



THE CHALLENGES FACED BY MOTHERS OF CHILDREN WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP TO THE LEVEL OF AWARENESS OF AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER

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Abstract

This study aimed to identify the challenges faced by mothers of children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), examine their level of awareness regarding the disorder, and explore the relationship between these challenges and the mothers' awareness of ASD. The study employed a descriptive correlational design. To achieve its objectives, two scales were developed: the Mothers' Challenges Scale and the Autism Spectrum Disorder Awareness Scale. The study sample consisted of (40) mothers of children with ASD in Tafila Governorate, Jordan.

The findings revealed that the level of challenges faced by mothers of children with ASD was high, with the following dimensions ranked in order: psychological challenges, economic challenges, and social challenges. The results also indicated that mothers demonstrated a high level of awareness of ASD. Furthermore, a statistically significant negative correlation was found between the challenges faced by mothers and their level of awareness of autism spectrum disorder.

The study concluded that the increase in challenges encountered by mothers is associated with a decrease in their awareness of ASD, highlighting the need for additional support to enhance their understanding and knowledge of the disorder.

Keywords: Challenges faced by mothers of children with autism spectrum disorder, awareness of autism spectrum disorder.

Introduction

Societies have witnessed an increase in the number of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) over the past years. Autism Spectrum Disorder has attracted extensive research interest within the scientific and health communities due to its impact not only on the lives of individuals with the disorder but also on their families and society as a whole. This is attributed to the wide variation in the severity levels of symptoms associated with this disorder and the diversity of its manifestations and effects on the lives of affected individuals. Some children

show difficulties in verbal and nonverbal communication, interacting with others, building friendships, engaging in social interactions, and understanding emotions and nonverbal cues, while others may exhibit high logical thinking skills and a strong interest in specific details of the external world. Diagnosis and treatment may be challenging and require considerable effort from physicians, specialists, and the families of children with autism spectrum disorder (Bottema et al., 2021).

A child with autism requires additional care and attention, and their parents often feel distressed and pressured while caring for their child. Mothers, in particular, suffer from significant stress due to the heavy caregiving burden and the child's extensive needs. Raising a child with autism is a demanding and exhausting experience, especially in countries lacking support services. Mothers of children with autism spectrum disorder often experience anxiety, depression, reduced quality of life, and diminished well-being. They also report higher levels of stress compared to mothers of children with other developmental disorders such as Down syndrome or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (Sasha & Zeedyk, 2021).

Moreover, mothers tend to experience health-related problems and difficulties in various aspects of family life, including marital relationship issues and the inability to devote sufficient attention to other children in the family (Yildirim & Rovshenov, 2022).

Mothers of children with autism also face challenges related to societal awareness. A significant number of people are unaware of what autism is and what challenges children with autism face. As a result, children with autism may experience isolation and discrimination within their communities, which negatively affects their social and emotional development. Their mothers must provide the necessary care for them, which requires substantial resources and effort. The needs of children with autism vary greatly from one individual to another, and many mothers exhibit low awareness of Autism Spectrum Disorder. This lack of awareness often leads to delayed diagnosis and inadequate treatment for the child. Consequently, mothers experience psychological stress related to caregiving, resulting in frustration, exhaustion, communication difficulties, and an inability to understand their child's needs (Gholipour et al., 2023).

It is of great importance that mothers of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder possess awareness and understanding that their child requires special support and care. Such awareness enables them to deal with emerging challenges more effectively and efficiently. It also helps them provide the necessary support for the child, assist them in adapting better to society, and enhance their abilities and potential in life (Alhuzimi & Alharbi, 2023).

Statement of the Problem and Research Questions

Caring for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) represents one of the most complex and demanding aspects of both educational and psychological care, as it requires mothers to engage with a wide range of specific behaviors and needs, such as repetitive behaviors, communication and social interaction difficulties, and the provision of continuous care, which necessitates patience, flexibility, and both physical and psychological endurance (Al-Khafash, 2024).

At the global level, despite the relative progress in knowledge about Autism Spectrum Disorder, local studies in Jordan, particularly in the Tafila Governorate, remain limited. This creates a clear knowledge gap concerning the relationship between the challenges faced by mothers and their level of awareness of the disorder.

Accordingly, the importance of this study stems from the need to gain a precise understanding of the nature of these challenges and their relationship to awareness of Autism Spectrum Disorder. The results of this study can contribute to providing practical recommendations to enhance the support offered to mothers and improve family quality of life, as well as the overall development of the children.

