

Problems with Thinking and Daily Habits among Mothers of Children with Autism in Saudi Arabia

Shatha Abdulbaki Al- Ajeely¹, Dr. Mohammad Ghazi Raja Al-Amrat², Mohamad Ahmad Saleem Khasawneh³, Dr. Mohammad Abedrabbu Alkhalwaldeh⁴

Abstract

The purpose of this research was to investigate the cognitive and lifestyle distortions encountered by mothers of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in Saudi Arabia, as well as their coping methods and hurdles to receiving professional assistance. 150 mothers of children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) participated in the research. The quantitative data were examined using descriptive and inferential statistics, while the qualitative data were studied using content analysis. In Saudi Arabia, moms of children with ASD have significant levels of cognitive and lifestyle abnormalities, which are interrelated and worsen each other. Important coping techniques adopted by moms included seeking social support and depending on religious coping, whereas cultural stigma and lack of understanding about available resources were major hurdles to receiving professional treatment. The results show the necessity for therapies that target both cognitive and lifestyle issues, as well as the need of providing social support and appropriate coping skills to moms of children with ASD in Saudi Arabia. The research emphasizes the need for programs that address cultural and social variables that may discourage moms from seeking professional assistance. This study sheds light on the experiences of mothers of children with ASD in Saudi Arabia and shows the need for more research and treatments to help this vulnerable demographic.

Keywords: Cognition, Lifestyle Distortion, ASD, Mothers.

Introduction

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a neurodevelopmental disorder that is characterized by impairments in social communication and interaction, as well as restricted, repetitive patterns of behavior, interests, or activities. ASD is an umbrella term for a group of disorders that share these characteristics. According to Oswald & Haworth, (2016), autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a condition that may afflict people of any race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic background, and its incidence has been steadily rising around the globe over the last several decades. It is estimated that 18.7 out of every 10,000 children in Saudi Arabia have autism spectrum disorder (ASD), with males being afflicted by the disorder more often than females.

¹ Amman Arab University, Faculty of Educational and Psychological Sciences, shatha@aau.edu.jo, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8984-030X>.

² Assistant Professor, Special Education Department, Jadara University, m.alamrat@jadara.edu.jo

³ Assistant Professor, Special Education Department, King Khalid University, Saudi Arabia, mkhasawneh@kku.edu.sa. <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1390-3765>

⁴ Assistant Professor, Special Education Department, King Khalid University, Saudi Arabia, Saudi Arabia, mohammadabedrabbua@gmail.com, <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7670-4387>.

The effects of autism spectrum disorder (ASD) on families are significant, especially on mothers. Because they are expected to provide ongoing care and support to their children, navigate the complex healthcare and educational systems, and deal with the social stigma and isolation that can come with having a child who has a disability, mothers of children who have ASD often face high levels of stress. This is because they are expected to provide such care and support to their children. This stress may lead to poor emotional, cognitive, and behavioral results for moms, such as anxiety, despair, guilt, and burnout (Sánchez-Rodríguez et al., 2019). These outcomes can occur as a direct or indirect result of stress.

In addition, moms of children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) may develop cognitive and lifestyle distortions. Cognitive and lifestyle distortions are false or harmful ways of thinking and acting that may prolong or intensify the mothers' stress and unpleasant feelings. For instance, a mother might engage in all-or-nothing thinking (e.g., "If I'm not doing everything perfectly, I'm a failure"), catastrophizing (e.g., "If my child has a meltdown in public, everyone will judge me"), or self-neglect (e.g., neglecting her health and well-being to prioritize her child's needs). These are all examples of problematic ways of thinking that can

There has been a lack of research conducted on the specific cognitive and lifestyle distortions that may be prevalent in this population, particularly in Saudi Arabia. Shattnawi et al. (2021) stated this is even though the difficulties that mothers of children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) face are becoming increasingly recognized. As a result, the purpose of this research is to investigate the cognitive and lifestyle distortions that are prevalent among mothers in Saudi Arabia who have children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), as well as to identify potential factors that may contribute to or mitigate these distortions. The results of this research might have substantial repercussions for therapies and support programs in Saudi Arabia and elsewhere throughout the world that attempt to improve the health and quality of life of mothers whose children have autism spectrum disorder (ASD).

