

4th European Autism Congress

May 13-14, 2022 | Webinar

Volume: 12

Exploring challenges and support structures of mothers with children with Autism Spectrum Disorder in the United Arab Emirates: A thematic analysis

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Research primarily administered in the West shows that parents of children with autism spectrum disorders experience high levels of parenting stress and poor psychological outcomes, however, there is limited information about their experiences in the Middle East. In the present study, 17 expat mothers (Age range = 33-56 years) with a child with ASD in the United Arab Emirates were interviewed about their challenges and available support structures. **Thematic analysis** revealed four primary themes: a) diagnosis b) schooling and therapy c) key relationships, and d) feelings towards the wider community. Initially most mothers struggled a lot with accessing information to seek correct diagnoses, admission in a mainstream school, and finding appropriate therapeutic services. Several mothers narrated experiences of not receiving optimum support from their partners, facing difficulties during the pandemic, and feeling rejected from extended family members. Majority however appeared to be extremely satisfied with support groups where they felt heard and exchanged crucial information related to their **children's wellbeing**. Findings highlight the need for the government to facilitate centralized channels of information for expat parents with children with developmental disabilities, formalizing more support groups for mothers in the UAE, and increasing knowledge about **autism** to decrease biases.

Biography

Nishtha Lamba holds a PhD and MPhil in Psychology from University of Cambridge. She is a behavioral scientist specializing in psychological health and social policy informed by strong quantitative and qualitative analytical skills. She also holds a BA in Psychology and Sociology from Hunter College, City University of New York. Currently, she is a Senior Lecturer in Psychology at Middlesex University Dubai and holds postgraduate certificate in higher education training. She is founder and head of 'Social Psychology Research Lab' at the University.

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