Based on the aforementioned context, the problem of this study can be summarized in the following main question:

What is the relationship between the challenges faced by mothers of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder and their level of awareness of autism?

Research Questions

This study seeks to answer the following questions:

- What are the challenges faced by mothers of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder in Tafila Governorate?
- What is the level of awareness among mothers of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder in Tafila Governorate regarding autism?
- Is there a statistically significant correlation at the level ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) between the challenges faced by mothers and their level of awareness of autism?

Objectives of the Study

The present study aims to identify the following:

- The challenges faced by mothers of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder.
- The level of awareness among mothers of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder regarding autism.
- The relationship between the challenges faced by mothers and their level of awareness of autism.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study lies in the importance of its topic, as it examines the challenges faced by mothers of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder in Tafila Governorate and explores their relationship with the level of awareness about autism. The study's importance can be viewed from both theoretical and practical perspectives:

Theoretical Significance:

This study is valuable for Arabic libraries in the fields of autism and motherhood, as it provides insights into the challenges faced by mothers. Such knowledge contributes to improving the care and support provided to children with autism. The study may offer valuable information to those interested in the fields of mental health and special education by highlighting appropriate mechanisms for interacting with children with autism and identifying the nature of the challenges faced by their mothers in Tafila Governorate. Furthermore, it clarifies the implications of these challenges on the lives of both mothers and their children.

Practical Significance:

It is hoped that the results of this study will contribute to enhancing families' and stakeholders' understanding of the nature of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), improving the quality of life for individuals affected by this disorder, and generating multiple hypotheses and ideas for further research in this field. Moreover, the findings can be utilized in designing programs and

plans aimed at raising awareness among mothers and developing care services for children with autism in Tafila Governorate.

Scope of the Study:

Subjective Scope:

The study was limited to examining the challenges faced by mothers of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder in Tafila Governorate and their relationship with the mothers' level of awareness regarding ASD.

Temporal Scope:

The current study was conducted during the 2024–2025 academic year.

Spatial Scope:

This study was carried out in Tafila Governorate, located in the southern region of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

Study Delimitations:

The delimitations of this study are represented in several aspects that may affect the generalizability of its findings. First, the sample was limited to 40 mothers only, without including fathers, which restricts the ability to represent the family as a whole and limits understanding of the fathers' awareness in managing the challenges faced by children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Although the sample represents the entire target population of mothers of children with ASD in Tafileh Governorate, the generalizability of the results to other governorates is limited due to potential differences in cultural, social, and service-related contexts, which may influence both the challenges and awareness levels of mothers. In addition, the statistical constraints resulting from the correlational design of the study limit the analysis to identifying the nature of relationships between variables, without allowing for the inference of causal relationships.

Terminological and Operational Definitions:

Challenges (The challenges):

Challenges are defined as the range of difficulties individuals face in their lives, extending across multiple domains (Abdullah et al., 2022). Operationally, in this study, challenges are measured by the score obtained by participants on the Challenges Scale developed specifically for this research.

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD):

ASD is a developmental disorder characterized by a set of difficulties in social interaction and verbal communication, along with specific and repetitive patterns of behavior (Critchley et al., 2022). Operationally, in this study, ASD refers to individuals diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

Level of Awareness:

Level of awareness refers to the extent of an individual's knowledge on a particular subject and their understanding of it (Alhuzii & Alharbi, 2023). Operationally, in this study, it is defined as the score obtained by respondents on the Autism Awareness Scale prepared for this research.

Theoretical Framework

This study provides a comprehensive review of the theoretical literature related to Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). This review comprises two main sections: the first section presents the theoretical framework, which addresses the nature of ASD, its effects on the child and the

family, the challenges faced by mothers, their level of awareness of the disorder, and the influencing factors; the second section examines previous studies relevant to the topic of the study.

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD):

Autism Spectrum Disorder is considered the most prevalent developmental disorder. Recent reports indicate that its incidence has increased by 200% since the year 2000, making it the most common developmental disorder in childhood. It is also classified among the most severe disorders in terms of its significant impact on behavior, social development, mental health, and overall quality of life. ASD poses a strong barrier to positive social interactions and building effective relationships with others, which may hinder these children from acquiring even the most basic essential skills for interaction and independence (Shenouda et al., 2022).

ASD is defined as a neurological disorder in which the individual experiences difficulties in communication and social interaction, exhibits specific and repetitive behaviors, is sensitive to the environment, and shows confusion when faced with daily changes (Hamadou, 2020).

