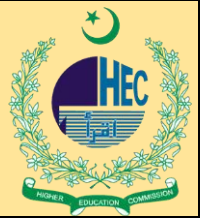




ADVANCE SOCIAL SCIENCE ARCHIVE JOURNAL

Available Online: <https://assajournal.com>

Vol. 04 No. 01. July-September 2025. Page#.1635-1643

Print ISSN: [3006-2497](https://doi.org/10.55966/assaj.2025.4.1.091) Online ISSN: [3006-2500](https://doi.org/10.55966/assaj.2025.4.1.091)<https://doi.org/10.55966/assaj.2025.4.1.091>Platform & Workflow by: [Open Journal Systems](https://openjournal.org/)**Insights into Communication Differences of ASD Children and their Parents' Emotional State****Mehak Afzal**

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arslan.ali@gift.edu.pk**ABSTRACT**

This paper examines how the emotional health of parents is affected by communication differences between their autistic children. The research conducted qualitative thematic analysis on interviews with parents of autistic children to find recurring themes about communication problems and parent concerns. Data was analyzed using Atlas.ti for coding and Ailyze for theme extraction, ensuring a comprehensive exploration of key patterns. This recent study indicates that the parents might be anxious as well as emotionally distressed due to communication problems like communication errors and various communication styles. It also shows coping mechanisms that parents employ to deal with these challenges, as well as the effects of these techniques on their mental state. Besides, it also sheds light on such an intricate relationship between the communication problems of autistic children and their parent's emotional health by presenting insights into the daily life struggles encountered by the families of autistic individuals. The findings bring forward suggestions that are beneficial in improving therapies and assistance to handle the communicative necessities of autistic children together with the emotional health of their parents. This study also contributes to our understanding of the implications of communication gaps of autistic children on family dynamics and the means to strengthen family support systems.

Keywords: Autistic Children, Communication Differences, Parental Emotional Distress, Copying Mechanisms, Family Dynamics.

Introduction

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a complex and multifaceted neurodevelopmental disorder that usually appears in early childhood and is characterized by social, communicative, and cognitive problems along with repetitive behaviors [1]. It frequently co-occurs with other conditions, and males are more usually affected than females. According to Lorna Wing and Judith Gould, autistic

people face three main challenges: difficulties with social communication, difficulty engaging with people, and difficulty employing social imagination [2].

One of the most significant challenges arising from ASD is communication, an essential component of human contact and relationships. People with autism spectrum disorders frequently struggle with verbal and nonverbal communication, including delayed or absent language development, difficulty initiating or maintaining conversations, and difficulty understanding linguistic distinctions including tone, facial expressions, and body language [3]. Additionally, these impairments can emerge in various ways, including difficulties with verbal and nonverbal communication, social cues, and interpreting and expressing emotions [4]. Therefore, through exploring the diverse range of communication styles in the context of autism spectrum disorder, this research aims to provide a thorough knowledge of the distinct language environment that autistic children negotiate.

ASD diagnosis can be a dramatic and life-changing event for families. Parents who are dealing with a diagnosis, finding appropriate solutions, and dealing with day-to-day caregiving demands may experience a variety of emotions, such as stress, anxiety, sadness, guilt, and depression [5]. The results of a study proved that parents of children with ASD experienced higher levels of depression, anxiety, and stress (measured by DASS). The important indications included economic limits, limited facilities and professionals, familial strain, and societal variables [6].

Many researches have shown that the communication challenges of autistic children cause frustration, worry, and anxiety in their parents. According to the results of a study conducted in Greece, parenting a child with ASD has several detrimental repercussions on families, including emotional and family strain as well as financial and social difficulties [7]. According to Avinash De Sousa's study, mothers of autistic children were more likely to suffer from mild or severe depression as compared to mothers of healthy children. It was also observed that mothers of autistic children had considerably higher ratings on the state of anxiety and trait anxiety testing [8]. It is interesting to note that these problems significantly affect their day-to-day activities as well.

Furthermore, parents' capacity to successfully assist their child's growth and negotiate the challenges of family life may be impacted by their continuous stress and emotional strain. Accordingly, this study aims to investigate the emotional state of parents facing a challenging communication environment with their autistic children.

