

EXPLORING ADAPTIVE AND MALADAPTIVE COPING STRATEGIES AMONG PARENTS OF CHILDREN WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

POOJA BHATT^{1*}

¹Faculty of Behavioural Sciences, SGT University, Gurgaon
EMAIL: Bhatt4069@gmail.com, ORCID ID: 0009-0001-2328-9180

DR. AKSHITA²

²Faculty of Behavioural Sciences, SGT University, Gurgaon
EMAIL: Akshita_sbisc@sgtuniversity.org, ORCID ID: 0000-0002-9961-9166

Abstract

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a complex neurodevelopmental condition that presents significant challenges for parents, including emotional strain, persistent caregiving demands, and social isolation. This qualitative study explores the coping strategies—both adaptive and maladaptive—used by parents of children with ASD. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with three mothers at a therapy centre in Gurgaon, India, focusing on emotional well-being, daily routines, social interaction difficulties, and family dynamics. The findings reveal that adaptive strategies, such as cognitive reframing, mindfulness, engaging in hobbies, and seeking social support, foster resilience and positively impact mental health. However, maladaptive strategies, including emotional withdrawal and avoidance, were also identified, highlighting the need for greater awareness and tailored interventions. Parents shared the challenges of managing daily routines, such as meltdowns and transitions, and their struggles with social stigma and misunderstanding from others. Family dynamics were profoundly affected, with some reporting strengthened relationships through mutual support, while others experienced tension due to differing coping styles. This study underscores the importance of comprehensive support systems and interventions that address the unique needs of parents raising children with ASD. The findings offer valuable insights for practitioners, therapists to enhance family resilience and overall well-being of parents and children with autism spectrum disorder.

Keywords: Coping strategies, Parents, Autism Spectrum Disorder, Social support, emotional wellbeing.

INTRODUCTION

Autism Spectrum Disorder is neurodevelopmental disorder; it is believed that the fastest-growing type of developmental disability is autism spectrum disorder (ASD). ASD manifests as repetitive patterns of behaviour in early childhood, as well as ongoing deficiencies in social communication and engagement (Reddy et al., 2019). Parenting stress and persistent caring are factors for parents of children with ASD due to the chronic nature of the disorder and related behavioural and emotional difficulties (Lai et al., 2015).

A difficult and frequently overwhelming process of adaptation begins when a family member is diagnosed with ASD. Families have to deal with the diagnosis, look for the right treatments, and adapt to the unique demands of the person with ASD (Sánchez Amate & Luque de la Rosa, 2024). Compared with parents of children with other intellectual disorders, parents of children with ASD experience higher levels of stress, depression and anxiety (Wei-Chih et al., 2023). As stresses rise, the families may face time constraints, marital discord, social isolation, diminished parental self-efficacy, increasing care time, insufficient support services, continuous child advocacy, and uncertainty about the child's future (Yaacob et al., 2022). Caring for a child and family presents numerous daily problems that impact the parent's health and capacity to meet their demands (Salas et al., 2017). Parents who have unfulfilled expectations may go through a grief process and feel alone because their social environment doesn't understand or support them (Sánchez Amate & Luque de la Rosa, 2024).

In order to raise their children and improve their own quality of life, parents must learn coping mechanisms (Balubaid & Sahab, 2017). Depending on the coping mechanisms they choose while caring for children with ASD, caregivers may encounter varying degrees of affiliate stigma (Salami & Alhalal, 2024). There is a two-way influence of a healthy family; the positive cycle can decrease the child's troublesome behaviour and boost the favourable reaction to the therapeutic intervention. Parents of children with ASD rely on various coping strategies

and resources to navigate the challenges of parenting and caregiving stress. The use of both maladaptive (like avoidance and disengagement) and adaptive (like cognitive reframing and seeking social support) coping strategies by parents of children with ASD was noted, with a preference for adaptive coping techniques like positive reinterpretation and seeking social support. Positive mental health outcomes among parents of children with ASD have also been associated with the employment of adaptive coping methods (Lai et al., 2015)

