

## Exploring Coping Strategies in Parents Raising a Child with Autism Spectrum Disorder: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

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### Abstract

The aim of the present qualitative study was to explore different coping strategies in parents raising a child with autism spectrum disorder. By utilization of an interpretative phenomenological analysis IPA the lived experiences of the parents were measured for coping strategies. Initially Permission was granted from the official or group admin in the community that is entitled Autism Resource Group Pakistan on social media as on WhatsApp/Facebook, in said community or group parents of ASD children across Pakistan or outside Pakistan (Pakistani only) are available for the facilitation they get information or knowledge that is used to better provide the parenting or care for their ASD children. In this study in-depth interviews were conducted with the participants of ASD children to explore the coping strategies they use. Purposive sampling technique was used for the data collection and the sample size for the current was 12 (n=12) individuals with equal number of representations from the male (father) =6 and female (mother) =6. The Data was recorded and transcribed. Various themes were identified from the transcript. Themes for the coping strategies included: Management of emotional difficulties, Management of worry and stress, Self-care and Compassion, and Management of challenging feelings. By replication of these coping strategies the other parents can benefit from it, and they can manage the issues they have while having or raising a child with autism spectrum disorder.

**Keywords:** Autism Disorder, Coping Strategies, Phenomenological Analysis

### Introduction

#### Coping Strategies

Coping refers to the strategies individuals employ to manage stressful situations and mitigate their impact on well-being (Al-Oran et al., 2022). Extensive research has shown how these mechanisms can be used in reducing stress levels and preventing psychological problems among parents of autistic children (Kasperzack et al., 2019). For instance, using measures such as the Inventory of Socially Supportive Behavior (ISSB), Ways of Coping Questionnaire-Revised (WOC), Parenting Stress Index (PSI), and Life Experience Survey (LES), Hyman et al. (2020a) probed into coping styles among parents of autistic children. Thus, according to their findings escape-avoidance and distancing were coping strategies that are associated with increased depression and marital difficulties. Conversely, positive reappraisal reduces

depression and anxiety, while increasing marital satisfaction through considering negative events in a positive way (Bonis & Sawin, 2016). To investigate qualitatively about the ways different parents have coped with autism syndrome in their kids divided them into fathers and mothers being aware of these distinctions (Mumtaz et al., 2022). Fathers frequently believed that mothers had more stress owing to their primary role as caregivers while mothers mentioned issues regarding how their partners dealt with stress such as denial or avoidance (Alareeki et al., 2022). Furthermore, it was also noted by (Alibekova et al., 2022; S. Bonis, 2016) that fathers play a greater role in bringing down maternal stresses level during this period through participating in coping processes together with other sources of support from where they gain some skills about what is necessary for overall family wellness. The influence of fathers' cultural backgrounds upon their involvement in child's life should be addressed here since paternal coping strategies vary from one culture to another and some fathers use self-distraction techniques like reading or substance abuse in order to cope with stress and other related issues (Vernhet et al., 2019). These studies taken together indicate that coping mechanisms, parental roles and support systems are intricately interwoven in family management of stress associated with autism spectrum disorders; thus, interventions aimed at optimizing coping strategies and promoting the well-being of parents are necessary.