More recently, a qualitative study was conducted with Egyptian mothers of autistic children. The findings demonstrated how the parents' social life and mental health deteriorated following their diagnosis of autism; also, having a child with autism increased the social stigma placed on mothers and their children [9]. These studies suggest that there is a complicated and multidimensional relationship between parental emotional states and communication deficits in children with ASD. Even though autism research has lately received a lot of attention globally, little is known about what it's like to raise an autistic kid in Pakistan, particularly in Gujranwala. On the whole, it is a huge stigma in Pakistani society even to consider autism in their child and several barriers refrain individuals from getting help for this issue. Reliance on the same traditional treatments as well as religious healers also exists in the remote regions and prolongs causing other obstacles in availing proper treatment. While exact prevalence statistics are unavailable, estimates show that there are approximately 350,000 children with autism in the country, with the true number possibly higher due to underreporting [10].

Therefore, the current study took into account the lived experiences and parenting issues among parents of autistic children in Gujranwala, to establish the relationship between communication differences between autistic children and their parent's emotional state.

The current research intends to offer insights into the communication disparities of autistic children and their influence on their parents' emotional well-being. It will focus on the challenges experienced, the resulting emotional distress, and the adaptive methods utilized. This study will use qualitative thematic analysis to uncover significant themes while providing parents with concrete recommendations for improving communication and emotional interaction with autistic children.

Research Questions

This study will address the following research questions:

1. What are parents' perceptions about the particular communication differences children with autism have?
2. How is parental emotional well-being affected by the communication differences of their autistic children?
3. What is the relationship between communication impairments of autistic children and their parents' emotional health?

These research questions aim to investigate the specific communication differences of autistic children and their impact on the emotional well-being of their parents. To understand the relationship between the communication challenges of autistic children and the profound emotional stress experienced by their parents, the current research intends to comprehend the nature of these communication impairments and their influence on the emotional state of parents. Through this investigation, the study seeks to shed light on the connection between the communication impairments of autistic children and their parents' emotional state.

Material/Subjects/Patients and Methods

This study is qualitative in nature, aiming to investigate the relationship between the communication differences of children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and their parents' emotional states.

The sampling for the present study was conducted in collaboration with a child psychologist who runs an organization named "Helping Hands for Differentiable Kids", in Gujranwala. This collaborative effort resulted in a carefully selected sample of parents who can contribute in-depth, relevant, and diverse insights into how the communication dynamics of autistic children impact their emotional well-being.

In addition, purposive sampling was used in this study to select the individuals who are most likely to provide comprehensive, timely, and diverse information about the phenomenon under study. A sample size of 5 to 7 participants has been considered sufficient for this phenomenological research [11]. This level of knowledge is critical for comprehending the complicated emotional and communicative experiences of parents with ASD children.

Data collection involves in-depth interviews with the parents of autistic children. The semi-structured interviews allow participants to narrate their personal experiences while maintaining a focus that aids in exploring major areas of interest. The focus here is on the parents' perspective towards the communication differences of their autistic children and the impact of communication disparities on their feelings and relationships with family members.

Furthermore, Noel et al. (2017) stated that the main benefits of thematic analysis are its adaptability and simplicity of use. They believe it is simple and effective to use in qualitative data analysis [12]. Therefore, this study adopted a thematic approach for data analysis.

The utilization of Atlas.ti in this research was enhanced by integrating sophisticated artificial intelligence (AI) capabilities designed to enhance qualitative research. According to a researcher, Atlas.AI capabilities, such as intentional AI coding, combine human capabilities and AI efficiency by having researchers guide the AI to code documents based on their intended use [13]. This makes it possible to analyze data in an orderly and focused manner.

Moreover, the advanced technology for thematic analysis, Ailyze, which uses artificial intelligence to find and validate themes, was then implemented. The study's success using Ailyze is supported by the researchers' contention that artificial intelligence (AI) technologies should complement analysts' judgment and interpretation skills rather than replace them [13].

As a result, Ailyze receives the target code from Atlas.ti and groups related code to find themes that are anticipated. After that, the chosen themes are assessed and improved, by merging the duplicated themes and clarifying the confusing ones.

