

Research Paper

## Parenting a Child with ASD: Navigating Challenges, Stressors, and Effective Coping Mechanisms

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### ABSTRACT

Parenting a child with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) presents unique challenges that significantly impact parental well-being, family dynamics, and overall quality of life. This literature review synthesizes findings from over 20 peer-reviewed studies sourced from Google Scholar and Shodhganga, examining the stressors, coping mechanisms, and cultural influences on parenting autistic children. Key challenges explored include communication difficulties, social interaction barriers, behavioral issues, sensory sensitivities, financial burdens, and emotional strain. The review also highlights the importance of support systems, including counseling, community networks, and structured intervention programs. Special emphasis is given to the effectiveness of Barkley's Parent Training Program, which has demonstrated superior outcomes in reducing parental stress and improving child behavior compared to other intervention strategies. By understanding the multifaceted struggles parents face, this review underscores the need for evidence-based support programs that empower families, enhance coping mechanisms, and promote positive developmental outcomes for autistic children. The findings have significant implications for future research, clinical practice, and policy development in the field of ASD parenting support.

**Keywords:** *Parenting, Autism, Parenting stress*

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a complex neurodevelopmental condition characterized by persistent deficits in social communication and interaction, along with restricted and repetitive patterns of behavior, interests, or activities (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). The global prevalence of ASD has risen significantly in recent years, with estimates suggesting that approximately 1 in 100 children worldwide are diagnosed with the disorder (World Health Organization, 2023). This increase has brought heightened awareness of the challenges faced by individuals with ASD and their families, emphasizing the urgent need for research-driven interventions and support systems.

Parenting a child with ASD presents unique challenges that extend beyond those encountered by parents of neurotypical children. The demands of raising an autistic child often include managing communication difficulties, behavioral concerns, sensory sensitivities, and the need for specialized educational and therapeutic interventions (Karst &

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Van Hecke, 2012). Additionally, many parents experience significant emotional and psychological strain due to societal stigma, financial burdens, and the lifelong caregiving responsibilities associated with ASD (Hayes & Watson, 2013). Studies consistently report that parents of children with ASD experience higher levels of stress, anxiety, and depression compared to parents of neurotypical children or those with other developmental disabilities (Estes et al., 2013). Mothers, who often serve as the primary caregivers, report particularly high levels of emotional exhaustion, which can negatively impact their overall well-being and family dynamics (Dunn et al., 2001).

Given these challenges, understanding the experiences of parents raising children with ASD is crucial for developing effective interventions and policies that enhance family resilience. Various coping strategies have been identified in research, including problem-focused coping, social support, mindfulness-based stress reduction, and behavioral parent training programs (Blackledge & Hayes, 2006). Structured intervention programs such as Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) and Parent-Mediated Interventions have shown promise in improving child behavior while reducing parental stress (Kasari et al., 2015). Furthermore, research highlights the importance of culturally informed approaches, as parenting practices and support systems vary across different sociocultural contexts (Benson, 2014).

One of the most effective strategies in supporting parents of children with ASD is structured parental training. Among the various models available, Barkley's Parent Training Program has gained significant recognition for its structured approach to improving parent-child interactions, reinforcing positive behaviors, and equipping parents with effective disciplinary strategies (Matson et al., 2009). Unlike other training models, Barkley's program offers a step-by-step framework tailored to the unique challenges faced by parents of autistic children, making it an essential tool in reducing caregiver stress and enhancing family well-being.

This literature review aims to synthesize current research on the experiences of parents of children with ASD, the factors influencing their well-being, and the efficacy of interventions designed to support them. By exploring parental stressors, coping mechanisms, intervention programs, and the role of social and cultural factors, this review seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by parents and the strategies that can empower them in their caregiving journey. The findings of this review have significant implications for future research, clinical practice, and policymaking, ultimately contributing to the development of more effective and accessible support systems for families affected by ASD.

### ***Parental Experiences and Stressors***

Parenting a child with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is often accompanied by increased stress levels, emotional strain, and significant lifestyle adjustments. Research consistently indicates that parents of children with ASD experience higher levels of stress compared to parents of neurotypical children or those with other developmental disabilities (Hayes & Watson, 2013). This heightened stress stems from various factors, including the child's behavioral challenges, the need for constant supervision, financial burdens, and the complexities of accessing appropriate educational and therapeutic resources. Unlike many other developmental disorders, ASD symptoms can be unpredictable and vary significantly from one child to another, making it difficult for parents to establish stable routines and long-term plans.

