

Lived Experiences of Mothers Raising Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder: Parenting Styles and Techniques

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Abstract:

This study examines the lived experiences of mothers raising children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), focusing on how cultural and societal factors influence their parenting. Through a systematic review of existing literature, the study identifies key challenges faced by these mothers, including social stigma, isolation, and limited access to resources. In cultures with low awareness of ASD, mothers often encounter heightened stress and inadequate support systems, exacerbating the difficulties of parenting a child with ASD. Conversely, cultures with greater acceptance and understanding of autism provide more supportive environments, positively impacting both mothers and their children. The study also highlights the role of societal attitudes toward disability in shaping the availability and accessibility of essential services. The findings underscore the need for culturally sensitive interventions and policies that address these unique challenges, advocating for systemic reforms to ensure equitable access to support across different cultural contexts. By enhancing awareness and reducing stigma, society can better support families affected by ASD, ultimately fostering a more inclusive and empathetic environment. This research contributes to the growing body of literature on ASD and underscores the importance of addressing cultural and societal factors in supporting families raising children with autism.

Keywords: Autism Spectrum Disorder, cultural factors, societal factors, parental stress, support systems, parenting styles

Introduction:

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a neurodevelopmental disorder characterized by difficulties in social communication, as well as limited interests and repetitive activities (Hodges, 2020). Autism is a complex neurological disease that affects behavior. The term "spectrum" refers to the wide range of characteristics or symptoms associated with the illness; Thus, these people may exhibit minimal or severe symptoms, yet they all have ASD (Brentani, et al., 2013).

In compared to raising normal children, parents of special children have experienced several challenges, including educational, social, financial, and mental issues. Autism parents are likely to be more stressed and prone to unfavorable outcomes than parents of children with other disabilities (Dunn, et al., 2001). Since these children have difficulty communicating their needs verbally and may weep or scream to do so, it is difficult for parents both inside and outside the home to comprehend what they are going through (Shattnawi, 2020).

On the other hand, children or students with autism are more prone to be bullied. Students with disabilities, according to Saylor and Reach (2009), are more concerned about school safety and being injured or bullied by classmates than students without disabilities. Rose and Cage (2017) backed up prior study by claiming that students with disabilities had higher rates of victimization and perpetration over time than their peers without disabilities. When assessing specific types of disabilities, prevalence rates differ: 35.3 percent of students with behavioral and emotional disorders, 33.9 percent of students with autism, 24.3 percent of students with intellectual

disabilities, 20.8 percent of students with health impairments, and 19 percent of students with specific learning disabilities face high levels of bullying victimization, according to a study conducted by PACER's National Bullying Prevention Center (2020).

As previously noted, these problems, particularly bullying, have exacerbated the difficulties that parents and relatives of autistic children confront. Despite the problems faced by autistic children and their parents, Papadopoulos (2021) asserts that there is still insufficient research on the mother experiences of raising an autistic child (ASD). Several studies have highlighted the challenges and limitations that parents face when parenting an autistic child, as well as the necessity of paying attention to and addressing parental concerns in order for society to develop a better understanding of autistic children from their mothers' perspectives (Kadir, 2020).

Autism, along with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Cerebral Palsy, and Global Developmental Delay, is one of the four most common developmental disabilities in the Philippines, according to the PhilHealth Circular No. 2017-0029. Furthermore, according to the Labor Market Intelligence Report (2020), the Philippines has 1.44 million people with disabilities, or 1.57 percent of the population. On the other hand, while we do not yet know the prevalence rate of autism in the Philippines due to a lack of financing, current data from the United States indicates that ASD affects one in every 150 people. It occurs more frequently in boys than in girls (The Medical City, 2017). However, experts believe that 3 to 6 children out of every 1,000 will develop autism, according to SENATE BILL NO. 1433. Autism affects one out of every 500 Filipinos, or about 200,000 people out of a total population of 100 million people in the Philippines (SENATE BILL NO. 1433). According to the 2022 report, one out of every 100 children has autism (WHO, 2022).