This thematic analysis allowed the researcher to develop a thorough understanding of the parent's emotional and communicative experiences, revealing critical patterns and connections of meaning that shed light on the impact of ASD communication variations on their parent's emotional state [14].

Ethical considerations

The study covered a broad spectrum of ethical concerns. The university's Ethical Review Board (IRB) approved it after reviewing an entire written application and research proposal. These records were subsequently provided to the relevant organization to ensure transparency and ethical compliance. All information was encrypted and kept completely confidential to protect participant identities. Throughout the research process, the rights and well-being of the participants were given top priority, ensuring that all ethical guidelines and standards of conduct were adhered to.

Results:

This section presents the findings from a thematic analysis based on interviews with parents of autistic children. The following tables present the four major themes defining their subthemes, related codes, and interview extracts, identified through thematic analysis, related to the communication variations of autistic children and their impact on their parent's emotional well-being.

The table 1 illustrates the communication barriers of autistic children faced by their parents. The subthemes include communication challenges, factors contributing to miscommunication, and differences in communication style. To ensure a clear and organized representation of the data, each subtheme is supported by a corresponding set of related codes. Extracts from the interviews of participants highlight their frustrations and the varied responses they encounter in dealing with the communication challenges of their children.

Table 1: Communication Barriers

Subthemes	Codes	Extracts
Communication challenges	Difficulty in understanding, and explaining situations, speech clarity issues, limited understanding, miscommunication, delayed response, involving father, difficulty expressing, understanding behavior, routine, gestures, physical guidance, unresponsive, silent, illness	Participant 6: وہ اپنی بات کا اظہار جو کرنا چاہ رہا ہے اس سے ہونہیں پا رہا۔ کئی دفعہ ایسا ہوتا ہے کہ بچہ آپ کو سائنز دیتا ہے یا آپ کا ہاتھ پکڑ کر اپنے ساتھ لے جا کر اشارے سے ڈیمانڈ بتا دیتا ہے۔
Factors contributing to miscommunication	Lack of direction, ineffective explanation, lack of awareness, speech clarity issue, lack of understanding, communication issue, delayed response, inability to express, struggle to understand, unclear behavior, misunderstanding gestures, lack of communication, gestures, physical guidance, lack of response, silence	Participant 4: ہاں سمجھ میں تو آتی ہے لیکن مطلب وہ رسپانس لیٹ کرتا ہے تو اسی وجہ سے ہم اس کو یہاں پہ لائے ہیں Participant 8: اس کو کسی بات سے فرق نہیں پڑ رہا تھا آئی کانٹیکٹ نہیں تھا کر رہا، خاموش ہو گیا اس کی طرف سے کوئی رسپانس نہیں تھا
Communication style differences	Attentiveness, response to instructions, voice frequency, ignoring others, mother preference, need communication, specific requests, emotional, dependency, attention-seeking, loving communication, non-responsive to anger, interaction variation, expressive, vocal, crying, gestures, behavior change, adaptability, mental issues, non-responsive, engaged in own world	Participant 1: میری وہ بات تھوڑی سمجھ جاتی ہے، لیکن اگر کوئی اور کہے تو وہ سنتی ہی نہیں ہے ان کی بات۔ ایسے لگتا ہے جیسے وہ سن ہی نہیں رہی تھی، دھیان دینا تو دور کی بات ہے ایسے فیل ہوتا ہے جیسے وہ اس ٹائم بالکل بلینک ہے وہ نہیں سنتی۔ Participant 4: جو پیار سے بلائے اس کے ساتھ ویسے بیہیو کرتا ہے جیسا میرے ساتھ لیکن اگر کوئی غصہ کرے تو رسپانس نہیں دیتا

The table 2 demonstrates the five subthemes of parental anxiety and emotional distress, with associated codes and extracts. The first subtheme, communication trigger, focuses on the issues that parents confront as a result of certain child-related behaviors. The second subtheme, response pattern, emphasizes how parents respond to these obstacles. The third subtheme, the influence of past experiences, underscores the impact of prior experiences in molding parental reactions and emotions.

