

ABSTRACT

Parenting a child with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) poses significant challenges that can affect the mental and emotional well-being of caregivers, especially mothers who are often the primary caregivers in these families. The stressors associated with raising a child with ASD are unique, complex, and persistent. These include managing the child's behavioral issues, navigating the healthcare and educational systems, and coping with social stigma. As a result, mothers of children with ASD often experience higher levels of stress, which can negatively impact their psychological well-being, social support systems, and coping strategies. Given the profound impact that caregiving stress has on maternal well-being and child outcomes, there is a pressing need for psychosocial interventions designed to support these mothers. Such interventions can help reduce stress, improve coping strategies, and foster better social support, ultimately improving the quality of life for both mothers and children with ASD. This study aimed to develop, implement, and evaluate the effectiveness of a psychosocial intervention designed specifically for mothers of children with ASD, focusing on reducing parental stress, enhancing coping mechanisms, and strengthening social support networks.

The research employed a mixed-methods approach, integrating both qualitative and quantitative methodologies to provide a comprehensive analysis of the research problem. The study was thus conducted in two phases: Phase 1 involved a qualitative needs assessment to identify the challenges and stressors faced by mothers, while Phase 2 focused on the implementation and evaluation of a psychosocial intervention based on the findings from the needs assessment.

The qualitative phase consisted of an in-depth exploration of the lived experiences of mothers of children with ASD, using interviews and extensive literature review to gather detailed insights into their caregiving challenges. These insights informed the development of a tailored psychosocial intervention aimed at addressing the specific needs identified by the mothers in the needs assessment phase. In the quantitative phase, a classical experimental design was used, including a before-and-after test with a control group to assess the efficacy of the developed psychosocial intervention.

The study involved 41 mothers, with 21 in the experimental group and 20 in the control group, recruited from five organizations located in the Kamrup Metropolitan District of Assam, India. Participants were randomly assigned to either the experimental

or control group. The inclusion criteria for the study required that participants be biological or adoptive mothers who were the primary caregivers of children diagnosed with ASD.

The psychosocial intervention provided to the experimental group consisted of 11 sessions in total, including seven individual sessions, each lasting one hour, and four group sessions, each lasting one and a half hours. The individual sessions were designed to offer personalized support, addressing the unique concerns and challenges faced by each mother. These sessions focused on enhancing coping strategies, managing stress, and building emotional resilience. The group sessions provided opportunities for peer interaction, mutual support, and shared problem-solving, which helped participants learn from each other's experiences and build a supportive network.

Data were collected at multiple time points throughout the study. A pre-assessment was conducted before the intervention to measure baseline levels of stress, perceived social support, and coping strategies in both the experimental and control groups. Immediately after the intervention, a post-assessment was performed to measure changes in these variables. Follow-up assessments were conducted one month and three months after the intervention to evaluate both the short-term and long-term effects of the intervention and determine whether the benefits were sustained over time. The study utilized three primary measurement tools: the Parental Stress Scale (Berry & Jones, 1995), which assesses stress across multiple domains such as anxiety, work/family stress, guilt, marital satisfaction, and social support; the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS; Zimet et al., 1988), which measures the level of perceived social support from family, friends, and significant others; and the Brief COPE (Carver, 1997; Dias et al., 2012), which evaluates the use of various coping strategies, including problem-focused coping, emotion-focused coping, and avoidant coping.

Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the data, including measures of central tendency (mean, standard deviation) and frequency distributions. Repeated Measures ANOVA was employed to assess the changes in stress, coping strategies, and social support across the four assessment time points: pre-assessment, post-intervention, and the follow-up assessments at one month and three months. The statistical analysis was performed using SPSS software to evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention and compare the outcomes between the experimental and control groups.

The findings from the study revealed that the intervention had a significant positive impact on the mothers in the experimental group. The intervention led to a noticeable increase in perceived social support immediately after the intervention, which was sustained at one month and three months follow-up. Additionally, the intervention led to a significant increase in problem focused coping and emotion focused coping among mothers in the experimental group. However, its impact on reducing avoidant coping strategies was less pronounced. Furthermore, the intervention group showed a substantial reduction in parenting stress levels post intervention as well.

To conclude, this study provides compelling evidence that a structured psychosocial intervention can effectively reduce stress, enhance coping strategies, and improve social support for mothers of children with ASD. The results suggest that such interventions can have significant, lasting effects on the well-being of mothers and may contribute to better outcomes for both mothers and their children with ASD. This study also contributes to the growing body of literature on the need for tailored interventions for mothers of children with ASD and highlights the potential for psychosocial interventions to improve maternal well-being. Future research should explore the scalability and long-term impacts of these interventions across different cultural and socio-economic contexts, as well as examine how such interventions can be integrated into existing support systems for families having someone with ASD.