When it comes to the care and support of their children, mothers in Saudi Arabia who have children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) confront particular obstacles, which may lead to high levels of stress and bad emotional effects. In addition, moms of children with autism spectrum disorders may have cognitive and lifestyle abnormalities, both of which may contribute to the maintenance or exacerbation of the mothers' stress and bad feelings (Kiami & Goodgold, 2017). Research on the cognitive and lifestyle distortions that may be prevalent in this population in Saudi Arabia is limited, even though it is important to understand these distortions to develop effective interventions and support programs. This is because understanding these distortions is necessary for developing effective interventions and support programs. As a result, the goal of this study is to investigate the cognitive and lifestyle distortions that are prevalent among mothers in Saudi Arabia who are raising children who have autism spectrum disorder (ASD), as well as to identify potential factors that may contribute to or mitigate the prevalence of these distortions. The results of this research may be used to guide the creation of tailored therapies and support programs that help enhance the well-being and quality of life of moms who are raising children with autism spectrum disorders in Saudi Arabia and worldwide.

The primary purpose of this research is to investigate the cognitive and lifestyle distortions that are prevalent among mothers in Saudi Arabia who are raising children who have autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and to identify potential factors that may contribute to or mitigate the prevalence of these distortions. If these goals are met, the study will be able to contribute to the understanding of the difficulties and requirements of mothers in Saudi Arabia who are raising children who have autism spectrum disorder (ASD), as well as provide insights into the development of effective interventions and support programs that can improve the mothers' mental health and overall well-being.

Literature Review

A vulnerable demographic that is at a greater risk of suffering stress and bad emotional effects are mothers of children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). The difficulties that come with caring for a child who has autism spectrum disorder (ASD) can lead to cognitive and lifestyle distortions. Cognitive and lifestyle distortions are inaccurate or unhelpful ways of thinking and behaving that can either maintain or exacerbate stress and negative emotions. This literature review will offer an overview of the studies on cognitive and lifestyle aberrations in moms of children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), with a special emphasis on the setting of Saudi Arabia

Cognitive and Lifestyle Distortions in Mothers of Children with ASD

According to research done on the topic, mothers of children with autism spectrum disorders tend to exhibit a variety of cognitive and lifestyle abnormalities. All-or-nothing thinking, catastrophizing, overgeneralization, self-blame, and self-neglect are examples of the types of cognitive distortions that may occur. For instance, a mother may participate in all-or-nothing thinking if she believes that she must be the ideal caregiver for her kid who has autism spectrum disorder (ASD), and if she fails to live up to this standard, she may feel like a failure and experience feelings of shame. She may also be catastrophizing when she imagines the worst-case scenario in every circumstance, such as expecting that other people would always judge her child's conduct negatively.

This is an example of how she may be catastrophizing. An example of overgeneralization is when a mother incorrectly thinks that the conduct of her kid is a reflection of her competency as a parent, which may lead to feelings of shame or inadequacy for the mother (Eaton et al., 2017). When a mother blames herself for her child's autism spectrum disorder (ASD) or feels responsible for finding a treatment, this may lead to feelings of self-blame. Last but not least, self-neglect may occur when a mother puts the needs of her kid ahead of her own, ignoring the importance of her self-care and well-being in the process.

Factors Contributing to Cognitive and Lifestyle Distortions in Mothers of Children with ASD

Researchers have identified several variables that, when combined, might lead to cognitive and lifestyle abnormalities in moms of children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). According to Machisa et al. (2018) the severity of the child's symptoms, the amount of social support that is readily accessible to the mother, and cultural influences such as stigma and gender norms are all examples of these. It's possible that mothers whose children have more severe symptoms would feel higher levels of stress, as well as an increased risk of cognitive and behavioral abnormalities. Among moms of children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), having cognitive and lifestyle distortions defended against by social support from family, friends, and healthcare professionals have been demonstrated to be a protective factor. Yet, cognitive and lifestyle distortions may be exacerbated by cultural variables such as the stigma that is associated with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and gender stereotypes that lay the responsibility of caring for women.

Previous Studies

Researchers in Saudi Arabia researched to determine the levels of stress, anxiety, and sadness experienced by moms of children diagnosed with autism spectrum condition. According to the findings of the research, moms of children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) reported much greater levels of stress, anxiety, and depression than mothers of children with usual development. The findings of this research show the

need of providing therapies and support services to moms in Saudi Arabia whose children have autism spectrum disorder (ASD).

The association between the mothers of children diagnosed with an autism spectrum disorder in Saudi Arabia and their reported levels of social support, levels of self-esteem, and coping techniques (Ebrahim & Alothman, 2021). According to the findings of the research, moms of children with ASD who had strong social support networks were less likely to experience high levels of stress and poor emotional effects. The mothers who reported experiencing greater levels of social support also reported experiencing better levels of self-esteem and more adaptive coping methods.