Table 2: Parental Anxiety and Emotional Distress

Subthemes	Codes	Extracts
Communication trigger	Crying, misunderstanding, anger, child's behavior, eating habits, task completion, crying, not listening, throwing tantrums, anxiety, hyper reaction, realization of problem, depression, frustration, difficult behavior, defiance, sleeping issues, eating problems, discipline response	Participant 3: اپنی بات منوانے کے لیے روتا ہے اگر اس کی بات نا مانیں تو بڑا زیادہ تنگ کرتا ہے بڑا زیادہ روتا ہے Participant 4: جب بہت زیادہ اس کو ٹینٹرمز آتے ہیں نا یعنی چڑچڑا ہو جاتا ہے بہت زیادہ تب میں بھی ایک دم سے ہائپر ہو جاتی ہے
Response patterns	Repeating instructions, anger, scolding, hitting, negative reinforcement, giving in, getting up, taking a long, hyper reaction, calming down, the realization of the problem, self-understanding, optimism, love, distraction, mood change, losing control, patience, isolation, worrying, machine-like communication, depression	Participant 8: جب آٹزم کا پتہ چلا میں نے اس کے ساتھ کام کرنا شروع کیا تو میں اس کو بلانے کے لیے کسی مشین کی طرح اس کے ساتھ بولتی تھی میں اس کی وجہ سے ڈپریشن میں بھی رہی ہوں
Influence of past experiences	Past experiences, frustration, anger, behavior expectations, anxiety, reactions, understanding of the issue, depression, patience, calmness, physical punishment, health issues, leaving child, autism discovery	Participant 1: میں پریشان ہوتی ہوں، بعض دفعہ مار بھی لیتی ہوں۔ اتنا زیادہ جو غصہ آجاتا ہے دو تین گھنٹے مسلسل اس کو ساتھ کہتے رہنا زینب ایسے نہیں ایسے نہیں ایسے نہیں لیکن اس نے سننا نہیں ہے
Emotional impact on communication development	Ineffective communication, harsh tones, lack of patience, emotional response, guilt, anxiety, hope, worry, self-blame, perception of the child, engagement, consciousness, reliance on a higher power, stress, uncertainty, regret,	Participant 1: مطلب شاید ہو سکتا ہے میں اس کو فون نہ دیتی تو وہ اس سے بہتر سچویشن میں آج ہوتی۔ یا ٹائم سے ہمیں کچھ پتہ چل جاتا
Impact on life	Struggle with depression, medication, gradual management, common issues, IQ, attention, work burden, family difficulty, cooperation, involvement, sudden change, realization, unawareness, environment, concern, focus shift, high stress	Participant 1: میں ڈپریشن کی میڈیسن وغیرہ بھی یوز کرتی رہی ہوں۔ گھر کی طرف بھی دھیان نہیں دے پاتی تھی۔ Participant 5: ایک دم بدل کے ہو رکھ دیا تھا۔ یہ لفظ میں نے سنا بھی نہیں تھا کہ یہ بھی ہوتا ہے لائف میں۔

Further, the fourth sub-theme, emotional impact on communication development, articulates how parenting emotions influence their communication ability. The last sub-theme, impact on life, demonstrates how such experience influences parents' daily lives and their general ability to be well. These subthemes are presented with relevant codes in their pursuit, hence for an organized and reliable analysis. Extracts highlight the various ways in which these emotional challenges manifest and affect parents' lives and interactions with their children.

The table 3 outlines the adaptative strategies used by the parents to manage the communication challenges of their autistic children, dividing it into four subthemes: related codes and extracts. The first subtheme is strategies for dealing with miscommunication, which describes how parents handle the communication challenges of their autistic child. The second subtheme, coping strategies, emphasizes how parents deal with stress as well as maintaining emotional balance.