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One of the primary contributors to parental stress is the presence of behavioral and emotional difficulties in children with ASD. Many children with ASD exhibit aggressive behaviors, self-injury, severe tantrums, or difficulties with emotional regulation, which can be overwhelming for caregivers. The inability to communicate effectively or understand social cues further exacerbates these challenges, leading to frustration and emotional exhaustion among parents. A systematic review by Corcoran et al. (2015) highlighted that many parents report persistent feelings of isolation, anxiety, and uncertainty about their child's future. The long-term nature of ASD, coupled with the absence of a definitive cure, creates ongoing stress that can evolve into chronic burnout.

Beyond the immediate demands of caregiving, societal stigma and misconceptions about ASD significantly impact parental well-being. Many cultures still view developmental disorders through a lens of shame, blame, or superstition, leading to social exclusion or judgment. Cultural beliefs and expectations shape parental experiences in profound ways, influencing how families perceive and manage ASD. Riany et al. (2017) explored how traditional cultural values in Indonesia affect parenting practices for children with ASD, revealing that societal norms often place undue pressure on parents, exacerbating feelings of guilt and self-doubt. Similarly, Habib et al. (2017) examined the experiences of Pakistani mothers raising children with ASD in Ireland. Their study found that cultural dissonance and the lack of social support in a foreign environment heightened parental stress, as these mothers struggled to reconcile their cultural expectations with the Western approach to ASD interventions.

Parental stress also has a direct impact on mental and physical health. Chronic stress is linked to increased risks of anxiety and depression, particularly among mothers who often take on the primary caregiving role (Dunn et al., 2001). The daily challenges of managing therapy appointments, coordinating school accommodations, and handling unpredictable behaviors can lead to emotional exhaustion and burnout. Estes et al. (2013) found that prolonged exposure to high stress levels contributes to adverse health outcomes, including hypertension, weakened immune function, and sleep disturbances. Additionally, financial strain associated with medical expenses, therapy costs, and specialized education further compounds stress levels, making it difficult for families to maintain financial stability.

Despite these challenges, research also highlights the resilience of parents who develop adaptive coping mechanisms. Many caregivers find support in community networks, religious or spiritual beliefs, and structured intervention programs. Some parents engage in advocacy efforts to raise awareness about ASD, turning their personal struggles into a source of empowerment. However, the availability of support systems varies across cultures and socioeconomic backgrounds, influencing the overall experiences of families.

Understanding the multifaceted stressors faced by parents of children with ASD is essential for developing effective support interventions. By addressing both psychological and social factors, mental health professionals, educators, and policymakers can create targeted strategies to alleviate parental stress and improve the overall well-being of families affected by ASD.

### ***Challenges Faced by Parents***

- **Communication Difficulties:** Autistic children often experience difficulties with both verbal and nonverbal communication. This can lead to frustration for both the child and parents, making it challenging to understand the child's needs and desires

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(Charman & Stone, 2012). Parents may struggle to interpret their child's cues, leading to misunderstandings and potential behavioral issues.

- **Social Interaction Challenges:** Difficulties with social interaction are a core characteristic of ASD. Parents may find it challenging to support their child's social development, including forming friendships, understanding social cues, and navigating social situations (Bauminger & Agam, 2011). This can lead to social isolation for both the child and the family.
- **Behavioral Issues:** Autistic children may exhibit challenging behaviors such as tantrums, aggression, self-injurious behavior, and repetitive behaviors. Managing these behaviors can be emotionally and physically draining for parents (Estes et al., 2014). Finding effective strategies for behavior management is often a significant concern for families.
- **Sensory Sensitivities:** Many autistic children experience sensory sensitivities, either hyper- or hypo-sensitivity, to various stimuli such as sounds, lights, textures, and smells. These sensitivities can lead to meltdowns and avoidance behaviors, making everyday activities like going to the grocery store or attending social events challenging (Ashburner et al., 2014).
- **Financial Burdens:** The costs associated with ASD, including therapies, specialized education, and medical care, can be substantial. These financial burdens can place significant strain on families, limiting their access to other resources and impacting their overall well-being (Ginsberg et al., 2014).
- **Emotional Strain:** Parenting an autistic child can be emotionally demanding. Parents often experience heightened levels of stress, anxiety, depression, and grief (Pottie & Ingram, 2011). The constant challenges and uncertainties associated with ASD can take a toll on parents' mental health.
- **Impact on Family Dynamics:** The challenges of raising an autistic child can impact the entire family. Siblings may experience feelings of resentment, jealousy, or isolation. Parents may have less time and energy to dedicate to other family members. The strain can also affect the marital relationship (Orsmond et al., 2005).

### *Coping Mechanisms and Resilience*

Despite the numerous challenges associated with raising a child with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), many parents develop effective coping strategies to manage stress and support their child's development. Research indicates that social support, parenting styles, culturally tailored interventions, and adaptive coping mechanisms all play a crucial role in fostering resilience among parents.