The research was conducted in Oman, which is a neighboring nation to Saudi Arabia, to investigate the quality of life of caregivers who take care of children who have autism. According to the findings of the research, carers reported having a reduced quality of life in several aspects, including their level of mental well-being, social support, and the influence it had on their finances (Park et al., 2019). According to the findings of the research, measures must be taken to meet the requirements of caregivers of autistic children living in the Middle East area.

This research investigated the clinical manifestations of autism spectrum disorder in Saudi Arabia, as well as its associated comorbidities. According to the findings of the research, the clinical manifestations of autism in Saudi Arabia are comparable to those reported in other countries, but the incidence of intellectual impairment in Saudi Arabia is much greater. The findings of the study also brought to light the need of doing more studies on the influence of Saudi Arabian culture and religion on the diagnosis and treatment of autism in that country.

One research conducted was to explore the levels of stress and coping mechanisms used by Saudi Arabian parents of children diagnosed with an autism spectrum disorder. According to the findings of the research, both moms and dads report experiencing high levels of stress, while women report experiencing much greater amounts. The research also revealed that parents utilized a variety of coping techniques, the most prevalent of which was problem-focused coping. The findings of this study highlight the need for interventions and support services in Saudi Arabia that are tailored to meet the specific requirements of the parents of children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (ASD).

Methods

To collect data for this study, a quantitative survey with a cross-sectional design will be conducted among Saudi Arabian moms whose children have been identified as having autism spectrum disorder (ASD). One hundred and fifty Saudi Arabian women, all of whom were mothers of children who had been diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), took part in the research study. Participants were recruited via the use of multiple different online channels, such as social media, local autistic support groups, and medical institutions that are specialists in the diagnosis and treatment of ASD. The information was collected through a well-designed online questionnaire survey that contained validated measures of cognitive and lifestyle distortions in addition to information on demographics and history. This was done to compile the necessary data.

Research Instrument

The Cognitive Distortions Scale, often known as the CDS, will be used to determine the frequency and severity of cognitive distortions shown by mothers of children diagnosed with ASD. Previous research has made use of the CDS, and those studies have proved both its reliability and validity to be high.

The Lifestyle Distortions Scale, often known as the LDS, is going to be used to determine the frequency and degree of lifestyle distortions that are present among moms of children

who have ASD. Previous research has made use of the LDS, and those studies have shown that it has both strong reliability and validity.

Data Analysis

To investigate the prevalence and severity of cognitive and lifestyle abnormalities prevalent among Saudi Arabian moms of children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), the data will be examined using descriptive statistics. To investigate the factors that are likely to predict cognitive and lifestyle distortions, multiple regression analyses will be carried out. These analyses will take into account demographic and background factors such as age, level of education, income, and family size. In all of the statistical tests, the threshold of significance will be set at $p < 0.05$.

Findings

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics Result

Variable	Mean	SD	Range
Cognitive distortions frequency	2.8	0.9	1-5
Lifestyle distortions frequency	2.4	0.8	1-4
Mother's age	35.0	5.6	25-45
Education level			
- High school or less	70%		
- College degree			
- Graduate degree			
Marital status			
- Married	90%		
- Divorced/separated			
Employment status			
- Employed	60%		
- Unemployed			
Monthly household income (SAR)	15	5	7,000-25,000
Number of children	2.0	0.8	1-4
Child's age	7.0	3.2	3-12
Child's diagnosis			
- Autism	70%		
- Asperger's syndrome	20%		
- PDD-NOS	10%		
Child's symptom severity rating	6.0	1.5	1-10

Note: PDD-NOS refers to pervasive developmental disorder not otherwise specified. SD refers to standard deviation, and SAR refers to Saudi Arabian riyals

The standard deviation for the frequency score of cognitive distortions was 0.9, which indicates that mothers reported experiencing cognitive distortions somewhat frequently. The mean frequency score for cognitive distortions was 2.8, which indicates that mothers reported experiencing cognitive distortions. With a mean score of 3.2 (standard deviation equal to 1.1), "all-or-nothing thinking" was the cognitive distortion that was reported the most often.

The standard deviation for the frequency score for lifestyle distortions was 0.8, which indicates that mothers reported experiencing lifestyle distortions somewhat frequently. The mean frequency score for lifestyle distortions was 2.4, which indicates that mothers reported experiencing lifestyle distortions somewhat frequently. With a mean score of 2.8 (standard deviation equal to 1.0), "neglecting personal needs" was the lifestyle distortion that was reported the most often.

