and develop a bond with parents. This will also assist social workers to make a more accurate assessment of the client and their families in their natural environment, spot problems as they occur, and start interventions early. Respite care for the caregivers of autistic children is one of the most important types of care. In this form of care, the caregiver is given a period of time to rest, and this approach has proven to reduce pressure on them invariably [35].

Social workers have also been seen as cultural brokers by providing culturally sensitive care to vulnerable groups like immigrants. This aspect of care was brought to the fore as professional healthcare providers became aware of their biases, cultural or professional orientation stemming from their background and how this may have influenced their interaction with their patients. Some challenges encountered by social workers in the course of providing care, like language barriers, gender and generational differences, lack of knowledge of resources, discrepancies between clinicians and patients' cultural orientation and difficulties building rapport and trust are adequately managed by social workers as they link these families to

resources and mediate between cultural orientations during the course of providing care by other healthcare providers [16]. This is supported by [25], who stated that when caregivers have more social support, they can adopt a positive coping style which invariably is conducive to the rehabilitation and development of autistic children.

Social workers use their knowledge and skills to provide social services to autistic individuals, their families, and communities facing difficult problems that they cannot solve by themselves. In their social support activities, they facilitate home-based visits and support as well as establish support groups for social support and resilient care for peers and parents/caregivers. Because of their expertise in various areas, they are well suited as managers and supervisors. They also assist in accessing resources and services for autistic individuals, their families, and communities to address and prevent social problems which contribute to social security. Social workers help families improve their capacity to deal with and solve problems, find the needed resources, facilitate human-to-human interaction and human-to-environment interactions, promote social accountability, and influence social policies. Counseling in general and counseling for families with autistic children is one of the very important tasks of social workers, according to [36]. Social work has unique professional advantages, in that it meets the autistic child's caregiver's needs from multiple angles and in multiple dimensions. It helps caregivers reach a better living standard and benefit autistic children [25].

Linking to needed Resources/Services

Social workers acting as brokers do navigate systems in order to link clients to needed resources and services. They also facilitate interactions between the clients and the various resource persons (i.e., programs, agencies, and individual service providers) and strengthen these interactions [21]. Another one of the roles of social workers is linking autistic children to

support groups and philanthropists. They also assist the caregivers of autistic children to getting financial assistance from donors [37].

The helping profession of social workers come to bear when caregivers and family members of children with ASD are financially and mentally stressed as they struggle to find appropriate interventions and supportive resources. social workers also provide education and training to parents/caregivers and guardians, refer families to the appropriate services, and provide case management [32].

Social workers assigned on home-based intervention services provide necessary support to families by providing updated information about ASD, linking them to supportive resources, and meaningful linkage with the school systems. They also conduct and facilitate caregivers' training on managing physical, social, and emotional needs of individuals with ASD and their families, and get involved in sharing information with and seeking support from extended family members and community members [38].

Social workers are usually involved as key actors in raising awareness on the available resources and provide support at the individual, family, community, and societal levels. Also, there are direct and indirect ways in which school social workers support autistic children and their families [39]. Direct support includes their involvement in assessment processes, supporting and engaging family members, and providing support to other school staff members. Indirect roles include collaboration with multi-disciplinary teams and advocating policy change [39]. These supportive roles and the impact on the target audience extends over micro-, meso-, exo- and macro-system advancement [40].

According to [41], social workers working in health care settings can play a key role in enhancing family-centered care through crisis intervention, counselling, collaboration, advocacy, and resource gathering for autistic patients and their families [40]. As case managers, they are involved in locating services

and assisting in accessing these services. This is more pronounced in complex situations like the elderly, homeless individuals, people with chronic physical or mental health challenges, vulnerable children, etc. [37]. As facilitators, they facilitate group gatherings for community development, self-advocacy, and policy changes where group leaders are tasked [42]. The role of social workers on the healthcare sector is geared towards enhancing family-centered care i.e., through crisis intervention, counseling, collaboration, advocacy, and resource gathering for persons with autism and their families. The knowledge about autism spectrum disorder known to social worker will position them to be effectively supportive to autistic children and their families as this knowledge will ensure a better understanding and appreciation of their unique situation (their challenges and coping skills) [43]. Social workers are trained to examine the social and ecological systems that drive social and economic injustice and utilize interventions that can be delivered effectively in communities [41].

Multi-disciplinary Approach (Team)

World Health Organization (WHO) defines a multi-disciplinary approach as having different professionals come together to work towards a common goal for patients, families, caregivers, and communities to deliver the highest quality of care. Each professional member of the teamwork towards a common goal as each member is valued; each has a strong sense of purpose, and each requires trust and a sense of shared responsibility. [18] in their research study concluded that inter professional collaboration, using a multi-disciplinary approach, is the best practice model for the care and treatment of individuals with multidimensional health problems, like chronic illness and ASD.