### **Social Support**

Parents of children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) face a variety of challenges as they raise their children. These include financial pressures associated with accessing the necessary services for their children, participation restrictions in social events (Befkadu et al., 2022; Z. Wang et al., 2022), difficulty accessing relevant autism-specific services (Ludlow et al., 2012), and societal stigma associated with ASDs (Almog et al., 2023). As a result, parents dealing with these adversities often claim increased stress levels, depression, anxiety, feelings of isolation, and loneliness (Gómez-Campos et al., 2023; Kütük et al., 2021). The literature emphasized the critical importance of social support in addressing such stressors among disabled children's parents (Makino et al., 2021), countering the effects of stressful experiences related to raising a child with autism spectrum disorder (Kasperzack et al., 2019), and enhancing parental well-being (Mathew et al., 2019). Importantly, strong and supportive social networks have been associated with fewer problems in marriage among parents (Piro-Gambetti et al., 2023). On the other hand, formal support exists within organized entities or agencies that offer free or fee-based assistance to both parents and children alike (Villa et al., 2022). Moreover, Mohd Roffeei et al. (2015) highlight that autism cares is a high-demand area for professionals with the knowledge and skills to handle behavioral challenges posed by their children. According to them, disparities in health service delivery show that parents of autistic children suffer more stress than those whose children have other developmental disabilities, e.g., Down syndrome (Mohd Roffeei et al., 2015). Studies on mothers of ASD-diagnosed children indicate that psychological distress is much greater among those who experience higher levels of child-challenging behaviors as well as family support from friends and relatives who are not part of the formal system (Weinberg et al., 2021). For example, single mothers or women without accommodation tended to informally depend less on, causing even more stress in their lives (Weinberg et al., 2021). Another study by Sugavanaselvi et al. (2015) investigated how parents of children with autism spectrum disorder coped with the condition, and it emerged that most moms sought both personal and professional assistance more often than dads did.

### **Methodology**

#### **Research design**

For this study, qualitative research is followed, further the Interpretative phenomenological analysis IPA was chosen as the study design for the present study because it is specifically well-compatible for exploring the lived experiences of individuals (Smith & Osborn, 2015),

which also aligns directly with the study questions. As main aim of this study was to identify the coping strategies of parents, parenting a child with autism spectrum disorder ASD.

### **Sample Size & Method**

The sample size for this study was 12 participant's parents, with equal representation of male (6) and Female (6). The decision to recruit 12 respondents for the present study was informed by the principles of qualitative research, specifically the concept of data saturation. (Saunders et al., 2018). Previous studies and methodological guidelines propose that a sample size of 6 to 15 participants is often passable for attaining data saturation in IPA research, as it stipulates enough multiplicity to capture an array of experiences while still letting for a comprehensive and in-depth analysis of each participant's experiences. (Vasileiou et al., 2018). It is also recommended by Morse (2015) the use of six sample sizes for interpretative phenomenological analysis IPA. Purposive sampling (Hardesty et al., 2022) method in the present study was adopted to gauge the sample who are fulfilling the study inclusion criteria, it allows researchers to deliberately select participants who possess specific characteristics or experiences relevant to the research objectives or criteria. By focusing on a specific group of people, purposive sampling method ensures that the data gathered is rich, detailed, and promptly applicable to the study objectives.

### **Participants**

For the current study the participants were the parents having a child/Children or raising a child/Children with Autism spectrum disorder and who are residing in Pakistan. Parents who have at least one/more child/children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), are educated, are either job holders or own a business, and are not diagnosed with any chronic psychological, or health-related issues, and do not have any disabilities. The age range was 18 years to 50 years. Parents who were divorced, stepparents or foster parents, those diagnosed with chronic mental or health-related issues, and who are below 18 years or above 50 years of age.

### **Measures**

Semi-Structure in-depth interviews were conducted with parents, for the interviews guide was developed earlier, the interview guide comprised different questions which were related to the coping strategies the parents use while having or raising a child with autism spectrum disorder. According to Crouch & McKenzie (2006) In-depth interviews expose real-life questions and provide rich knowledge.

### **Data Collection Procedure**

The present study has been conducted in five months' time; the interviews were taken one by one on different time span. Initially an interview guide was established, the guide was utilized for data collection. That interview guide included an introduction and questions regarding the interview. The data was collected from "Autism Resource Group Pakistan" a social media group both available on Facebook and WhatsApp which is made for the parents (Pakistani parents from Pakistan and outside Pakistan are added). Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data. The data was collected from the equal numbers of the parents as (n=12 male=6, female=6).