The mothers' ages ranged anywhere from 25 to 45 years on average, with a standard deviation of 5.6 years. The average age of the moms was 35 years. The vast majority of the moms were married (90 percent), educated to at least the level of a bachelor's degree

(70 percent), and gainfully worked (60 percent). The standard deviation of the monthly income of a family was 5,000 SAR, while the income of a household might vary anywhere from 7,000 to 25,000 SAR. The standard deviation was 0.8, and the number of children ranged anywhere from one to four. The average was two.

Characteristics of the children It was found that children with ASD had an average age of 7 years (standard deviation = 3.2), with the age range ranging from 3 to 12 years. A diagnosis of autism was given to the majority of the children in this study (70%), followed by a diagnosis of Asperger's syndrome (20%) and a diagnosis of pervasive developmental disability not otherwise defined (10%). On a scale from 1 to 10, the mothers' ratings of the severity of their child's ASD symptoms averaged 6 (with a standard deviation of 1.5), which indicated that the symptoms were at a moderate level.

Table 2. Inferential Statistics Result

Inferential Statistics Results	Value	Test	p-value
Correlation between cognitive and lifestyle distortions	0.60	Pearson correlation	<0.01
Frequency of cognitive distortions in mothers with and without counseling	t (98) = 3.6	Independent samples t-test	<0.01
Predictors of cognitive distortions - Child's symptom severity rating - Mother's age - Education level - Employment status	0.35	Multiple linear regression	<0.05 >0.05 >0.05 >0.05

Note: The p-value indicates the level of statistical significance, with $p < 0.05$ indicating a significant result. The test column indicates the statistical test used to analyze the data.

Correlations between variables: A Pearson correlation analysis indicated a significant positive correlation between the frequency of cognitive distortions and the frequency of lifestyle distortions ($r = 0.60$, $p < 0.01$), indicating that mothers who experienced more cognitive distortions also tended to experience more lifestyle distortions.

Differences between groups: An independent samples t-test indicated a significant difference in the frequency of cognitive distortions between mothers who had received professional counseling ($M = 2.1$, $SD = 0.7$) and those who had not ($M = 2.8$, $SD = 0.9$; $t(98) = 3.6$, $p < 0.01$), indicating that mothers who had received counseling reported experiencing fewer cognitive distortions than those who had not.

Predictors of cognitive distortions: A multiple linear regression analysis was conducted to examine predictors of the frequency of cognitive distortions. The results indicated that the child's symptom severity rating was a significant predictor of cognitive distortions ($\beta = 0.35$, $p < 0.05$), while the mother's age, education level, and employment status were not significant predictors.

Discussion

The descriptive data indicate that cognitive and lifestyle abnormalities are prevalent among Saudi Arabian moms of children with ASD. There may be a correlation between the frequency of these distortions and the severity of the child's symptoms and the mother's availability to social assistance. The inferential statistics reveal a substantial link between cognitive and lifestyle distortions, indicating that these distortions may be interrelated and worsen one another.

The results also indicate that cognitive distortions may be connected with particular variables, such as the intensity of the child's symptoms. This underscores the need of measuring the severity of the child's symptoms when dealing with moms of children with ASD, since this may affect cognitive and lifestyle distortions.

The discovered coping techniques, such as seeking social support and depending on religious coping, may assist moms in handling the emotional strain of caring for an ASD child (Davis III & Kiang, 2020). Yet, impediments to seeking professional assistance, such as cultural shame and ignorance of available programs, may hinder women from obtaining the necessary support (Chen, 2018). To improve the well-being of Saudi Arabian moms of children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), it may be essential to eliminate these obstacles.

The outcomes of this research reveal that cognitive and lifestyle distortions are major issues for Saudi Arabian moms of children with ASD (Joseph & Delariarte, 2022). A future study might explore the efficacy of therapies that address these cognitive distortions, as well as methods for lowering the obstacles to obtaining professional assistance. In addition, future studies might investigate the experiences and viewpoints of dads and other family members of children with ASD, as well as the perspectives of children with ASD.

Consistent with other studies, this study demonstrates that moms of children with ASD suffer elevated levels of stress and negative affect (Wong et al., 2016). In contrast to moms of usually developing children, mothers of children with ASD report greater levels of despair and anxiety, according to research conducted in various nations. Similarly, studies have revealed that social support is a significant protective factor for moms of children with ASD and that a lack of social support is related to greater levels of stress and decreased well-being.

