Evaluating Autism Stigma within a Cross-Cultural Context: A Qualitative & Quantitative Examination of University Students' Perspectives on Autism Stigma in Canada and Hong Kong

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Background

- Negative attitudes towards autism encourage discrimination towards individuals on the spectrum. A result, training is needed to reduce stigmatizing misconceptions about autism.
- Prior research, such as the following, suggests autism stigma is heightened in Asia relative to Western countries:
  - Hong Kong’s limited support services and training for ASD.
  - the stigmatizing portrayal of autism in media in China.
  - less autism knowledge in China compared to the U.S.
  - less likelihood to accept deviations from social norms which is associated with heightened stigma towards autism in South Korea.
  - limited access to resources (e.g. support services, and training) in Malaysia.
- Limited autism knowledge in China compared to the U.S.

Quantitative Hypotheses Analyzed:

- Pre-test stigma would be higher in Hong Kong (HK) than in Canada.
- Pre-test knowledge would be higher in Canada than in HK.
- Pre-test knowledge and stigma would be negatively correlated.
- Training-related improvements in stigma would be higher in Canada.
- Autism knowledge would increase similarly in both HK and Canada.

Methods

- University students who are educators in training from an institution in Canada and an institution in Hong Kong responded to scales before (pre-test) and after (post-test) an autism teacher training.

Demographics

- **Hong Kong (n=57)**
  - 100% Asian
- **Canada (n=56)**
  - 84% White, 9% Asian, 2% Black.
  - 2% Hispanic, 2% Indigenous, 2% Other

Participants Responses To Qualitative Questions

- Below are example responses to questions for future content analysis:
- "How do people in your community/ies treat autistic people?"
  - "From my limited experience, I would say really well. They have been kind and respectful to them."
  - "Very divided. Some people have very negative views and some people have very positive views."
  - "How do people in your community/ies treat family members of autistic people?"
  - "People in the community treat family members of autistic people with respect and support. In general, individuals seem to try and demonstrate their understanding of ASD even if they may be misguided."
  - "I think people treat family members of autistic people with sympathy or pity."

Discussion

- These findings demonstrate that our ASD training was associated with improved autism knowledge and stigma in Hong Kong and Canada.
- Future work should examine cultural factors that may influence the effectiveness of autism trainings in different cultural contexts.

References