Al-Zriqat (2020) defined it as a developmental disorder that negatively affects an individual's communication and behavior, characterized by persistent difficulties in social interaction and repetitive behaviors. The severity of the disorder ranges from mild to severe, depending on the level of support required, and diagnosis typically occurs in early childhood (from birth to eight years).

This disorder also affects the families of those diagnosed, manifesting in a range of psychological challenges. When a child is diagnosed with ASD, there is an immediate need for therapeutic sessions and continuous educational support, which places pressure on parents and affects the overall family dynamics. This often results in psychological distress for families, including depression, anxiety, stress, and social isolation (Al-Otaibi, 2021).

Moreover, ASD requires specialized treatment, educational activities, assistive technologies, and other forms of support, which may be costly for families with low socioeconomic status. The added financial burden and lack of financial support increase parental stress (Sasha & Zeedyk, 2021).

In addition, parents of children with ASD face social challenges, including feelings of isolation and marginalization, which affect both the child and the family. These challenges often stem from a lack of public understanding and awareness of ASD, leading to difficulties in accepting the child's condition and empathizing with their situation. Parents may also struggle to access necessary health, educational, and social services, which can further detach them from society (Sasha & Zeedyk, 2021).

Level of Awareness:

Level of awareness is related to an individual's perception and understanding of a particular subject or situation. This concept is widely used in fields such as psychology, education, and public health. Awareness of various issues is crucial for personal growth and development. Higher levels of awareness allow for a deeper understanding of oneself, the surrounding environment, and the world. For example, an individual who is aware of the impact of stress on mental and physical health can take steps to manage stress and improve overall well-being. Awareness of different cultures and traditions also broadens perspectives and fosters empathy toward others (Al-Qursh & Al-Jadi, 2020).

Several factors can influence an individual's level of awareness. Education is a primary factor, as it provides knowledge and skills necessary for better understanding and informed decision-making. Culture also plays a significant role in shaping an individual's perception and understanding of issues, as belonging to different cultural backgrounds affects one's awareness. Practical experience contributes to developing awareness, as experts in specific fields demonstrate greater understanding of related topics. Media also impacts awareness by providing diverse information and analyses of events. Additionally, social and economic factors significantly influence awareness, as circumstances such as poverty, hunger, and deprivation may hinder an individual's ability to develop awareness. Mental health is another key factor, as individuals facing mental health challenges often struggle to understand and accurately analyze information (Al-Qursh & Al-Jadi, 2020).

Previous Studies

The study by Sameea et al. (2025) aimed to examine the level of knowledge and awareness of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) among mothers of children with autism in Qatar. The study included 600 mothers from ten primary healthcare centers in Qatar. The results indicated a high level of knowledge and awareness about ASD among the mothers, with variability in their satisfaction regarding the health services provided, particularly in the areas of health education, psychological support, and social assistance.

The study by Kareem et al. (2025) aimed to assess the knowledge of parents of children with ASD regarding the disorder's symptoms and management strategies. The sample consisted of 100 parents in Basrah. The results showed that the majority of parents had an acceptable level of knowledge regarding ASD management strategies and demonstrated sufficient awareness of its symptoms. A subset of parents with lower knowledge levels required targeted educational programs to improve understanding and support for children with ASD.

Similarly, the study by Abdullah et al. (2022) aimed to investigate the challenges faced by mothers of children with autism in Greece using a descriptive approach. The study found that the most significant challenges were mothers' feelings of burden, distress, and vulnerability.

The study conducted by Alvarez (2021) focused on identifying the problems encountered by parents of children with ASD. The sample included 10 parents who were interviewed individually. The results revealed that parents suffered from insufficient support sources and experienced challenges related to ASD symptoms, including communication deficits, aggressive behavior, non-compliance, and restricted interests.

Papadopoulos (2021) conducted a study to explore the challenges faced by three mothers of children with autism through a series of semi-structured face-to-face interviews. The findings highlighted challenges related to ASD characteristics, including one-way communication, sensory issues such as auditory sensitivity, aggressive behavior, fixation on details, obsessions, moodiness, and temper tantrums. The study emphasized the need to strengthen family capacity to assist mothers in raising their children with ASD.

Shepherd et al. (2018) aimed to examine parents' perception of autism symptoms, parental stress, and the mediating role of coping strategies. The results indicated that parental stress increased in relation to the severity of autism symptoms and that coping strategies mediated the relationship between parental stress and symptom severity.