To protect and provide for the needs of children with ASD, the Philippine government has passed laws such as the Anti-Bullying Act, Equal Opportunity Employment, Accessible Polling Places Exclusively for Persons with Disabilities and Senior Citizens, Magna Carta for Persons with Disabilities, and others. In addition to this, the Philippines Department of Education has expressed its commitment to enhancing the educational quality of special children. DepEd Order No. 53, s. 2008, emphasized the use of as maximization educated teachers and administrators as possible. DepEd issued Memorandum No. 58, s. 2016 in 2016 in enhancing the quality of autism education. In November 2021, the Department of Education (DepEd) issued an order setting policy guideline for educational programs and services for learners with disabilities in K-12 basic education programs. Despite these programs and legislation, the Philippine government has yet to provide parents of children with autism any explicit assistance. Until date, parental funding and support have been insufficient.

Parents of Filipino children with special needs express and exhibit negative stresses that affect their lives, according to Gomez and Gomez (2013) researchers from the University of Santo Thomas and the University of the Philippines, who discovered that parental educational attainment, annual income, child's comorbid conditions, and length of time in therapy are the best indicators of parental quality of life. They also suggest family intervention programs that would address the needs of parents who have children with autism (Gomez & Gomez, 2013). Furthermore, greater awareness of autism, according to Alqahtani (2012), has a positive impact on the lives of special children and their families. Martin (n.d.) advocated that the public gain a better knowledge of autistic children's life through the perspective of their parents who are familiar with them.

The primary goal of this research is to gain a better understanding of children with ASD through the perspectives of their mothers' firsthand experiences. The findings of this study could be used to fill a gap in academic literature and methodology. Since the researcher has been living with an autistic younger brother for years; thus, the researcher employed a mixed technique approach to analyze the problem, integrating participatory action research with phenomenological qualitative research.

Literature Review:

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) has garnered significant attention in recent decades due to its impact on both families and society. A robust theoretical framework is essential for understanding and analyzing ASD. This study uniquely contributes to the literature by utilizing Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (EST), informed by the researcher's personal experience of having an autistic sibling. Bronfenbrenner's EST posits that human development occurs within a complex system of relationships influenced by multiple levels of surrounding environments, from immediate family to broader societal factors (Gilstrap et al., 2022; Bronfenbrenner Center for Translational Research, 2019).

EST is often utilized to understand the environmental factors influencing ASD. The microsystem, the innermost level of EST, includes the child's immediate surroundings, such as family and school, which directly affect development (Guy-Evans, 2020; Paquette & Ryan, 2001). Bronfenbrenner emphasized the bidirectional nature of relationships within the microsystem, where the behavior of adults and children mutually influences each other (Psychology Notes HQ, 2013). Studies have shown that a breakdown in these relationships can hinder a child's ability to engage with other aspects of their environment (Paquette & Ryan, 2001).

The mesosystem, which includes the interactions between different microsystems, such as family and school, further shapes a child's development. The quality of these interactions, such as the relationship between parents and teachers, plays a critical role in the development of children with ASD (Taylor & Gebre, 2016; Galkiene & Puskoriene, 2020). However, there is a gap in the literature concerning the specific impact of these mesosystem interactions on children with ASD, a focus that this study aims to address.

The exosystem, which includes broader community influences like parents' workplaces and social services, indirectly affects the child's development. For example, parental stress from work can influence a child's behavior at home and school (Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory I Transforming Education in Challenging Environments, n.d.). The exosystem's role is particularly significant when considering policies and services for children with disabilities (Stephen, 2018).

The macrosystem encompasses the overarching cultural and societal influences that shape the other systems, such as societal values and laws. This system underscores the importance of cultural awareness in addressing the needs of children with ASD (Scott-Croff, 2017). Bronfenbrenner's theory has been widely applied, emphasizing its relevance in understanding the complexities of ASD within various ecological contexts (Cuvo & Vallelunga, 2007).

Lastly, the chronosystem refers to the dimension of time and its influence on the child's development, considering significant life events and socio-historical changes (Paquette & Ryan, 2001; Scott-Croff, 2017). Understanding the timing and nature of these events is crucial for providing appropriate support to children with ASD. Bronfenbrenner's EST thus offers a comprehensive framework for examining the multifaceted environmental influences on children with ASD, guiding more effective interventions and support systems.