### **Data Transcription & Analysis**

The data was recorded and transcribed, the participants has given the informed consent and allowed to record the interviews. The technique employed for data analysis in the present study followed the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (Smith & Osborn, 2015) method, which is specifically appropriate for exploring the lived of respondents. The analysis initiated with a close, line-by-line scanning and reading of the interview transcripts, where initial codes

were allotted to considerable statements or expressions that depicted the crux of the respondents' experiences. These codes were not predefined but identified organically from the collected data, exhibiting the respondents' own words and meanings. Further, the codes were studied for patterns and links, which led to the discovery of emergent themes. Further, the data analysis process followed a seven-step procedure: (Smith et al., 2021) proposed seven steps for the IPA analysis, with reference to the current study the same seven steps were followed as below.

1. This process begin with the data collection by the semi structure interviews, the data was transcribed, and it was read and reread several times to make self-familiar with the information.
2. The interview transcript was printed earlier and with a highlighter the data was highlighted, and the separate page was used to note down the significant notes.
3. Different themes were identified on a separate page, by using the highlighter in which the data was highlighted with reference to the themes, and the digits (1, 2,3 etc) were given as codes to know later the link of them with the statement
4. By grouping the similar themes in clusters, the superordinate themes were created. A search was done to check the connection between themes in the same case and themes were integrated when similar or in same way.
5. The same method was followed Moving to the next cases in each one.
6. Checking for patterns or similarities that is of higher order qualities in the cases were done, and the similarities were again integrated.
7. Analysis of writing was the final step; in the result section the important themes were described with verbatim.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Several measures were implemented to protect and maintain the confidentiality of participants, ensure their identities, secure data storage, and obtain informed consent throughout the study. Each respondent was ascribed to a unique identifier number to safeguard that personal details were not associated with the data. All identifying information, for example names and contact details, was eliminated from the transcripts. Confidentiality was ensured; the identifier numbers were given to the respondents that were for committing to the non-disclosure of any personal or sensitive information attained during the interview. Participants were treated with respect and equality, regardless of gender, or ethnicity etc.

### **Result**

*Table 1 Demographics*

<b>Participant#</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Number of ASD</b>
1	Female	38	1
2	Female	40	2
3	Female	27	2
4	Female	31	1
5	Female	31	2
6	Female	27	1
7	Male	35	1
8	Male	34	1
9	Male	40	1
10	Male	45	1
11	Male	28	1
12	Male	43	2

*Table 2 Coping Strategies the Parents use*

Theme	Operationalization	Code	Operationalization
Managing Emotional Difficulties	Refers to strategies used by parents to regulate, reduce, or manage emotional distress arising from challenges in raising a child with ASD.	Mindfulness and Meditation	Parents' use of mindfulness, meditation, or calming practices (e.g., breathing, prayer, mental relaxation) to handle emotional difficulties.
Management of Worry and Stress	Captures the various coping strategies parents adopt to deal with ongoing stress and worries associated with caregiving.	Physical Activity	Engaging in walking, exercise, or physical movements to release tension and manage stress.
		Organizational Skills	Structuring daily routines, managing time, and planning caregiving tasks to reduce stress.
		Social Interaction	Seeking comfort and support through conversations and interactions with friends, family, or community.
		Faith and Positive Outlook	Reliance on spirituality, prayer, or maintaining a hopeful/optimistic mindset as a coping mechanism.
		Enjoyable Activities	Engaging in hobbies, leisure, or enjoyable pastimes to temporarily relieve stress.
Self-Care and Compassion	Encompasses the ways parents look after their own well-being and show kindness to themselves in the midst of caregiving challenges.	Knowledge and Education	Actively seeking information, guidance, or education (e.g., reading, consulting professionals) to better handle caregiving challenges.
		Self-Care Activities	Engaging in personal health, rest, relaxation, or daily self-maintenance routines.
Management of Challenging Feelings	Refers to strategies used to handle intense emotions such as frustration, sadness, or anger while raising a child with ASD.	Self-Compassion	Parents' ability to forgive themselves, avoid self-blame, and show understanding toward their struggles.
		Expression and Acceptance	Parents' ability to acknowledge, express, and accept difficult emotions without suppressing them.