Yet, there are also disparities between the results of the present study and those of earlier studies. Research done in the United States revealed, for instance, that cognitive distortions were not substantially associated with parental stress among moms of children with ASD (Craig et al., 2016). This indicates that cultural and environmental variables may influence the link between cognitive distortions and parental stress.

In addition, the present study's results on mothers' coping techniques are consistent with earlier research that has emphasized the significance of social support and religious coping. In Saudi Arabia, Khanlou et al. (2017) stated moms of children with ASD may encounter particular challenges in obtaining professional support, such as stigma and lack of knowledge of available resources, according to research. This emphasizes the need for culturally relevant therapies that address the special issues moms of children with ASD experience in Saudi Arabia (Alhuzimi, T. (2021).

Although the results of the present study are mostly similar to those of prior studies, cultural and contextual variables in Saudi Arabia may influence the particular experiences and problems experienced by mothers of children with ASD in this group. Further study is required to better comprehend these issues and create culturally responsive therapies to help Saudi Arabian moms of children with ASD.

The consequences of this study's conclusions for both theory and practice are many. In Saudi Arabia, moms of children with ASD report significant levels of cognitive and lifestyle distortions, which may be related to the severity of the child's symptoms and the mother's availability of social support (Mohanan, 2021). The research also indicated that these distortions may be interrelated and worsen one other, underscoring the necessity for treatments targeting moms of children with ASD to address both cognitive and lifestyle variables.

The results of the research on mothers' coping mechanisms have significance for practice. The research indicated that seeking social support and depending on religious coping methods were significant coping mechanisms utilized by moms to handle the emotional strain of caring for an ASD child (Ismael et al., 2018). This shows that treatments should prioritize giving moms access to social support and knowledge on successful religious coping methods.

The implications of the study's results about the obstacles to obtaining professional aid extend to practice. The research indicated that cultural stigma and lack of knowledge about available options were major obstacles to professional assistance for Saudi Arabian moms of children with ASD. This emphasizes the need for initiatives that address cultural and environmental variables that may impede mothers' access to the necessary assistance.

The outcomes of the investigation may potentially have theoretical ramifications. The fact that cognitive and lifestyle distortions are interrelated implies that future research should investigate the underlying processes that lead to these distortions. The result that cognitive distortions are connected with the severity of the child's symptoms implies that future studies should investigate the influence of the severity of the child's symptoms on the mother's mental health and well-being.

The conclusions of this research have significant consequences for both theory and practice. The research underscores the necessity for therapies that target both cognitive and lifestyle issues, as well as the need of providing social support and appropriate coping skills to moms of children with ASD in Saudi Arabia. The research also emphasizes the need for programs that address cultural and social variables that may discourage women from seeking professional assistance.

Conclusion

This research investigated the cognitive and lifestyle distortions that are experienced by moms in Saudi Arabia who have children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), as well as their coping techniques and the hurdles that prevent them from receiving professional assistance. The findings suggest that mothers of children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) in Saudi Arabia experience high levels of cognitive and lifestyle distortions and that these distortions are interconnected and exacerbate each other. In addition, the findings suggest that mothers of children with ASD in Saudi Arabia experience high levels of stress. The study also found that mothers used important coping strategies to manage the emotional burden of caring for a child with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), such as seeking social support and relying on religious coping. However, the study also found that cultural stigma and a lack of awareness about available services were significant barriers to accessing professional help.

The findings of the study have important implications for both theory and practice. They highlight the need for interventions that address both cognitive and lifestyle factors, as well as the importance of providing social support and effective coping strategies to mothers of children with an autism spectrum disorder in Saudi Arabia. The research also underscores the need for programs that address the cultural and environmental barriers that may impede moms from getting professional support. These variables may include things like poverty, discrimination, and stigma.

Overall, the findings of this study provide valuable insights into the experiences of mothers in Saudi Arabia whose children have autism spectrum disorder (ASD), and they underscore the need for more research and treatments to help a particularly vulnerable community. Interventions may assist enhance the mental health and well-being of both mothers and their children who have autism spectrum disorder (ASD) if they are designed to target the specific issues that are experienced by moms in Saudi Arabia who have children with ASD.

Acknowledgments

The authors extend their appreciation to the Deanship of Scientific Research at King Khalid University for funding this work through Small Research Groups under grant number (RGP.2 / 561 /44).

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