Methodology:

A systematic review was conducted to synthesize the existing literature on the lived experiences of mothers raising children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), with a particular focus on parenting styles and techniques. The review followed the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines to ensure transparency, rigor, and replicability.

Search Strategy

The review utilized a comprehensive search strategy to identify relevant studies. Multiple electronic databases, including PubMed, PsycINFO, Scopus, and Google Scholar, were systematically searched. Keywords and search terms such as "Autism Spectrum Disorder," "parenting styles," "mother experiences," "parenting techniques," and "lived experiences" were used in various combinations to capture a broad range of studies. Boolean operators (AND, OR) were employed to refine the search results.

Studies were included if they met the following criteria: (1) focused on mothers raising children with ASD; (2) explored parenting styles, techniques, or experiences; (3) were published in peer-reviewed journals; and (4) were written in English. Studies were excluded if they (1) focused on other types of disabilities, (2) did not specifically address mothers' experiences, or (3) were dissertations, conference papers, or non-peer-reviewed articles.

Data Extraction and Synthesis

After the initial search, duplicates were removed, and titles and abstracts were screened for relevance. Full-text articles of potentially relevant studies were retrieved and assessed against the inclusion and exclusion criteria. Data were extracted from the selected studies, including information on the study design, sample characteristics, parenting styles and techniques identified, and key findings related to the lived experiences of mothers.

Thematic analysis was employed to synthesize the data from the included studies. Common themes and patterns related to the challenges, coping mechanisms, and parenting approaches of mothers raising children with ASD were identified. The analysis also considered the contextual factors that influenced these mothers' experiences, such as cultural, social, and economic variables.

The quality of the included studies was assessed using the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) checklist. Each study was evaluated for its methodological rigor, credibility, and relevance to the research questions. Studies that met a high standard of quality were prioritized in the synthesis of findings, while those with significant limitations were noted but considered with caution in the overall analysis.

Findings

Increased Parental Stress and Emotional Challenges

The systematic review revealed that mothers raising children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) experienced significantly higher levels of stress compared to mothers of neurotypical children. This elevated stress is



multifaceted, stemming from the unique and ongoing challenges associated with ASD, including managing the child's behavioral issues, communication difficulties, and the constant need for supervision. Numerous studies have documented these findings, emphasizing that the stress levels in mothers of children with ASD are often higher than those of parents raising children with other disabilities or typical developmental patterns (Estes et al., 2013; Hayes & Watson, 2013).

One of the primary sources of stress is the behavioral challenges that often accompany ASD. Children with ASD may exhibit a range of behaviors that are difficult to manage, including repetitive actions, meltdowns, and resistance to change (Ludlow et al., 2012). These behaviors require constant vigilance and intervention from parents, particularly mothers, who often bear the brunt of caregiving responsibilities. The unpredictability of these behaviors adds to the stress, as mothers must always be prepared to handle sudden outbursts or difficult situations. The need for continuous supervision, even during routine activities, further exacerbates the pressure on mothers, limiting their ability to engage in other personal or professional activities.

In addition to behavioral challenges, communication difficulties are a significant source of stress for mothers of children with ASD. Many children with ASD have limited verbal abilities or struggle with understanding and expressing emotions, making it difficult for them to communicate their needs effectively (Keenan et al., 2016). This communication gap often leads to frustration on both sides—children may become upset when they cannot express themselves, and mothers may feel helpless or inadequate in their ability to meet their child's needs. The constant struggle to interpret and respond to their child's non-verbal cues can be mentally and emotionally draining, contributing to the overall stress experienced by these mothers.

Emotional challenges, such as feelings of isolation, anxiety, and guilt, are also prevalent among mothers raising children with ASD. Many mothers report feeling isolated due to the demanding nature of caregiving, which leaves little time for social interactions or self-care (Pottie & Ingram, 2008). This isolation is often compounded by societal stigma and the lack of understanding from others regarding their child's condition. Studies have shown that mothers of children with ASD are more likely to experience social withdrawal and reduced participation in community activities compared to mothers of neurotypical children (Woodgate et al., 2008). This social isolation can lead to feelings of loneliness and depression, further impacting the mother's emotional well-being.