Table 3: Adaptative Strategies and Parental Advice

Subthemes	Codes	Extracts
Strategies for resolving miscommunication	Effective communication, understanding efforts, autism diagnosis, doctor consultation, understanding the child's perspective, active listening, gestures, giving in, interpreting signals, understanding demands, gestures, task completion, lessening screening time	Participant 1: سکرین ٹائمنگ بالکل زیرو سکرین ٹائمنگ میں اگر آپ نے اس کو 5 سے 10 منٹ بھی دے دیے ہیں اور اگر اس کو آپ نے چھوڑ دیا ہے اس کے حال پہ تو وہ آپ کا ایک دن پیچھے چلا جاتا ہے
Coping strategies	Walk outside, improve mood, motivation, support, coping together, acceptance, relaxation, focus on other things, staying calm, expressive listening, avoiding anger, discussing with a partner, routine implementation therapy, refrain from scolding, self-care,	Participant 2: پردیشان ضرور ہو جاتی ہوں لیکن پھر اس کے بابا مجھے بڑا موٹیویٹ کرتے ہیں کہ کچھ نہیں ٹھیک ہو جائے گا۔
Support Systems sought for child's communication needs	Doctor consultation, school support, school teacher consultation, child specialists, online sessions, speech therapy institute, online resources, specific organizations	Participant 8: میں نے بہت سے ڈاکٹرز جائنلڈ سپیشلسٹ سے رابطہ کیا تھا نہ صرف یہاں بلکہ لاہور کا بھی کوئی ڈاکٹر نہیں چھوڑا ہم نے ان لائن بھی بہت لوگوں سے رابطہ کیا جو اس چیز پر کام کر رہے تھے بہت سے تھراپی سیشن لیے لیکن سب سے اچھا رزلٹ ہمیں اس ادارے میں ملا ہے
Hope and Acceptance	Support, solve behavior problems, remain positive, avoid favoritism, equal time, prompt treatment, effective resolution, love, respectful expression, time management, child focus, emotional support, encourage hard work, provide attention, tackle issues, patience, gratitude, acceptance, praying, sharing with family	Participant 2: صبر سے کام لیں یقین رکھیں باقی اللہ پاک ناممکن کو بھی ممکن کر سکتے ہیں Participant 6: ایک ایمان ہے نا کہ جس نے دیا ہے جو دیا ہے وہ سپیشل ہے

Moreover, the third subtheme, which pertains to the support systems pursued for a child's communication requirements, underscores the external resources that parents use to facilitate their child's acquisition of communication abilities. In addition, the fourth subtheme, referred to as hope and acceptance, illustrates how parents express optimism and resilience, fostering an environment of acceptance, gratitude, and shared family experiences, thereby emphasizing the importance of specialized care and counseling for these families. These subthemes are supported by corresponding codes, leading to a well-organized and evidence-driven analysis. Extracts from the interviews highlight the importance of the strategies that parents utilize to manage the communication challenges of their autistic child and support their children's needs.

Collectively, this section illuminates the complex relationship that exists between communication impairments in people with autism and the emotional toll these impairments impose on parents. It further demonstrates how these difficulties can cause considerable anxiety and emotional discomfort in parents. The advice parents provided and the coping mechanisms they used demonstrated a strong and resourceful approach to these challenges. The findings demonstrate the need to provide parents with personalized communication help and emotional counseling, highlighting the importance of comprehensively addressing children's communication needs and parents' emotional well-being.

Conclusion:

To sum up, this study sheds light on the complicated relationship between the communication deficits of autistic children along with their parent's emotional states. The findings serve as

evidence of the effects on the parent's mental health as a result of the communication difficulties with the autistic child and it even talks about some of the adaptations which may be more helpful. It is suggested that the government should take action to help these families by aiding the child's speech therapy and providing counseling support to parents.

By fulfilling these requirements, we may create a supportive environment that encourages problem-solving through improved communication, thus improving the mental health of parents as well as their children in the process. This research is not only useful for comprehending the problems faced by families with autistic children, but it also serves as a call to action for lawmakers, teachers, and health caregivers to prioritize the needs of these families.

Acknowledgment: Above all, I would like to thank Allah Almighty for the strength, wisdom, and patience He has given me to complete this research. Such an accomplishment would have been impossible without His multiple blessings and directions along the way.

I extend my candid regard to my supervisor Sir Javed Iqbal, whose wisdom, support, and encouragement have consistently contributed to my achievement. Moreover, I am grateful to my colleagues for their support. Finally, my deepest gratitude is to my family and friends. Your love and help mean much to me and you continue to add so much more to my life.

Disclaimer: None

Conflict of interest: None

Funding disclosure: None

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