The study by Gona et al. (2016) focused on identifying the challenges faced by families of children with ASD. The findings revealed that families experienced stigma, lack of adequate interventions, caregiving burdens, and financial challenges.

Gomes et al. (2015) investigated the challenges encountered by families of children with ASD in Brazil. The study showed that families suffered from emotional burdens, difficulties managing ASD symptoms, and lack of social support.

Hwang et al. (2015) aimed to examine the self-awareness and knowledge level of teachers and families regarding ASD. The sample consisted of 133 teachers and parents of children with ASD in Singapore. The results indicated that teachers' self-awareness and understanding were moderate, whereas parents' awareness was low. The study also highlighted clear obstacles in accessing information to increase awareness about ASD among both teachers and families.

Commentary on Previous Studies

Reviewing the previous studies shows the significant attention this topic has received. While previous studies shared similar objectives, the current study—according to the researchers' knowledge—is the first to combine the two variables. Previous studies were utilized to enrich the theoretical framework of the current study and to select appropriate research instruments. The current study aligns with some previous studies in employing a descriptive methodology but differs in its sample, which consists of mothers in Tafileh Governorate, southern Jordan. Additionally, it differs in its primary objective, which is to investigate the challenges faced by mothers of children with autism and their relationship to the level of awareness regarding ASD in Tafileh Governorate.

Methodology and Procedures

Study Design: The study employed a descriptive correlational design, which relies on data collection and analysis to identify the relationships between variables (Creswell, 2019).

Study Population: The study population consists of all mothers of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in Tafileh Governorate, southern Jordan, totaling 40 mothers.

Study Sample: All mothers who constituted the target population were included in the study; therefore, the sample comprised the entire population (N=40). The selection of this relatively small number was due to the limited number of mothers in the governorate. Hence, any partial selection would not have been sufficient to accurately represent the actual situation. Including all mothers in the sample enabled the researcher to obtain a comprehensive and holistic picture of the challenges faced by this group, enhancing the accuracy of the results and minimizing potential bias associated with partial sampling. This approach also provided a more precise reflection of the real-life experiences of mothers in the governorate.

The participating mothers were reached through special education centers in Tafila Governorate. Communication was established with the directors of these centers to obtain a list of mothers who met the inclusion criteria. Prior to conducting the study, written ethical approval was obtained from the relevant authorities at the centers. In addition, informed consent was obtained from each participating mother after the purpose of the study was clearly explained. Participants were assured of the confidentiality and privacy of all information provided, with an emphasis that the data would be used solely for scientific research purposes.

Study Instruments: To achieve the study objectives, two scales were used:

First: The Challenges Faced by Mothers Scale: This scale was developed to assess the challenges faced by mothers in order to achieve the study objectives. The development process was based on reviewing relevant studies and literature on challenges faced by mothers, including the studies by Sasha & Zeedyk (2021) and Yildirim & Rovshenov (2022). The scale consists of 21 items divided into three dimensions: psychological challenges, social challenges, and economic challenges. All items were phrased positively and were answered by the mothers.

Validity of the Challenges Faced by Mothers Scale:

Content Validity: To ensure the face validity of the scale, it was presented in its initial form to 10 experts in the field of special education. Their feedback was used to assess the relevance of the items, the clarity of the language, and any necessary additions or deletions. A consensus rate of 80% was considered, and the suggested modifications were implemented, including rephrasing certain items, resulting in the final version of the scale.

Construct Validity: To determine the construct validity of the scale, correlation coefficients were calculated for each item with the total score, between each item and its respective dimension, and between dimensions and the total score. This analysis was conducted on a pilot sample outside the main study, consisting of (30) mothers of children with ASD. The following table presents these results:

Table 1. Correlation Coefficients Between Each Item, Its Dimension, and the Total Scale

Item No.	Correlation with Dimension	Correlation with Total Scale	Item No.	Correlation with Dimension	Correlation with Total Scale	Item No.	Correlation with Dimension	Correlation with Total Scale
1	0.90**	0.80**	8	0.92**	0.89**	15	0.90**	0.87**
2	0.88**	0.85**	9	0.90**	0.84**	16	0.87**	0.84**
3	0.90**	0.83**	10	0.88**	0.85**	17	0.79**	0.76**
4	0.89**	0.77**	11	0.85**	0.81**	18	0.80**	0.80**
5	0.93**	0.87**	12	0.86**	0.79**	19	0.87**	0.83**
6	0.90**	0.89**	13	0.85**	0.81**	20	0.89**	0.86**
7	0.90**	0.89**	14	0.84**	0.85**	21	0.86**	

*Statistically significant at the 0.05 level.