The behavioural and cognitive attempts undertaken to master, tolerate, or recreate internal and external demands and disputes" is the definition of coping, while stress is the interaction between individuals and their environment. Coping mechanisms can be classified as either emotion-focused or problem-focused. Helping people control their emotions is the aim of emotion-focused coping, whereas problem-focused coping aims to solve problems. Parents of disabled children also develop coping techniques to help them deal with the challenges of raising a child with special needs. Parents of children with ASD may use different coping strategies depending on their psychological makeup, demographic characteristics, and the characteristics and environment of their children (Wei-Chih et al., 2023).

Despite the challenges of raising a child with ASD, many families show resiliency and successfully balance the needs of the other family members with those of the child with ASD (Sarriá & Pozo, 2015). Family members have to handle a lot of caregiving responsibilities, which can be taxing and sometimes overwhelming and have an impact on their mental health (Bekhet et al., 2012). Parents and other family members might start to see their circumstances more positively even as they navigate the difficulties of raising autistic children. When they have a child with autism, they could perceive it as a transformative event that makes them reevaluate their priorities, values, and belief systems, leading to a new perspective on life (Myers et al., 2009). The purpose of this study is to investigate the adaptive and maladaptive coping mechanisms employed by parents of children with ASD and investigates their family structure, daily routines, social difficulties, and emotional struggles.

Aim:

To explore the adaptive and maladaptive coping strategies of parents raising children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), focusing on emotional challenges, daily routines, social interactions, and family dynamics. The study aims to identify key stressors, evaluate the effectiveness of coping mechanisms, and provide insights for developing tailored interventions to enhance parental resilience, mental health, and overall family well-being.

Study Design

This study included a thematic design and in-person interviews to shed light on the participants of parents with Autism Spectrum Disorder to explore Adaptive and Maladaptive Coping Strategies.

Data Collection

Face-to-face, semi structured interviews were used to gather data. Data would collect from the therapy centre in Gurgaon from the parents of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder. This made it easier to provide a calm and comfortable setting where people could speak freely. The interview were taken with the participants permission, and quick notes were collected for use as a guide when the data was being analysed.

A total number of 3 parents were interviewed for the purpose of this research.

A semi-structured questions was created for the study to serve as a guide for gathering data. It made use of a semi-structured instrument to provide flexibility in a way that facilitated the flow of the questions. The duration of each interview ranged from thirty to forty minutes.

Objectives:

1. To examine the emotional and mental health challenges faced by parents of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).
2. To explore the strategies employed by parents to manage daily routines and caregiving responsibilities.
3. To investigate the social interaction difficulties encountered by parents, including stigma and lack of support from peers and the community.
4. To analyse the impact of ASD on family dynamics, including marital relationships and family cohesion.
5. To differentiate between adaptive and maladaptive coping strategies used by parents and their respective effects on resilience and mental well-being.

Interview Questions

Emotional and Mental Health Challenges

What feelings do you have as a mom raising a child with autism?

Parent 1- As a parent, I understand that my child with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is just as precious and capable as any child without neurotypical traits. We have approached his upbringing from the start with faith in his potential, emphasizing his strengths and abilities above his shortcomings. We make an effort to provide him the same chances and expectations as we give our neurotypical daughter, thereby reaffirming that his diagnosis does not define him. On the other hand, my neurotypical daughter might struggle with emotional control, peer interactions, or academic expectations. Even though every child has a unique journey, our fundamental parenting style is always based on love, support, and an understanding of each child's unique route. We honour each child's individuality while recognizing the many types of support and direction they need by accepting them for who they

are. However, there are certain difficulties associated with raising a kid with ASD that are similar to those encountered with raising a neurotypical child, despite their differences. Developing communication skills, controlling sensory sensitivity, and navigating social situations are a few examples of these difficulties.