Theme	Operationalization	Code	Operationalization
		Professional and Social Support	Seeking help from psychologists, counselors, teachers, or family/friends for emotional and practical support.
		Positive and Present Focus	Staying focused on current experiences, practicing gratitude, and avoiding excessive rumination.
		Self-Care and Breaks	Taking intentional pauses or short breaks from caregiving to maintain emotional balance.
		Mindfulness	Applying mindful awareness to remain calm and regulate emotional reactions in stressful caregiving moments.

## Theme 1: Managing Emotional Difficulties

### Mindfulness and Meditation

The parents reported that they learned some techniques from books or the supports groups or even from professionals regarding the reduction of the feelings which are negative by utilization of mindfulness and meditation practices. Parented reported that they use mindfulness, in which they focus on the present moment without judgment, they said these techniques assist them in developing emotional awareness and acceptance in the face of caring issues and obstacles. Parents also use meditation related activities, such as guided or silent meditation, providing them with moments of peace and relaxation while doing it, reducing stress and increasing emotional resilience and mindful living. They also reported that they use relaxation techniques such as deep breathing exercises which were used to reduce stress and anxiety and promote calm, giving parents practice methods to manage their emotional and psychological issues while raising a kid with autism spectrum disorder. According to P1 (F); *"I Manage stress and worry with various strategies some are added here. I perform and practice mindfulness and do meditation daily or regularly to help myself calm my mind and stay attentive and focused. I also do physical exercises, even something as simple as a sometimes do a daily walk, these help me reduce stress levels and boosts my mood and psychological functioning."* P2 (F)

## Theme 2: Management of Worry and Stress

### Physical Activity

The parents reported that they use the physical activeness to reduce the difficult feelings such as worry or stress, they mentioned by walking or physically activeness their feelings are reduced. According to P1 (F); *"Physical exercise, even something as simple as a daily walk, helps reduce stress levels and boosts my mood. I also find it helpful to stay organized and maintain a routine, which provides a sense of control and predictability."* P1 (F)

### 1. Organizational Skills

Some of the parents reported that by creating a structured or organized schedule or routine they get some decrease in their stress and tension or anxiety. Parents also reported that the organized

routine or structure life schedule is critical for parents who are dealing with the difficulties of raising a child with ASD. By creating or developing and following a scheduled daily routine can help lessen stress and anxiety by providing likelihood and regularity for both the parent and child with ASD. To be organized and structured also allows parents to cope various tasks more effectively, it also ensure that crucial responsibilities that include caregiving, employment, and personal life are met. According to P9 (M); *"I think that Managing stress and worry is a daily challenge for me and for parents raising a child with autism spectrum disorder; but I've found some strategies that helped me and I practice them. I try to stay organized and structured that is to maintain a routine, which helps me reduce some of the unpredictability and the issues like stress and anxiety I have because of the child with ASD."* P9 (M)

## **2. Social Interaction**

Parents reported that they practice social interaction that is social engagement, which is essential for them by dealing with the emotional problems due the parenting of an ASD child they have. They reported that when talking to other parents of children with ASD provides them a great support network for sharing experiences and exchanging advice and empathy in hard times of parenting. They also reported that by maintaining interaction with supportive friends, family members, and spouses, they provide both emotional support and practical assistance in hard times. They stated that seeking help from support groups encourages understanding and mutual support among them in similar situations. According to P3 (F); *"Yes, I have a few support systems that are incredibly valuable. My family, emotional and practical help is provided by my parents and siblings whenever I need. I have connections with my friends who understand my situation, they listen to me when I am stressed, and my situation is normal then. An addition to that I am part of a support group that is local and parents of children with ASD that has been a great source of knowledge and solidarity if required."* P3 (F)

