

Educational Support for Autistic Children and Their Families in Iraq and The Kurdistan Region: Challenges, Gaps, And the Need for Inclusive Policies

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Abstract

Autism diagnoses are increasing globally, yet many regions—including Iraq and the Kurdistan Region—remain under-prepared to support autistic children and their families. In these contexts, limited awareness, cultural stigma, and lack of qualified training continue to delay early intervention, placing autistic children at risk of educational and developmental obstacles ((World Health Organization, 2023; Alkhateeb et al., 2022). This research seeks to investigate the resources available to Iraqi and Kurdish Region autistic children and their families. It answers five main study questions: the average age of diagnosis; the availability of educational help; educator confidence; training access; and the consequences of inadequate support.

A qualitative case study approach was used, involving semi-structured interviews with ten educators from government-run autism centres in Baghdad and Erbil, alongside a bilingual survey with 22 educators. Findings revealed that autism is commonly diagnosed after the age of five, with many educators reporting a lack of early screening, specialist training, and structured intervention. Cultural stigma was generally recognised as a barrier for both families and institutions. Educators reported feeling underprepared and emotionally burdened. A notable growing concern was the near-complete lack of services for autistic people above the age of 12 (Rudaw, 2025). This study demonstrates that, while educators are dedicated, the system does not educate them to provide necessary support. It advocates for national investment in autism-specific training, early screening, and inclusive educational planning to address critical gaps and enhance long-term results for autistic students.

Keywords: Autism, Iraq, Kurdistan Region, special educational needs, diagnosis delay, inclusive education, cultural stigma, educator training