Parent 2- It is emotionally and physically draining to raise a child with autism. My daughter is on the severe end of the spectrum; she struggles academically and is nonverbal, which has made my journey even more difficult. From meeting her needs to attempting to comprehend her feelings when she is unable to communicate them, every day feels like an uphill battle. She struggles in ways that other kids don't, and it's painful to watch, and sometimes I feel exhausted. There are times when I wish I could go back in time and change my mind, perhaps choosing not to marry or have children altogether. Rather than a lack of love, these ideas are the result of suffering and fatigue. Although I adore my daughter dearly, the burden of this duty is great, and there are days when I feel that I can no longer contribute anything more.

She depends on me, therefore I continue in spite of everything. However, it is not simple. It's lonely, annoying, and excruciatingly uncomfortable at times. I only hope that people would realize how difficult this is—not so they will feel sorry for me, but so they will realize the realities of parenting an autistic child.

Parent 3- Being the mother of a kid with autism, I am incredibly proud of and committed to my child. In addition to being difficult, this experience has molded me in unexpected ways. It has given me a fresh perspective on the world and taught me to be patient and resilient.

Every minor accomplishment my child makes feels like a major triumph because I can see the difficulty, perseverance, and effort that went into it. Even seemingly insignificant things, like learning a new phrase, having a simple conversation, or making eye contact, are noteworthy accomplishments. As I watch my child strive so hard to accomplish their goals, I am reminded of their amazing strength and am filled with adoration. I have grown as a person and as a mother as a result of this experience. In addition to my child, it has taught me to be more patient, empathetic, and kind toward other people. I've discovered how to enjoy the little things in life and to find beauty in even the slowest development. I am thankful for this journey because, in spite of the difficulties, it has strengthened me.

How do you deal with feelings of worry or sadness about your child?

Parent 1- My husband and I are optimistic by nature. We think that the best prospects for the future should always be the focus of our hopeful and optimistic outlook. Even if we make an effort to be strong and optimistic, anxiety can still seep in at times, and concerns for my child's future can become too much to handle. During those times, I remind myself to stand back and take a deep breath. I schedule time for myself, even if it's only for a short period of time. These brief moments of self-care, whether it be playing with my dog, watching a movie, or listening to music, help me recharge. They serve as my treatment, providing me with the willpower to continue. Being the greatest mother, I can be made possible by taking care of myself, and These small retreats bring me comfort even on the worst days.

Parent 2- During my child's therapy sessions, I make it a point to take care of myself and in peaceful and comforting activities. I've discovered that even brief moments of self-care may have a significant impact, even though scheduling time for myself isn't always simple. I find that listening to music helps me decompress and divert my attention from stressful situations. Additionally, meditation has been beneficial; it helps me process my emotions, instills a sense of peace, and enables me to face each day with greater clarity. Taking care of myself makes me a better parent, and finding this balance keeps me strong, patient, and positive for my child. These times of solitude help me recharge, which is crucial when navigating the challenges of raising a child with autism. They also serve as a reminder that, even though my child's well-being comes first, my own mental and emotional health are important.

Parent 3- There are times when I feel totally absorbed in my thoughts as my fear and sorrow take over. I start thinking about the future and wonder if I'm providing enough for my child. Am I supporting them appropriately? Am I making the correct decisions? It can be too much to handle. Despite knowing better, I find it difficult to avoid comparing my child's development to that of others. When I do, though, it simply makes me feel worse because I feel like I'm falling short somehow. However, it's not always simple to discuss these emotions. I fear that people won't really grasp what I'm going through, and it can be exhausting at times to describe it. I therefore don't talk about it, even when I need help, and I keep it to myself. There are days when it all feels too heavy, and I emotionally shut down because facing those feelings head-on is just too much. It's like an endless battle between feeling completely powerless and trying to stay strong. No matter how much I love my child, there are moments when the weight of it all is simply overwhelming.

Daily routine management

What is hard about your daily routine with your child?