## **3. Faith and Positive Outlook**

Parents reported that when having faith and a positive view about the self and child, which is sometimes known as positive reframing or celebration of the achievement of child, are coping techniques that help them develop inner strength and resilience in hard times. They reported that they practice prayer or taking strength from spiritual ideas provide solace and a sense of purpose in tough times when having a child with ASD. They also reported that by adaptation of a positive approach entails viewing problems as chances for growth and focusing on strengths rather than weaknesses and limits, which help them manage stress, anxiety etc. and keep hope. According to P5 (F); *"I believe that I also get consolation in my prayers and faith practice, which is a greater source of peace and perspective"* P5 (F), P11 (M) also stated; *"I focus on positive and I try to focus on the positivity and celebrate the small victories in my child's achievement and progress, that help me to balance the stress with moments of joy."* P11 (M)

## **4. Enjoyable Activities**

Parents stated that they engage in activities which they enjoy, such activities is critical for them to reduce stress and promote health. They reported that hobbies, creative interests, and leisure activities enable relaxation in them to cope with their issues, they also stated that enjoyment, and self-care is also crucial in parenting an ASD child. They stated that they participate in activities that bring joy and fulfillment to them which helps them to recharge emotionally and refill their energy reserves prospect, that allow them to better cope with the needs of caregiving. According to P10 (M), *"I am interested and try to engage in activities that I enjoy and that help me relax or reduce the tension I have, such as reading or going for walks."* P10 (M)

## **5. Knowledge and Education**

Parents said that they stay informed on autism spectrum disorder (ASD) through knowledge and education provides them with awareness and insight into their child's diagnosis and needs. They reported that learning about ASD-related therapies, interventions, and strategies provides them with useful methods and ways for promoting their child's development, health and learning. Parents also stated that knowledge also assists them in understanding the complexity of healthcare and educational systems, allowing them to effectively advocate for their children's needs. According to P8 (M), *"I feel comfortable and also find solace in talking to my wife and sharing our concerns related to the child and us, as well as staying informed or updated about autism and seeking advice or knowledge from professionals and support groups whenever I need it."* P8 (M)

### **Theme 3: Self-Care and Compassion**

#### **1. Self-Care Activities**

Parents reported that they perform certain self-care related activities include a wide range of activities which are to improve physical, mental, and emotional well-being. This includes taking walks, doing yoga, reading, meditating, and engaging in hobbies that provide delight and relaxation. They reported that when they take pauses from caring obligations allows them to rest and restart, these activities reduce burnout and increase resilience among them. They stated that taking some time and setting aside dedicating some time for "me time" which recognize the importance of self-care and that addresses personal needs of parents that is amidst the responsibilities of parenting a child with ASD. They also reported that they engage in self-care activities that promote balance and self-restart, that allow them to manage stress and maintain overall well-being. According to P1 (F); *"I am very much inclined toward the self-care, emphasizing self-care and compassion starts with acknowledging my own needs and limitations that I have. I try to arrange some time and I make it a priority to set aside time each day for activities that I enjoy and that help me relax from tensions and I enjoy those activities, whether it's reading, yoga, or spending time in nature or walking etc."* P1 (F)

#### **2. Self-Compassion**

Parents reported that they practice self-compassion that entails treating oneself with care, understanding, and acceptance, especially in difficult situations. They reported that they face various issues while caring for a child with ASD, they said, they frequently confront a variety of pressures and emotional challenges while parenting an ASD child. By practicing self-compassion that realize them that it is normal to have difficult days and allow them to feel emotions without judgment. It is said that taking care of one's own health, both physically and emotionally, is critical for long-term caring success, come of the parents reported they have a practice that include self and self-compassion. They also reported that they avoid being unduly critical of oneself, acknowledging personal limitations, and valuing one's own efforts and strengths. They mentioned that having a supportive network of friends, family, and other parents of children with ASD gives essential emotional support and validation, that underscore the need to seek and receive assistance or help when needed. P2 (F) added that; *"Compassion and self-care focused on recognized that I have to take care of own self and that if I take care of myself, I will be able to better care for my child. I practice try to remind myself that it's okay to ask for assistance or help and to take breaks or off when needed. Self-compassion means that it is not necessary that everything will go in your favor not being too hard or unkind on myself when things don't go as planned. I make and take time for activities that energize me when I am stressed and tensed, like reading, gardening, or even just taking a quiet moment to reflect on the successful achievements. It's about finding small ways to nurture my own well-being and cope with issues that I face amidst the demands and stress of caregiving."* P2 (F)