As opined by [18], the conventional way of providing care to autistic individuals by professionals which was done independently by each provider, rather than inter professional collaboration in a multi-disciplinary approach

needs to change. As a result of the changing nature in the provision and delivery of healthcare in the 21st century, it is imperative to encourage multi-disciplinary approach among professional healthcare providers as this can contribute significantly to increased positive healthcare and educational outcomes for persons living with autism, because of the complex nature of autism spectrum disorder. Healthcare providers need to challenge and eradicate profession centrism when working with autistic individuals. To address the myriad of health issues associated with autistic children, such as seizures, sleep disorders, medication compliance, mental issues, and others; autistic children need care across many disciplines and by different health professionals, like psychiatrists, pediatricians, psychologists, social workers, speech and behavior therapists, occupational therapists, special educations, dietetics, and others. In conclusion, [18] opined that for healthcare providers and educators to holistically understand practice guidelines for working with autistic children and the role of each team member, there must be interprofessional collaboration of providers through a multi-disciplinary approach.

As part of recommendations made by [26] after conducting a study to better understand key areas in the context of social work practice with autistic individuals; It was recommended that social workers should take advantage of opportunities to work within a team to support children with autism as strong skilled social work involvement in care ensures a strong social care focus. The researcher also recommends that a network of specialist social workers and other practitioners should be established to ensure best practices and strong relationships should be built across agencies. The care management and treatment plan for individuals with autism usually involve multiple professionals. In this treatment plan, the providers communicate with each other and the individuals with ASD and their families to ensure that the treatment goals are met and progress is made [42].

School social workers have many roles in their work with children and other individuals with autism spectrum disorders including collaboration within a multi-disciplinary team, supporting other members of the child's ecosystem, and involving macro level practice [44]. According to [44], social workers collaborate with many individuals on behalf of children with autism spectrum disorders including parents, pediatricians, psychiatrists, therapists, psychologists, teachers, speech therapists, neurologists, and occupational therapists. This emphasizes that collaborating within a multi-disciplinary team is a role that school social workers are involved in at many levels depending on the individual they are consulting.

Awareness and Sensitization of the General Public

Social workers can serve as key actors to raise awareness and to provide support at individual, family, community, and societal levels [40]. As rightly observed by [9] there is a gap in social workers' knowledge about autism as very few studies were found highlighting the role of social workers in the care of autism in this review study; and this inadequate knowledge makes it difficult to effectively provide the needed assistance to autistic individuals and their families or carry out any form of advocacy on their behalf to ensure they have a voice. As social workers' knowledge on autism spectrum disorder improves, they will be able to provide much-needed support to autism individuals and their families [41].

Education is a critical tool for liberating the mind from the shackles of poverty and ignorance because it helps an individual to evaluate a problem and come up with alternative solutions [37] As knowledge and skills are offered to parents/caregivers and other family members, there is significant reductions in stress and anxiety, their coping skills is enhanced, there is improved parent-child interaction and communication, they better understand the

condition (ASD), there is improved efficacy and confidence and the parental quality of life improves [45]. Improving parent education to understand and navigate ASD has been noted as integrally important for supporting individuals with ASD [40]. There is need for more information and awareness creation amongst the general population especially parents or caregivers who need to note and be aware of the early warning signs. Though it has no known medical cure, it is treatable. Early and appropriate intervention can improve a child's prognosis [29]. As educators, social workers teach people how to develop much needed skills such as budgeting, the caring discipline of children, effective communication, meaning of medical diagnosis and prevention of violence. social workers also provide education and training to parents and guardians, refer families to the appropriate services, and provide case management [32].

As stated by [28], social work is a practice-based course, as many students point out in their first-year course feedback. [8] discussed disability and impairment in relation to both the medical and social models of disability, noting that the social model of disability perspective is consistent with the social work profession's person-in-environment approach [9]. The value of social workers as professional collaborators in the healthcare system is enhanced by increasing social worker knowledge and skills relevant to autism care and emphasizing the benefits and value of the role of social work which will eventually result in improved quality of patient and family-centered care and a higher satisfaction with healthcare services for children with autism and their families [41]. social workers are responsible for identifying effective treatments and creating early intervention plans

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to assist the child in improving, maintaining, adapting, and functioning within their learning environment [38].

Conclusion

In conclusion, this review has highlighted the gap in the holistic care offered to autistic children due to the lack or insufficient role meant to be delivered by social workers; this has shown that there is an urgent need to feature social workers more prominently in the care of autistic children. Social work educators are to consciously include the outlined roles of social workers into in the curriculum for training social work students in care for individuals with disabilities of which autism spectrum disorder is one of them. The community of health providers also need to be sensitized and made aware of the important role of social workers in any multi-disciplinary team put together to provide care to children with autism.

This review also shows the need for more research to be conducted on this topic as it was evident that not many articles have been published on this topic.

Conflict of Interest

The Author declares no conflict of interest.

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