Parent 1- When he demands to do everything himself, so bath time may occasionally become a bit of a battle. It can be difficult when I just want to assist, like washing his hair or scrubbing his back, even if I respect his freedom. But because he is adamant about doing it his way, the process may take longer and be more challenging than necessary. Another challenge to patience is mealtime. Sometimes it irritates me, even though I try to be tolerant, because he frequently takes a long time to complete his food. It can be tiresome to wait for him to complete on hectic days when there is a lot to do, even if I know he is going at his own time. I tell myself that his urge for independence is a natural part of who he is, even though these times might be difficult. I try to strike a balance between mentoring him and allowing him the freedom to do things independently, though it's not always simple.

Parent 2- Things feel easier to handle while she is in therapy or school since she is kept interested by a set schedule. However, during the weekends, it becomes really difficult to keep her busy all day. It's difficult to find activities that will keep her interested and focused, and on some days, it feels like a lot of work. It's challenging to balance my regular daily obligations with making sure she is amused and cared for. Her incessant need for my attention may make even simple chores like cooking, cleaning, or even taking a break feel overwhelming. Sometimes I find it difficult to keep her occupied, and the stress of it all becomes too much. Although I enjoy spending time with her, weekends can be emotionally and physically taxing. Even though, as a parent, I keep going and try my hardest, I frequently find myself wishing for a little more help or just a moment to rest.

Parent 3- It can take a lot of time and effort to perform even the most basic daily tasks, such as eating, dressing, and switching between tasks. It frequently takes time, support, and occasionally inventive problem-solving to do what others find easy.

Meltdowns are normal when my child feels overwhelmed by even little changes in routine. The entire day might become uncertain with a small change in routine, an unexpected noise, or even a different dinner than normal. I have to be ready at all times, adapting to the circumstances as they arise. Being vigilant, anticipating problems, and offering confidence all the time is emotionally draining. Managing my child's demands while juggling my career, household duties, and even my own health can be really challenging. Even when it seems like there isn't any more breathing room on some days, I continue because my child depends on me.

How do you handle tough moments, like when your child gets upset?

Parent 1- When my child has a meltdown, I try to listen to them without trying to halt or correct their feelings right away. I've come to understand that overusing words or logic can overwhelm him even more in certain situations, so I try to keep my answers brief and straightforward. Rather than talking excessively, I try to be present and let him know that I'm available to him. To assist him relax, I also employ several relaxing methods. I allow him time to work through his feelings, but sometimes deep breathing or gentle reassurance help. Using sensory stimuli or creating a peaceful, quiet environment can also help him regain his composure. Since every meltdown is unique and what works for him one day might not work the next, I make an effort to be understanding and attentive to his demands. Even though it's not always easy, I know that my composure and empathy help him feel supported and safe.

Parent 2- My daughter's comprehension has significantly increased over time. Now, when I explain things to her, she can understand them more readily. I've found that she can follow along and comprehend more clearly when I take the time to explain things to her in a calm manner. Seeing that improvement makes our everyday interactions a little more seamless, which is such a comfort. She isn't always ready to listen or participate, though, and I've discovered that playing gentle music really helps during those times. She seems to relax and a serene environment is created by the soft, calming sounds. It functions similarly to a switch, assisting her in settling and facilitating her shift into a more receptive condition. One of the best strategies I've found for helping her unwind and refocus when things become too much for her is music.

Parent 3- I make an effort to be composed and patient when my child is angry, concentrating on figuring out what's causing it. I employ calming techniques, such as speaking softly, allowing them space if necessary, or providing them with sensory aids that give them a sense of stability. I occasionally divert their focus to something they find reassuring or enjoyable. I remind myself that these times are a part of their journey and that it is my responsibility to help and mentor them. As we go through these difficult times together, I've learned to acknowledge and appreciate the progress, even if it's modest. When my child is upset, I try to be patient and calm while figuring out what's causing them to be frustrated. I employ calming strategies to assist them control their emotions, such as speaking softly, allowing them space when necessary, or providing them with reassuring and stable sensory aids. Sometimes I help them regain control by diverting their focus to something they enjoy or are comfortable with.