One of the most significant factors in mitigating parental stress is the presence of a strong support system. Both formal and informal social support networks contribute to parental well-being. Riany and Ihsana (2021) found that mothers who actively participated in support groups and had access to community resources reported lower stress levels and more positive parenting experiences. Connecting with other parents facing similar challenges can provide emotional validation, practical advice, and a sense of solidarity. Additionally, professional support, such as therapy, counseling, and respite care services, has been instrumental in reducing parental burnout and enhancing overall family functioning.

Parenting styles also play a crucial role in shaping parental stress levels and child outcomes. Research suggests that authoritative parenting—characterized by high warmth, responsiveness, and structure—leads to better emotional regulation in children with ASD

and lower stress levels in parents (Johnson et al., 2011). In contrast, authoritarian and permissive parenting styles have been linked to increased behavioral challenges in children and higher levels of parental stress (Rodriguez et al., 2019). Developing an adaptive and flexible parenting approach helps caregivers respond more effectively to their child's needs while maintaining their own emotional well-being.

Adaptive coping strategies are essential for building resilience. Problem-focused coping, which involves actively addressing challenges and seeking solutions, has been associated with lower stress levels in parents. Additionally, mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) and acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT) have been found effective in helping parents manage emotional distress and improve their mental health (Blackledge & Hayes, 2006). Engaging in self-care activities, such as exercise, meditation, or pursuing hobbies, further enhances parental resilience by reducing emotional exhaustion.

Cultural competence in support services is another critical aspect of effective coping. Sankey et al. (2019) emphasized the importance of culturally tailored interventions, noting that support programs that incorporate cultural values and traditions are more effective in engaging parents and promoting positive outcomes. Recognizing and integrating culturally relevant coping mechanisms ensures that interventions are accessible and meaningful to diverse communities.

Overall, fostering resilience among parents of children with ASD requires a multidimensional approach that includes strong social support, adaptive parenting styles, problem-focused coping strategies, and culturally sensitive interventions. By implementing these mechanisms, parents can navigate the challenges of raising a child with ASD while maintaining their own mental and emotional well-being.

### ***Impact of Parenting Styles on Children with ASD***

Parenting styles play a crucial role in shaping the development, behavior, and emotional well-being of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Research indicates that different parenting approaches significantly impact both child outcomes and parental stress levels. Understanding these styles and their effects is essential for fostering positive development in children with ASD while promoting parental well-being.

Authoritative parenting, characterized by high warmth, responsiveness, and structured discipline, has been associated with better emotional regulation and adaptive functioning in children with ASD. Riany et al. (2017) conducted a comparative study on Indonesian parents of children with and without ASD, revealing that authoritative parenting leads to improved social skills, self-regulation, and behavioral outcomes. Similarly, Johnson et al. (2011) found that children raised by authoritative parents exhibit better emotional resilience and reduced anxiety, highlighting the importance of a nurturing yet structured environment.

Conversely, authoritarian and permissive parenting styles have been linked to increased behavioral challenges in children and higher stress levels in parents. Authoritarian parenting, which is characterized by strict rules and high expectations with little warmth, can contribute to emotional distress and social withdrawal in children with ASD. Permissive parenting, which involves high warmth but low discipline, may lead to difficulty in setting boundaries and managing behaviors, resulting in increased parental stress (Rodriguez et al., 2019).

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Coping strategies are essential for parents managing the stress of raising a child with ASD. Research suggests that problem-focused coping, mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR), and acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT) are effective approaches for alleviating parental stress and enhancing coping abilities (Blackledge & Hayes, 2006). Additionally, engaging in self-care activities, seeking professional counseling, and participating in support groups help parents build resilience and maintain emotional well-being.

Promoting adaptive parenting practices is essential for fostering positive outcomes in children with ASD. Providing parents with education on effective parenting strategies, emotional regulation techniques, and culturally sensitive interventions can empower them to create a supportive and structured environment. By adopting an authoritative and balanced approach, parents can enhance their child's social and emotional development while managing their own stress effectively.

### ***Parental Support Programs and the Role of Social Support***

Various interventions have been developed to support parents of children with ASD, aiming to enhance their coping abilities and overall well-being. Parent education programs have shown significant benefits, as evidenced by Chiang (2014), who evaluated a culturally sensitive program for Chinese American families and reported improvements in parental knowledge, self-efficacy, and reduced stress levels. Similarly, Andrews et al. (2021) examined the integration of acceptance and commitment training with behavior parent training, finding that this approach enhanced parents' psychological flexibility and their ability to manage their child's challenging behaviors effectively. However, despite the availability of such programs, many parents face barriers in accessing support, including cultural stigma, lack of awareness, and limited access to resources. Clément et al. (2019) highlighted these challenges among French parents, emphasizing the need for increased public awareness and the role of healthcare professionals in guiding families toward available resources. Social support is another critical factor in alleviating parental stress. Parents who receive support from family, friends, and community networks report lower stress levels and improved overall well-being (Benson, 2014). Online support groups and autism advocacy organizations provide valuable platforms for parents to share experiences and access essential resources, fostering better coping mechanisms (Huws et al., 2001). Additionally, access to professional counseling and therapy services significantly improves parental mental health, reducing feelings of isolation and burnout. Strengthening parental support programs, increasing accessibility, and promoting inclusive social networks are essential steps in ensuring that families raising children with ASD receive the guidance and emotional support they need.