### **Theme 4: Management of Challenging Feelings**



### **1. Expression and Acceptance**

Parents mentioned that there has been a significant benefit of enabling themselves to feel and express their emotions freely. That includes understanding and embracing tough feelings triggered by the daily stresses and uncertainties of caregiving an ASD child. They elaborated that they allow themselves to experience and express their emotions honestly, they practice releasing emotional tension and gain insight on their sentiments, which is beneficial when negotiating the complexity of parenting a child with ASD. They also reported that they also practice writing journaling that is an effective strategy for processing emotions and reflecting on experiences, they said since it provides a private outlet for self-expression and emotional release. According to P1 (F) *“When I manage to handle challenging feelings and experiences involves that need me to use a mix of techniques or strategies. I allow myself to feel and express my emotions rather than suppressing them. Talking to a therapist helps me process these feelings in a healthy way. I also find writing in a journal to be therapeutic, as it allows me to reflect on my thoughts and experiences.”* P1 (F)

### **2. Professional and Social Support**

Some parents reported that they also get professional help or seek professional help whenever they have issues such as stress anxiety etc. Their professional help include counseling sessions and psychotherapies etc. They reported that when getting professional help, they share the issues with Psychologists or Counselors, they said when they share the issues with these professionals, half of the burden is realized, they get the guidelines from these experts. Parents also practice connecting with other parents of children with ASD that help them provide with a shared understanding and a sense of solidarity, as well as a supportive network in which they gain and share experiences that can be beneficial for emotional and psychological support. They also reported that they talk to those parents who know the challenges of raising a child with ASD help them to validate their experiences and create empathy, decrease feelings of isolation. According to P12 (M), *“Seeking professional help through therapy has also been crucial; it provides a safe space to explore my feelings and develop coping mechanisms. In addition to that, sharing these experiences with other parents in support groups helps me feel less isolated and more understood.”* P12 (M), P5 (F) also stated; *“Talking to someone who understands, whether it’s a family member, friend, or fellow parent from the support group, helps me process my emotions.”* P5 (F)

### **3. Positive and Present Focus**

According to parents maintaining a positive mindset through positive reframing enables them to reframe problems as opportunities for growth and learning. Staying present and attentive enables them to better manage stress by focusing on the present moment and eliminating unneeded anxiety about the future. This mindfulness practice builds emotional resilience and allows them to respond to their child's needs with clarity and calm. Celebrating a small achievement of the child also helps in the reduction of the challenging feelings for them. According to P7 (M); *“I try to stay present and focused on what I can control. When I feel overwhelmed, I take a step back and practice some form of self-care or mindfulness to regain my composure.”* P7 (M)