Social Interaction Difficulties

What challenges do you face in finding support from other parents?

Parent 1- My child is ten years old, and I've observed that he can be difficult for other kids and their parents to engage with. Even though most parents are understanding and helpful, others are ignorant of autism and other disorders, which can make social situations feel uncomfortable or uneasy. Some parents could unintentionally withdraw themselves because they don't know how to react, while others appear unsure of how to participate. Since those who haven't personally experienced autism may not comprehend it, I strive to be kind and provide

straightforward explanations when someone appears receptive to learning. However, I am aware that not everyone will comprehend right away, and that's acceptable. Making sure my child feels supported, appreciated, and involved is my top priority. Although I value those who try to connect, I also remind myself that I have no influence over other people's responses. The most important thing is to create a welcoming and happy atmosphere where my child can be himself, knowing that the correct people would try to understand and welcome him.

Parent 2- There are many different types of parents, and each one approaches interaction and communication differently. Some people are really helpful and will gladly share their knowledge, experiences, and insights when prompted. Whether it's about parenting, education, or personal experiences, they recognize the value of sharing knowledge and do it in a courteous and open manner. They foster a sense of community and support by their desire to participate, which makes overcoming obstacles collectively simpler. Some parents, on the other hand, are not really interested in sharing information, either because they don't want to or because they're uncomfortable with it or because they have a different idea about privacy. Instead of obsessing on their lack of involvement or attempting to alter their strategy, I decide to direct my energies elsewhere. I remind myself that it's acceptable for people to function differently from one another. I place more importance on interacting with people who are honest, encouraging, and eager to have deep talks than I do on allowing it to impact me.

Parent 3- Since every child with autism experiences it in a unique way, it might be challenging to locate parents that can empathize with my experience. There are parents who are willing to share their experiences and thoughts, while others would rather keep their challenges and successes to themselves. When my child's growth happens on a different timeline than others', it can be lonely for some parents to compare their child's progress with others'. Despite their inadvertent nature, these comparisons can be demoralizing and hinder the process of establishing a sense of belonging. Finding helpful advice that fits my child's unique requirements might be difficult because not all advice is applicable in every circumstance. Due to the wide range of ways autism presents itself, what works for one child might not be beneficial for another. In spite of these challenges, I decide to concentrate on the relationships that are genuinely encouraging and look for resources that offer significant assistance. Instead than focusing on comparisons or useless advice, I give priority to what would actually help my child and our journey.

How do you respond to people who don't understand your child's behaviour?

Parent 1- I make every effort to raise people's knowledge and comprehension of autism by educating them about it. By exchanging information, I think we can dispel myths and foster a more welcoming and inclusive atmosphere. But I also understand that not everybody will be willing to learn. Some people might not want to have meaningful conversations regarding the disease, be unwilling to change their opinions, or be set in their ways. I stand back and evaluate the person's capacity and willingness to learn in these circumstances. I change how I present the information to make it more approachable and relatable if I get the impression that they are willing to engage in conversation. But if I think their mindset or preconceptions would ruin a good conversation, I decide to go on and focus my efforts elsewhere. I am able to maintain my own mental and emotional health while simultaneously raising awareness thanks to this strategy. Rather than spending all of my energy attempting to alter someone's viewpoint, I concentrate on having deep discussions with people who are sincerely eager to learn and develop.

Parent 2- I try to avoid talking to people who have trouble understanding because it may be quite difficult and draining to explain this disease. It can be challenging to completely understand the subtleties and complexity of the disease, even for well-educated people, which can make these discussions tedious and fruitless. Communicating the information in a way that resonates or promotes genuine comprehension can sometimes feel like an uphill battle. Since these conversations demand a lot of emotional and mental energy, I put my own wellbeing first by avoiding interactions with those who might not be receptive to learning or understanding.