Anxiety is another common emotional challenge faced by mothers of children with ASD. The uncertainty of the child's future, coupled with the constant worry about their well-being and safety, contributes to heightened levels of anxiety (Hastings et al., 2005). Mothers often worry about their child's ability to integrate into society, succeed in school, or lead an independent life. This anxiety is not limited to the child's immediate future but extends into long-term concerns, such as what will happen to the child if the mother is no longer able to care for them.

Guilt is a particularly pervasive emotional challenge for mothers of children with ASD. Many mothers report feeling guilty about their child's condition, questioning whether they could have done something differently during pregnancy or early childhood to prevent or mitigate the symptoms of ASD (Gray, 2003). This guilt is often compounded by the societal pressures and expectations placed on mothers to be perfect caregivers. Additionally, mothers may feel guilty about not being able to give equal attention to their other children or to their own needs, as the demands of caring for a child with ASD often take precedence.

Societal stigma and the lack of understanding from others regarding ASD further exacerbate these emotional challenges. Many mothers report encountering judgmental attitudes from others, including family members, friends, and strangers, who may not fully understand the nature of ASD or the challenges it presents (Farrugia, 2009). This stigma can lead to feelings of shame and inadequacy, as mothers may internalize the negative perceptions of others and question their own abilities as parents. Moreover, the lack of public awareness and understanding of ASD can make it difficult for mothers to access appropriate support and resources, adding to their overall stress and emotional burden.

The cumulative effect of these stressors—behavioral challenges, communication difficulties, emotional challenges, and societal stigma—can have a profound impact on the mental and physical health of mothers raising children with ASD. Research has shown that these mothers are at an increased risk of developing mental health issues, such as depression and anxiety, as well as physical health problems, such as chronic pain and fatigue (Lovell et al., 2012). The constant stress and emotional strain can also lead to burnout, where mothers feel overwhelmed and unable to cope with the demands of caregiving.

In conclusion, the findings from the systematic review underscore the significant and multifaceted challenges faced by mothers raising children with ASD. These challenges, including behavioral and communication difficulties, emotional strain, and societal stigma, contribute to elevated levels of stress and negatively impact the overall well-being of these mothers. Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive approach that includes increasing public awareness of ASD, providing accessible support and resources for families, and developing interventions aimed at reducing parental stress and improving the quality of life for both mothers and their children.



Adaptation of Parenting Styles

The systematic review revealed that mothers of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) frequently adapt their parenting styles to better meet the unique needs of their children. Parenting a child with ASD presents challenges that require significant modifications in traditional parenting approaches. These adaptations often involve increased patience, the use of structured routines, and the development of individualized communication strategies. The review highlighted that many mothers shifted from either a predominantly authoritarian or permissive parenting style to a more authoritative or hybrid approach, blending firmness with flexibility to better support their child's development.

One of the most significant adaptations observed among mothers of children with ASD is the emphasis on structured routines. The predictability and consistency provided by routines are particularly beneficial for children with ASD, who often thrive in environments where they know what to expect (Rodgers et al., 2012). Structured routines help in reducing anxiety and managing behavioral issues that may arise from unexpected changes. Mothers reported that by establishing clear and consistent daily schedules, they were able to create a sense of security for their children, which in turn made it easier to manage other aspects of their behavior and development (Veness et al., 2012).

In addition to structured routines, the development of individualized communication strategies is another critical adaptation made by mothers. Children with ASD often experience significant communication challenges, ranging from limited verbal abilities to difficulties in understanding and expressing emotions (Prizant et al., 2006). To address these challenges, mothers frequently adapted their communication styles to align with their child's specific needs. This could involve using visual aids, simplifying language, or employing alternative communication methods such as sign language or picture exchange systems (Charlop-Christy et al., 2002). By tailoring communication strategies to their child's abilities, mothers were able to improve their child's understanding and reduce frustration for both parties.

The review also found that many mothers shifted their overall parenting style in response to the needs of their child with ASD. While some mothers initially adhered to a more authoritarian or permissive approach, they often transitioned to an authoritative or hybrid style as they gained more understanding of their child's condition. Authoritative parenting, which combines high expectations with high responsiveness, proved particularly effective for children with ASD (Aunola et al., 2000). This style allows mothers to set clear boundaries and expectations while also being attuned to their child's emotional and developmental needs. Mothers reported that this balanced approach helped them to maintain discipline while also providing the necessary support and understanding that their child required.