### **4. Self-Care and Breaks**

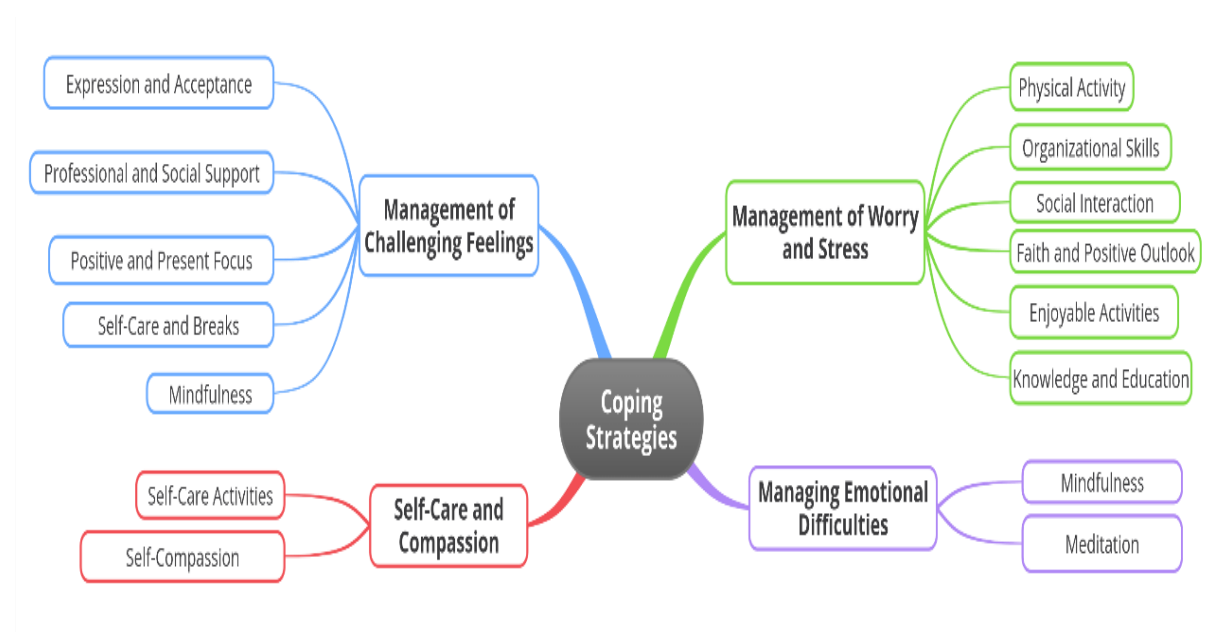
Parents reported that they take breaks and engage in self-care activities which are significant for them to recharge physically, psychologically, and emotionally. They said we prioritize self-care activities that allow them to take time to rest and regenerate which they mentioned that it might avoid burning out and sustain their caregiving efforts in the long run. They also reported that taking pauses from caregiving duties provides much-needed relief and allows them to

continue their obligations with restored energy and spirit. . According to P8 (M); *“I believe Self-care is very crucial, not only for my own well-being and health but also for my capability to provide care for my child with ASD. I practice and try to prioritize self-care that includes to practice some activities by setting aside time for activities that boost me, whether it is a sort of exercise, reading books, or spending time with loved ones. I also remind myself and practice that it is okay to ask for help and to take breaks when needed.”* P8 (M)

## 5. Mindfulness

Parents reported that they practice mindfulness activities, learned from professional places of through self-help practice, that include meditation and mindful breathing, which help them become more aware of their thoughts, emotions, and bodily sensations in the present now. This increased awareness reduces stress and enhances emotional regulation, helping parents to respond to difficulties more calmly and clearly. Mindfulness also promotes a stronger bond with their child and improves their capacity to deliver compassionate and attentive care. According to P2 (F), *“I also practice mindfulness and deep-breathing exercises to stay calm during particularly stressful moments. Taking short breaks when possible and engaging in activities that I enjoy, even if it's just for a few minutes, helps me recharge.”* P2 (F)

Figure 1: Concept Map for Coping Strategies



*Note.* The above figure illustrates in details the superordinate & subordinate themes which are the coping strategies the parents use while raising a child with ASD.

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## Discussion

The current study identified many tactics used by parents to manage fear and anxiety. Regular exercise, for example, was one of the common strategies employed here. Parents said participating in physical activities helped them take better care of themselves, reduce stress, and be able to take care of their child. This is supported by Zhao et al. (2021), who found out that physical fitness can help decrease parents' stress levels and hence increase overall well-being among parents of children with developmental disabilities. A study by Zhao et al. (2021) explores those parents interviewed for this research documented viewed organizational or management abilities as essential for handling everyday tasks, It also promote in addition to reducing stress and managing daily schedules. Efficient organization & time management can help lower the complexity or difficulties of raising a child with ASD. Similarly, Ozdemir & Koç (2023) observed that good organization skills are essential because they help alleviate pressure, thus improving family functionality.