Parent 3- I make an effort to address my child's behavior with understanding and compassion when someone doesn't understand it. A possible explanation may be, "My child has autism, and their behavior is a coping mechanism or a way of processing what's going on around them." It's simply the way their minds function, and they're trying their hardest. I provide further background information or respond to their inquiries if they appear receptive to learning. If they are scornful or judgmental, though, I remind myself that my child's welfare comes first and I'm not attempting to alter everyone's viewpoint. Supporting my child remains my top priority. I stand back and evaluate the person's capacity and willingness to learn in these circumstances. I change how I present the information to make it more approachable and relatable if I get the impression that they are willing to engage in conversation. But if I think their mindset or preconceptions would ruin a good conversation, I decide to go on and focus my efforts elsewhere. I am able to maintain my own mental and emotional health while simultaneously raising awareness thanks to this strategy. Rather than spending all of my energy attempting to alter someone's viewpoint, I concentrate on having deep discussions with people who are sincerely eager to learn and develop.

Family Dynamics

How has your child's autism affected your relationship with your partner?

Parent 1- Our bond has been genuinely reinforced by this journey, which has brought us closer as we have faced obstacles and overcome them together. Whether it's recognizing our child's special needs, advocating for him in various situations, or helping him acquire new abilities, we all work together to support him in many ways. We now have a greater sense of love, empathy, and understanding for one another as a result of our joint endeavour, and we recognize how crucial it is to support one another as parenting partners. Simultaneously, raising both of

our kids has been an amazing educational experience. We have learned the virtues of patience, tenacity, and unconditional love from them. Every significant event, regardless of size, has reaffirmed how crucial it is to acknowledge advancement at its own rate. Even though the road has been extremely gratifying and has shaped us into more resilient and sympathetic people, it can also be difficult at times. Our family's love is still growing, and we appreciate the lessons our kids give us every day.

Parent 2- Since almost every conversation we have now centres around our child and her needs, our relationship has changed significantly. We both want what's best for her, yet we frequently find ourselves taking different approaches to problems. He worries a great deal about what lies ahead for her and how she will handle the difficulties that come with growing up. He considers her education, independence, and the type of care she might require in the future, keeping an eye on long-term results. However, I make an effort to remind him to concentrate on the development she is making right now—the little triumphs, the advancements, and the constructive changes that are taking place. In my opinion, commemorating these occasions is equally as crucial as planning for the future. However, this divergence in viewpoint can occasionally result in recurring disputes as we try to strike a balance between anticipating the future and enjoying the trip as it happens. Even though these conversations might be difficult, our ultimate objective is the same: to provide the greatest possible care, love, and guidance for our child.

Parent 3- Having a child with autism has presented opportunities for personal and interpersonal development in addition to problems. Stress, irritation, and uncertainty have all been experienced at times since everyone reacts differently to circumstances. There have occasionally been arguments and conflict as a result of our different parenting philosophies, approaches to problem-solving, and strategies for dealing with trying situations. But these difficulties have also forced us to develop both as a marriage and as individuals, giving us important insights into patience, compromise, and support for one another. We have improved our ability to listen to and appreciate one another's viewpoints while communicating more freely and efficiently as a result of this experience. We've improved our ability to collaborate and find methods to help each other and our child. In our relationship as much as in parenting, patience has become instinctive. Our connection has become stronger and more empathetic as a result of our increased understanding of each other's emotions, anxieties, and strengths. In many respects, our shared experiences have strengthened our relationship and united us, reaffirming our dedication to one another and to our child.