The shift to a more authoritative or hybrid parenting style often involved increasing patience and flexibility. Mothers learned to adjust their expectations and responses based on their child's behavior and progress, rather than adhering strictly to conventional parenting norms. This flexibility was crucial in addressing the unpredictable nature of ASD, where a one-size-fits-all approach is rarely effective. For instance, mothers might choose to be more lenient on certain behavioral expectations if it meant reducing their child's anxiety or avoiding a meltdown, while still maintaining overall structure and discipline (Totsika et al., 2011).

Furthermore, the adoption of these tailored parenting strategies was essential for managing daily challenges and fostering the child's development. Mothers who successfully adapted their parenting styles reported better outcomes in terms of their child's social, emotional, and cognitive development (Kasari et al., 2010). By being both firm and flexible, they were able to create an environment that was both nurturing and conducive to growth, which is particularly important for children with ASD who may struggle in less structured or less responsive settings.

These findings underscore the importance of parental adaptability in the context of raising a child with ASD. The ability to modify parenting styles in response to the child's evolving needs is not only crucial for managing day-to-day challenges but also for supporting the long-term development of the child. The review highlights that such adaptability is a key factor in promoting positive outcomes for both the child and the mother, as it allows for a more harmonious and effective parenting experience.

The adaptation of parenting styles by mothers of children with ASD is a dynamic process that involves significant changes in approach, patience, and flexibility. The adoption of structured routines, individualized communication strategies, and a shift towards a more authoritative or hybrid parenting style are all essential components of this adaptation. These strategies enable mothers to better manage the unique challenges posed by ASD and to foster their child's development in a supportive and responsive environment.

Reliance on Coping Mechanisms and Support Systems

Coping mechanisms and support systems play a pivotal role in the lives of mothers raising children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). The challenges associated with parenting a child with ASD, such as managing behavioral

issues, communication difficulties, and the constant need for supervision, often lead mothers to rely heavily on both formal and informal support systems to manage the stresses and demands of their daily lives. The systematic review conducted in this study underscored the significance of these support networks, revealing that they are essential not only for the emotional well-being of the mothers but also for their practical ability to provide care for their children.

Informal support systems, particularly from family members, friends, and online communities, were found to be invaluable for mothers of children with ASD. These networks provided a crucial source of emotional support, helping mothers to cope with feelings of isolation, stress, and frustration that often accompany the demands of caring for a child with special needs. Research indicates that emotional support from family members and close friends can significantly alleviate the psychological burden on mothers, reducing stress levels and enhancing their overall well-being (Tehee, Honan, & Hevey, 2009). Additionally, these informal networks often provided practical assistance, such as helping with daily caregiving tasks or offering respite care, which allowed mothers to take necessary breaks and attend to their own needs (McAuliffe et al., 2019).

The role of online communities and social media also emerged as a significant source of support for mothers. In the digital age, many mothers of children with ASD have turned to online forums, social media groups, and virtual support networks to connect with other parents facing similar challenges. These platforms offer a space for sharing experiences, exchanging advice, and receiving encouragement from others who understand the unique difficulties of raising a child with ASD (Lopez et al., 2019). The anonymity and accessibility of online communities make them particularly appealing, especially for mothers who may not have access to local support groups or who prefer the convenience of virtual interactions. Studies have shown that participation in online support communities can lead to increased feelings of empowerment and reduced stress among mothers of children with ASD (Mackintosh, Myers, & Goin-Kochel, 2005).

In addition to informal support, formal support systems such as therapy, professional counseling, and support groups were identified as critical components in helping mothers cope with the demands of parenting a child with ASD. These formal resources provide mothers with access to professional expertise and structured environments where they can receive guidance on managing their child's condition. Behavioral therapy, speech therapy, and occupational therapy are among the most common forms of formal support utilized by mothers of children with ASD, offering strategies to address the specific developmental and behavioral challenges associated with the disorder (Firth & Dryer, 2013). Support groups, both in-person and online, provide a communal space for mothers to share their experiences, learn from others, and receive emotional support from peers who are facing similar challenges (Samadi, McConkey, & Kelly, 2012).