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have been evidenced, for instance, through their international studies about it, where spiritual strength and positive thinking are seen as stress-protective factors. Participating in enjoyable activities was an additional strategy used by parents. Having hobbies or taking part in leisure activities gave them an opportunity to divert their attention from the responsibilities of taking care of these children. Khalid, et al. (2020) found that leisure activities can significantly reduce stress among parents of children with autism, thus improving mood. It was vital for parents to gain knowledge and education about autism to be able to understand their child's condition well enough, thereby increasing their self-confidence while reducing anxiety. It is confirmed from international research findings by Rabba et al. (2019) which state that autism-informed parental respondents knew how to deal with tense situations more efficiently and in what way they could look after their children appropriately. Self-care and compassion are identified as essential components of coping strategies by research. Self-care activities were perceived as vital by caregivers or parents for their wellbeing. This comprises of achieving relaxation, personal pursuits, and taking a break. A study by S. A. Bonis & Sawin (2016) support this argument and show that self-care activities are necessary for preventing caregiver burnout and promoting positive emotional health. Practicing self-compassion was another substantial coping mechanism involved in the interviews with the parents. Parents affirmed that they could handle well with the challenges posed by an ASD child by being kind to themselves as well as admitting their efforts. This is consistent with other studies like (Furrukh & Anjum, 2020), which indicate that when they drop self-judgment on their skills, resilience improves amongst mothers who have kids suffering from autism.

Another significant coping strategy was managing challenging feelings. Parents emphasized expressing and accepting their feelings as very important. Coping was facilitated through talking about emotions and accepting experiences. International research also backs it up; for example, it has been shown by Cuvo & Vallelunga (2007) that people who express or accept these emotions have lower stress levels and better mental health, respectively. It was paramount to seek professional help or involve others to manage such tough emotions. Therapists and support groups, among others, entirely supported them, mostly when in trouble. This finding is consistent with research from Hyman et al. (2020), which emphasizes the importance of professional support in reducing stress and improving the well-being of parents of children with autism.

The next item discussed was maintaining a positive attitude while always remaining in the moment. Parents acknowledged that some factors helped them control their emotions, including focusing on positive aspects of their circumstances and staying present throughout this process. These results coin well with Kabat-Zinn et al. (1992) work, where he suggests mindfulness-based stress reduction techniques can be used effectively to reduce stress and improve emotional well-being. Another way of coping with hard feelings was taking breaks and practicing self-care. Parents stressed the importance of taking time for them to recharge and maintain their emotional health.

### **Limitations**

The present study has numerous limitations that may affect the generalizability of its results. Firstly, the little sample size of 12 participants (6 females and 6 males) confines the ability to employ the results to the broader population. Secondly, key issues such as socioeconomic, spiritual, and religious influences were not studied, which could have shaped the parents' coping strategies.

### **Implications**

This study emphasizes the need for required policies that refer to the unique neediness of parents raising children with ASD, preceding to improved support systems, comprising healthcare, financial aid, and educational resources. It highlights culturally adapted social

support assistance, such as psychological services, and advocates for healthcare developments like early diagnosis & interdisciplinary treatment. Grounded in ecological system theory, the study underlines how different interconnected systems, from immediate surroundings to broader societal contexts, influence parents' coping approaches. These strategies, varying from getting social support to self-care, exhibit the significance of an ecological environment that promotes resilience in managing ASD's difficulties.

## Recommendations

To improve generalization, future research should comprise a larger sample size of parents from a diverse range of backgrounds. Subsequent research should include religious, spiritual, and socioeconomic dimensions to gain a more complete knowledge of the factors influencing parents of children with ASD.

## Conclusion

In this study different coping strategies were explored from the parents when they are raising a child with autism spectrum disorder, they use those coping strategies to cope with the challenges they face. The coping strategies were categorized into different themes based on the response to different issues. The themes for coping strategies included, management of emotional difficulties, management of worry and stress, self-care and Compassion, and management of challenging feelings. This study revealed different coping strategies the parents adopt while having or raising a child with autism spectrum disorder, by replication of these coping strategies the other parents can benefit from it, and they can manage the issues they have while having or raising a child with autism spectrum disorder.

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