Emotional and Mental Health Challenges	There are many different experiences involved in raising a child with autism. Some moms emphasize acceptance, viewing their child as equal and capable, while others find the journey draining, particularly when dealing with children who are nonverbal or have scholastic difficulties, and occasionally experience remorse. Many, however, also discover pride, tolerance, and personal development, appreciating minor victories and become more compassionate. It's a voyage filled with difficulties, resiliency, and special delights.
Daily routine management	<p>Managing everyday routines with children can be difficult, particularly when difficulties occur, but parents find the fortitude and coping mechanisms to get through these times. Every parent has different challenges, ranging from being uncooperative during meals and bath time to managing tantrums brought on by adjustment to the schedule. To overcome these challenges, however, similar elements include understanding, patience, and adaptability.</p> <p>In order to assist their children manage their emotions, parents use a variety of strategies, including listening, speaking quietly, employing sensory aides, and offering soothing activities like music. Although the path is difficult, it is also fruitful since parents value the little triumphs and steady advancement. Managing daily obligations while attending to the child's demands calls for a great deal of resilience, but it also fortifies the relationship between parent and child, encouraging development and comprehension.</p>

Social Difficulties	Interaction	<p>Parenting a child with autism presents a variety of obstacles and coping mechanisms when it comes to social interaction issues. Some parents deal with comprehending people, while others experience misunderstandings, ignorance, or even difficulty in social situations. Developing relationships with parents who can genuinely relate to their experiences can be difficult, particularly when some are reluctant to offer their thoughts or compare progress.</p> <p>Parents modify their approach according to the circumstances when they encounter those who are unable to comprehend their child's conduct. While some opt to distance themselves from people who are critical or uncaring, others concentrate on teaching others about autism. Notwithstanding these challenges, the major priorities continue to be meeting their child's requirements and encouraging comprehension in those who are open to learning. Resilience, tolerance, and a dedication to putting their child's welfare ahead of social norms or criticisms are necessary for this journey.</p>
Family Dynamics		<p>Bringing up a child with autism affects family dynamics in a significant and complex way, especially the connection between partners. For some, the experience of helping their child together strengthens their relationship and promotes greater tolerance, love, and cooperation. These parents discover that as they work together to overcome obstacles and enjoy victories as a team, their efforts not only benefit their child but also strengthen their bond. Through the experience, virtues like compassion, tenacity, and a deeper understanding of one another's roles and contributions can be learned.</p> <p>For others, the difficulties may cause relationship stress. Differing viewpoints, such as one parent emphasizing the child's future while the other stresses their current development, can cause conflict and tension. Stressful circumstances, different coping strategies, and different approaches to meeting their child's needs frequently lead to conflict, necessitating constant work to close knowledge gaps.</p> <p>Numerous parents see chances for personal and interpersonal development in spite of these obstacles. Raising a child with autism frequently forces partners to improve their communication, empathy, and teamwork. The shared accountability and dedication to their child's welfare can act as a unifying factor, ultimately fortifying and deepening their bond even though the journey may be challenging.</p> <p>In general, raising a child with autism might present special challenges for a relationship, but it can also get chances to grow together. In negotiating the challenges of both parenting and partnership, it emphasizes the value of tolerance, cooperation, and support for one another.</p>

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study shed light on the many coping mechanisms used by parents of children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) as well as the complex difficulties they encounter. It is clear that providing care has an emotional cost; parents often feel stressed, anxious, and powerless. Nevertheless, a lot of parents also show incredible resilience by using adaptive coping strategies to control their stress levels, like pursuing hobbies, mindfulness, and social support. According to the study, parents who actively engage in self-care and use constructive coping mechanisms typically exhibit greater emotional health and a more upbeat perspective. Daily routines present a lot of difficulties because even seemingly easy things like eating, taking a shower, and switching between tasks take more time and patience. Many parents stated that their mental and physical tiredness was exacerbated by their children's meltdowns when they insisted on being independent or had trouble adjusting to changes in their routine. Because everyday life is unpredictable, parents must continually adapt and create adaptable coping mechanisms to deal with the increased stress. Another major issue that surfaced was social

relationships, as many parents experienced isolation, stigma, and miscommunications. Due to a lack of common experiences or criticism from others who are not knowledgeable with autism, some parents reported having trouble seeking support from other parents. Some parents prefer to steer clear of social situations that feel exhausting or unproductive, while others actively educate others about ASD in an effort to promote understanding. These incidents highlight the need for increased social acceptance and understanding of neurodiverse people and their families.