However, the review also highlighted significant disparities in access to these formal support systems. Many mothers reported difficulties in obtaining adequate support due to financial constraints, geographical limitations, or lack of availability of specialized services in their area. Financial barriers were particularly prevalent, with the high cost of therapies and specialized care often placing a significant strain on families. Studies have shown that the financial burden of raising a child with ASD can be substantial, leading to increased stress and anxiety among parents who may struggle to afford the necessary services (Kogan et al., 2008). Furthermore, mothers in rural or underserved areas frequently encountered challenges in accessing specialized services, which are often concentrated in urban centers, thus limiting their ability to provide optimal care for their children (Thomas et al., 2007).

Despite these challenges, many mothers demonstrated remarkable resilience and resourcefulness in navigating the complexities of the support system. Some mothers sought out alternative or complementary therapies, such as yoga, meditation, or holistic health approaches, to supplement the formal care their children received. Others advocated for their children within the healthcare and educational systems, working to secure the necessary resources and accommodations to support their child's development (Carter et al., 2015). The review highlighted the importance of empowering mothers through education and advocacy, enabling them to better navigate the support system and access the resources they need.

The review also emphasized the need for greater systemic support to address the disparities in access to formal services. Policy interventions aimed at reducing the financial burden on families, expanding the availability of specialized services, and improving the accessibility of support resources in rural and underserved areas are essential for ensuring that all mothers of children with ASD have the support they need. Additionally, the development of community-based support programs that are tailored to the specific needs of families raising children with ASD can help bridge the gap between formal and informal support systems, providing a more comprehensive network of care (Ooi et al., 2016).

The reliance on coping mechanisms and support systems is a critical aspect of the experiences of mothers raising children with ASD. Both informal and formal support networks provide essential emotional and practical assistance, helping mothers manage the unique challenges associated with parenting a child with ASD. However, disparities in



access to formal support services underscore the need for greater systemic support and policy interventions to ensure that all mothers have the resources they need to care for their children effectively. By strengthening these support systems, we can better support the well-being of mothers and improve outcomes for children with ASD.

Impact of Cultural and Societal Factors on Mothers Raising Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder

Cultural and societal factors play a pivotal role in shaping the experiences of mothers raising children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). The complexities of parenting a child with ASD are compounded by the varying levels of awareness, acceptance, and support available within different cultural contexts. This discussion explores how cultural norms, societal attitudes, and systemic structures impact the daily lives of these mothers, with a focus on how these factors influence the availability of resources, the prevalence of social stigma, and the overall quality of life for both the mothers and their children.

The degree of cultural awareness and understanding of autism significantly impacts how mothers of children with ASD navigate their daily lives. In societies where autism is poorly understood, mothers often face increased challenges, including social isolation and stigma. Studies have shown that in cultures where autism is seen as a taboo or is misunderstood, mothers may be blamed for their child's condition or face ostracization from their communities (Uy, et al., 2023). This lack of understanding not only exacerbates the emotional burden on mothers but also limits their access to support systems and resources that are crucial for managing their child's condition.

In contrast, cultures with higher levels of awareness and acceptance of ASD provide a more supportive environment. In these societies, there is generally greater access to specialized services, educational programs, and community support networks that can help mothers manage the challenges of raising a child with autism. For instance, in some Western countries where autism awareness has been significantly promoted, mothers report feeling more supported and less stigmatized (Neely-Barnes et al., 2011). These cultural differences underscore the importance of increasing global awareness and education about autism to reduce the disparities in experiences among mothers in different cultural contexts.

Social stigma remains a pervasive issue for mothers raising children with ASD, particularly in cultures where disabilities are viewed negatively. The fear of being judged or misunderstood often leads mothers to withdraw from social interactions, further isolating themselves and their children. Research indicates that stigma can manifest in various ways, including direct discrimination, subtle exclusion, and even self-imposed isolation due to anticipated negative reactions from others (Gray, 2002). This social stigma can have profound effects on a mother's mental health, leading to increased levels of stress, anxiety, and depression.