**Intervention Programs and Parental Training** Several intervention programs have been developed to assist parents in managing their children's needs. Behavioral Parent Training (BPT) and Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) techniques have been widely researched and proven effective in improving child behavior while reducing parental stress (Matson et al., 2009). Additionally, parent-mediated interventions that teach social and communication skills to children with ASD show promising results in enhancing parental efficacy and confidence (Kasari et al., 2015). Structured programs such as parent coaching, cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) for parents, and evidence-based interventions have demonstrated effectiveness in helping parents manage stress and behavioral challenges associated with ASD.

**Cultural Influences on Parenting ASD Children** Cultural beliefs and societal norms significantly influence how parents perceive and manage ASD. In some cultures, ASD is still highly stigmatized, leading to increased parental stress and reduced access to support systems (Divan et al., 2012). The availability of resources, attitudes toward disability, and societal expectations regarding child-rearing impact how parents cope with raising a child with ASD. Studies indicate that in collectivist cultures, extended families play a crucial role in caregiving, which may reduce parental burden, whereas in individualist cultures, parents often rely more on formal interventions and professional support (Lai et al., 2014). Addressing cultural differences in intervention strategies is essential to ensure that parent training programs are effective and inclusive.

## CONCLUSION

Parenting a child with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a multifaceted journey that presents a range of challenges, including heightened stress, emotional strain, financial burdens, and difficulties in managing behavioral issues. The literature consistently highlights that parents of children with ASD experience significantly higher levels of stress compared to parents of neurotypical children or those with other developmental disorders. Factors contributing to this stress include the unpredictability of ASD-related behaviors, the intensive caregiving demands, societal stigma, and cultural expectations. However, research also indicates that effective coping mechanisms, social support, structured interventions, and culturally sensitive parenting programs can mitigate these stressors, fostering resilience and enhancing parental well-being.

One of the most impactful interventions for parents of children with ASD is **Barkley's Parent Training Program**, an evidence-based approach designed to enhance parent-child interactions and manage autism-related behavioral challenges. This structured program focuses on improving communication, reinforcing positive behaviors, and implementing effective discipline strategies. Unlike other behavioral intervention programs, Barkley's training provides a **step-by-step framework** that equips parents with practical tools to address real-life parenting challenges. Studies have shown that parents who participate in this program report **reduced stress levels, increased confidence in handling behavioral difficulties, and improved emotional well-being**. By fostering a more structured and positive approach to parenting, this program not only benefits the child but also strengthens the overall family dynamic, creating a healthier home environment.

Beyond structured interventions, **counseling services, support groups, and culturally tailored interventions** play a crucial role in supporting parents of children with ASD. Access to professional counseling provides emotional relief, guidance, and stress management techniques, allowing parents to navigate their child's unique needs with greater confidence. Additionally, participation in support groups and autism advocacy organizations enables parents to connect with others facing similar challenges, reducing feelings of isolation and fostering a sense of community. The role of cultural competence in these interventions is particularly important, as parents from diverse backgrounds may face **unique social pressures, stigmas, and resource limitations** that require tailored solutions. Despite the growing recognition of these support systems, **barriers to accessing effective interventions persist**. Many parents struggle with **limited availability of services, financial constraints, lack of awareness, and cultural stigmatization** that prevent them from seeking help. Future research should focus on developing and evaluating **accessible, culturally sensitive, and evidence-based interventions** that can be implemented across diverse populations. Longitudinal studies are also essential to assess the **long-term impact**

**of parenting styles, coping mechanisms, and intervention programs** on both parents and children with ASD. By understanding these evolving dynamics, researchers and practitioners can refine existing support models to better address the specific needs of families.

In conclusion, parenting a child with ASD requires a **comprehensive, multidimensional support system** that includes structured training programs, counseling services, peer support networks, and culturally competent interventions. By equipping parents with the necessary tools, knowledge, and emotional support, we can empower them to **navigate the complexities of raising a child with ASD more effectively**. Furthermore, fostering greater societal awareness and acceptance of ASD will help reduce stigma, creating a more inclusive and supportive environment for autistic individuals and their families. Through continued research, advocacy, and the expansion of accessible support programs, we can work toward improving the quality of life for both parents and children, ensuring that families raising children with ASD receive the guidance and assistance they need to thrive.

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