When it comes to managing the difficulties of parenting a child with ASD, family dynamics are quite important. According to some parents, their relationships were improved by mutual support and shared obligations, which promoted cooperation and unity. Other people, however, were under stress because of the hardship of long-term caregiving, conflicting parenting philosophies, and different coping mechanisms. In several couples, tension increased as a result of the emotional strain of continuously defending their child and making plans for their future. Many parents acknowledged their personal progress over the journey and indicated a strong dedication to their child's well-being despite these challenges.

The study's overall findings emphasize the value of all-encompassing support systems, which include community support networks, easily available therapy alternatives, and family education initiatives. Understanding the difficulties parents encounter and the coping strategies they employ can help mental health providers, educators, and legislators create initiatives that improve the resilience and general well-being of families.

CONCLUSION

This study emphasizes how raising a child with ASD has a significant impact on everyday life, family connections, and parental well-being. Adaptive coping techniques greatly enhance emotional well-being and resilience, whereas maladaptive techniques exacerbate stress and burnout. The results highlight the need for more community knowledge, easily accessible mental health resources, and social support in order to lessen stigma and give parents the resources they need to get through their journey. Therapy, parent support groups, and organized coping training are examples of interventions that are customized to the particular experiences of parents and can improve results for both parents and kids. In the end, although parenting a kid with ASD is a difficult journey, it also offers chances for personal development, closer family ties, and the growth of more tolerance and empathy. Society can lessen the load on parents and enhance the general wellbeing of families coping with ASD by raising awareness and offering all-encompassing support.

REFERENCES

1. (Balubaid & Sahab, 2017)Balubaid, R., & Sahab, L. (2017). The coping strategies used by parents of children with autism in Saudi Arabia. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 8(35), 141–151.
2. Bekhet, A. K., Johnson, N. L., & Zauszniewski, J. A. (2012). Resilience in family members of persons with autism spectrum disorder: A review of the literature. *Issues in Mental Health Nursing*, 33(10), 650–656.
3. Lai, W. W., Goh, T. J., Oei, T. P., & Sung, M. (2015). Coping and well-being in parents of children with autism spectrum disorders (ASD). *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 45, 2582–2593.
4. Reddy, G., Fewster, D. L., & Gurayah, T. (2019). Parents' voices: Experiences and coping as a parent of a child with autism spectrum disorder. *South African Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 49(1), 43–50.
5. Salami, S., & Alhalal, E. (2024). Affiliate Stigma Among Caregivers of Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder: The Role of Coping Strategies and Perceived Social Support. *Journal of Disability Research*, 3(2), 20240009.
6. Salas, B. L., Rodríguez, V. Y., Urbieto, C. T., & Cuadrado, E. (2017). The role of coping strategies and self-efficacy as predictors of life satisfaction in a sample of parents of children with autism spectrum disorder. *Psicothema*, 29(1), 55–60.
7. Sánchez Amate, J. J., & Luque de la Rosa, A. (2024). The Effect of Autism Spectrum Disorder on Family Mental Health: Challenges, Emotional Impact, and Coping Strategies. *Brain Sciences*, 14(11), 1116.
8. Sarriá, E., & Pozo, P. (2015). Coping strategies and parents' positive perceptions of raising a child with autism spectrum disorders. *Autism Spectrum Disorder-Recent Advances*, 51–79.
9. Wei-Chih, C., Chang, H.-L., & Kuo-Yu, C. (2023). Exploring coping strategies of parents of children with autism spectrum disorder in Taiwan: A qualitative study. *Journal of Nursing Research*, 31(3), e278.
10. Yaacob, W. N. W., Yaacob, L. H., Zulkifli, M. M., & Muhamad, R. (2022). A journey towards resilience: Coping strategies adopted by parents with children having autism Spectrum disorder in Northeast Malaysia. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 19(4), 2458.