

Letter to the Editor

Supporting caregivers of autistic children

Sir,

I read with great interest the article by Abed et al on "Quality of life disparities among mothers of autistic children and mothers having normal children in Baghdad city-2024".¹ The study effectively demonstrated that mothers of autistic children face significantly poorer quality of life (QOL) compared to controls, with the greatest disparities noted in physical and psychological domains. These results highlight the immense caregiving burden borne by mothers, affecting their health, emotions, and daily functioning.¹

The findings are consistent with a study from South Delhi by Islam et al which also documented impaired psychological and social QOL among parents of autistic children, compounded by fragmented treatment pathways and high out-of-pocket expenditure consuming 16 % of family income.² Together, these studies reinforce that caregiver stress is both a health and social challenge that transcends cultural and geographical boundaries.

Moving forward, comprehensive policies are required to strengthen psychosocial support and reduce financial strain. In India, the Niramaya Health Insurance Scheme of the National Trust provides up to ₹1 lakh annually for therapies, hospitalization, and transportation with minimal premiums (₹250 for BPL, ₹500 for others). Beneficiaries receive a Niramaya Card, enabling cashless treatment at empaneled hospitals and simplified reimbursement for covered services.³ Additionally, the Spandan Awards instituted by the National Trust recognize outstanding contributions by persons with disabilities and stakeholders, promoting visibility and inclusion.³

WHAT PARENTS CAN DO TO TACKLE THE CHALLENGES

Parents are very important in helping their child with autism to grow, learn, and stay healthy. The way parents act and behave every day affects the child's learning and confidence. Having a fixed daily routine helps the child feel safe and calm. Using pictures, charts, or daily plans helps the child know what will happen next and makes it easier to move from one activity to another.

Parents can add small learning and therapy activities in their daily routine. Talking to the child while playing, using simple games, or doing short speech exercises helps the child learn to communicate and socialize. Making learning fun encourages the child to join in and pay attention.

Parents should also notice how their child communicates. Many autistic children use actions, eye contact, or facial expressions instead of words. When parents understand and respond to these signals with love and patience, it helps the child feel safe and connected. Using short and clear sentences with a friendly tone makes it easier for the child to understand.

Parents should also take care of their own health and mind. Looking after an autistic child can be stressful, so parents should relax, join support groups, or talk to counsellors when needed. Calm and happy parents can care for their child better.

Working together with teachers, doctors, and therapists helps the child get the best care. Sharing progress, attending sessions, and following advice keeps everyone on the same track. Teamwork between home, school, and therapy centers gives the child strong support.

Parents should celebrate even small achievements-like saying a new word or following an instruction. Praising small efforts builds the child's confidence. Love, patience, and encouragement from parents help the child grow emotionally and socially and reach their best potential.

CONCLUSION

We conclude that interventions must not only target autistic children but also prioritize caregiver well-being through structured psychosocial support, awareness campaigns to reduce stigma, and expansion of schemes like Niramaya. Early diagnosis and evidence-based interventions remain crucial in improving long-term outcomes.

Shubham Jagannath Shivale*

Department of Community Medicine, Dr. D. Y. Patil
Medical College, Pune, Maharashtra, India

***Correspondence to**

Dr. Shubham Jagannath Shivale,
E-mail: shubhamshivale39@gmail.com

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