SUMMARY

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a complex neurodevelopmental condition characterised by deficits in several areas of development, including reciprocal social interaction abilities, communication skills, and stereotyped and repetitive behaviour patterns. According to prevalence research, 2.3 million children in India have ASD, and the number is on the rise. Despite the numbers, there are persistent challenges and limitations in the identification, assessment and treatment of this disorder. Available western screening and diagnostic tools are often time-consuming, expensive and inaccessible to all stakeholders. Early detection of ASD in children is important as it lays the foundation for effective intervention strategies that can significantly improve the child's developmental trajectory and overall quality of life. Parents and caregivers are often the first to notice the signs of ASD in their child and can play an important role in seeking out diagnostic evaluation and treatment. Healthcare professionals' role is also critical in the identification and diagnosis of ASD. However, the lack of appropriate screening tools impedes early identification of symptoms.

This study aimed to develop a culturally appropriate screening tool for early identification of symptoms that could be used by parents, as well as to develop culturally appropriate tools to understand the social-emotional reciprocity (SER) of children with ASD. The pilot study results revealed that, regardless of the educational level and socio-economic status, there was a dearth of awareness about ASD among grassroots stakeholders, including parents. A screening tool for early detection of ASD was developed through rigorous validation procedures. It is a simple tool with 2-dimensional animated videos to help parents identify ASD symptoms in children aged 3-10. To design an intervention module for children with ASD, it is paramount to comprehend their SER with their family members. Towards this goal, measures with sound psychometric properties were created to assess the SER of children with ASD with their parents and with their siblings.

The outcomes of this study imply that early detection of symptoms, as well as understanding the SER of children with ASD, allows for a tailored intervention that addresses each child's individual needs and problems. The greatest possible care for these children can be offered through targeted intervention and a stronger support network, allowing them to attain their full potential.