The Role of Self-help Groups in Overcoming Challenges Faced by Mothers of Autistic Children

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to explore the challenges faced by mothers in Saudi Arabia whose children suffer from autism. According to Irazabal and Pastor (2016) many mothers whose children suffer from autism spectrum disorder (ASD) assume personal responsibility for their child's situation, a factor that consequently leads to various maternal, social and emotional problems. Some of the most common and notable social problems these mothers face include depression, stigma, low self-esteem and feelings of guilt, financial issues (Irazabal & Pastor 2016; Duarte et al. 2005; Valente 2004). Mothers of children with ASD experience increased stress in response to behaviours their children exhibit, such as being irritable, lethargic and hyperactive as well as demonstrating poor communication or social interaction skills (Tomanik et al. 2004, cited in Ekas & Whitman 2011, p. 1202). Hence, self-help groups may enable mothers to express their feelings and learn from each other by discussing the common stressors they encounter. Moreover, self-help groups are intended to teach members how to deal with stress through the development of coping skills and the sharing of relevant knowledge of disorders, potential treatment and care, and support services for children and their families. This study will use a mixed method approach. The methods will comprise surveys and interviews with mothers of children with autism. The research aims to engage with the social model of disability despite the medical model of disability still being mainly used in Saudi Arabia. It is expected that the findings will contribute to the wider understanding of self-help groups and the challenges that mothers of children with autism may face in Saudi Arabia.

Keywords: Self-help groups – Challenges - Mothers – Parents – Children with autism –

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