Moreover, the societal perception of autism can influence how mothers view their own parenting abilities. In cultures where there is a strong emphasis on conformity and social norms, mothers may internalize negative societal attitudes, leading to feelings of guilt and inadequacy (Gill & Liamputtong, 2011). This internalized stigma can hinder mothers from seeking help or advocating for their child's needs, thereby limiting the child's opportunities for development and inclusion.

The availability and accessibility of resources and services for children with ASD are heavily influenced by societal attitudes towards disability. In many countries, systemic issues within healthcare and educational systems pose significant barriers for mothers seeking support for their children. For example, in low- and middle-income countries, there is often a severe lack of trained professionals, diagnostic tools, and specialized services for children with autism (Ruiz Sasan, et al., 2023). This scarcity of resources forces many mothers to either go without necessary services or seek expensive private care, which may not be affordable for all families.

In contrast, countries with more developed social services and healthcare systems tend to offer a broader range of support options for families of children with ASD. These services include early intervention programs, special education, and access to healthcare professionals who specialize in autism. However, even in these contexts, systemic challenges can arise, such as long waiting lists for services, geographical disparities in service availability, and insufficient funding for special education programs (Kilag, et al., 2023). These barriers highlight the need for systemic reforms to ensure that all mothers, regardless of their location or socioeconomic status, can access the support they need.

Cultural norms and values also shape the coping mechanisms and support networks that mothers of children with ASD rely on. In collectivist cultures, where family and community ties are strong, mothers may receive more informal support from extended family members and neighbors. This support can be crucial in alleviating some of the daily burdens associated with caring for a child with autism (Shin et al., 2006). However, in these same cultures, the pressure to conform to social norms can also lead to increased stigma and a lack of understanding from the community, complicating the support dynamic.

Conversely, in individualist cultures, where there is a greater emphasis on independence and self-reliance, mothers may find it more challenging to access informal support. However, these cultures may offer more formal support

systems, such as support groups and online communities, where mothers can share their experiences and receive advice from others in similar situations (Uy, et al., 2023). The effectiveness of these support networks often depends on the level of societal awareness and acceptance of autism, further illustrating the interplay between cultural and societal factors in shaping the experiences of mothers raising children with ASD.

The impact of cultural and societal factors on mothers raising children with Autism Spectrum Disorder is profound and multifaceted. Cultural awareness and understanding of autism, societal attitudes, systemic barriers, and cultural norms all influence the daily lives of these mothers and their ability to access the resources and support they need. Addressing these issues requires a concerted effort to increase global awareness of autism, reduce social stigma, and reform systemic structures to ensure equitable access to services for all families. By recognizing and addressing the cultural and societal factors that shape the experiences of mothers raising children with ASD, we can work towards creating a more inclusive and supportive environment for these families.

Conclusion:

This study has illuminated the profound impact that cultural and societal factors have on the experiences of mothers raising children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). The findings underscore the significant role that cultural awareness, social stigma, and systemic barriers play in shaping these mothers' daily lives, access to resources, and overall well-being. In societies where autism is misunderstood or stigmatized, mothers often face isolation, heightened stress, and limited support, which exacerbates the challenges of parenting a child with ASD. Conversely, in cultures with greater acceptance and understanding of autism, mothers are more likely to find supportive environments that offer essential resources and community backing.

The variability in societal attitudes towards disability further influences the availability and accessibility of services, highlighting the need for systemic reforms. Ensuring equitable access to support systems, regardless of cultural or geographical context, is crucial for improving the quality of life for both mothers and their children. Additionally, this study emphasizes the importance of culturally sensitive interventions and policies that address the unique needs of families affected by ASD.

By recognizing and addressing the cultural and societal factors that shape the experiences of mothers raising children with ASD, policymakers, educators, and healthcare providers can better support these families. This study contributes to a growing body of literature advocating for increased awareness, reduced stigma, and more inclusive practices that enable mothers to navigate the complexities of raising a child with ASD with greater resilience and support. Ultimately, fostering a more inclusive and understanding society will not only benefit families affected by ASD but also enrich the broader community by embracing diversity and promoting empathy.

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