** Statistically significant at the 0.01 level.

It is worth noting that all correlation coefficients were at acceptable levels and statistically significant; therefore, none of the items were deleted. The correlation coefficient between each dimension and the total score, as well as the correlations between the dimensions themselves, were also calculated, as shown in the following table.

Table 2. Correlation Coefficients Between the Dimensions and the Total Scale

Social Challenges	Economic Challenges	Psychological Challenges	Challenges Scale
Social Challenges	1		
Economic Challenges	0.856**	1	

Social Challenges	Economic Challenges	Psychological Challenges	Challenges Scale
Psychological Challenges	0.892**	0.908**	1
Challenges Scale	0.917**	0.929**	0.942**

*Statistically significant at the 0.05 level.
** Statistically significant at the 0.01 level.

Table (2) shows that all correlation coefficients were at acceptable levels and statistically significant, indicating an appropriate level of construct validity.

Reliability of the Challenges Scale

To ensure the reliability of the study instrument, the test-retest method was used by administering the scale and re-administering it after two weeks to a group outside the study sample consisting of (30) mothers of children with autism spectrum disorder, and then the Pearson correlation coefficient between their two scores was calculated.

The reliability was also calculated using the internal consistency method according to Cronbach's alpha formula. Table (3) shows the internal consistency coefficients according to Cronbach's alpha and the test-retest reliability for the dimensions and the total scale, and these values were considered suitable for the purposes of this study.

Table 3. Internal Consistency (Cronbach's Alpha) and Test-Retest Reliability for the Dimensions and Total Scale

Dimension	Test-Retest Reliability	Internal Consistency
Social Challenges	0.84	0.81
Economic Challenges	0.87	0.80
Psychological Challenges	0.82	0.79
Challenges Scale	0.91	0.85

It is evident from Table (3) that the study instrument possesses good levels of reliability, with internal consistency coefficients ranging between (0.79) and (0.85), and test-retest reliability coefficients between (0.82) and (0.91), indicating a high level of trustworthiness.

Second: Mothers' Awareness Level Scale of Autism Spectrum Disorder:

The Mothers' Awareness Level Scale was developed by referring to a set of relevant studies and literature on the topic of mothers' awareness, including the studies of (Alqarsh & Aljadi, 2020) and (Ali, 2021). The scale consists of (19) items, formulated in a practical manner to facilitate responses from the mothers.

Content Validity:

To ensure the face validity of the awareness level scale, the initial version of the scale was presented to a group of experts and specialists in the field of special education, totaling (10) reviewers, to assess the accuracy of the items, the linguistic formulation, and their opinions on any deletions, additions, or modifications. An agreement rate of 80% was then considered, and the suggested modifications by the reviewers, which included rephrasing several items, were applied to produce the final version of the scale.

Construct Validity: Mothers' Awareness Level Scale

To extract the construct validity indicators for the scale, the correlation coefficients between each item and the total scale score were calculated in a pilot sample outside the study sample, consisting of (30) participants. The correlation coefficients between the items and the total score ranged between (0.36 – 0.71), as shown in the following table.

Table 4. Correlation Coefficients Between Each Item and the Total Scale Score

Item No.	Correlation Coefficient	Item No.	Correlation Coefficient	Item No.	Correlation Coefficient
1	0.40*	8	0.49**	15	0.36*
2	0.58**	9	0.61**	16	0.61**
3	0.71**	10	0.54**	17	0.52**
4	0.42*	11	0.50**	18	0.56**
5	0.37*	12	0.42*	19	0.64**
6	0.59**	13	0.52**		
7	0.39*	14	0.37*		

*Statistically significant at the 0.05 level.

** Statistically significant at the 0.01 level.

It is worth noting that all correlation coefficients were at acceptable levels and statistically significant; therefore, none of the items were deleted.

Reliability of the Mothers' Awareness Scale: To ensure the reliability of the study instrument, the test-retest method was used by administering the scale and then re-administering it after two weeks to a group outside the study sample consisting of (30) participants. The Pearson correlation coefficient between their two sets of scores was (0.88).

Internal consistency reliability was also calculated using Cronbach's alpha formula, which amounted to (0.82), and these values were considered suitable for the purposes of this study.

Statistical

Standard:

The five-point Likert scale was adopted to score the study instruments, with each item receiving a score from one of its five levels (Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Strongly Disagree), represented numerically as (5, 4, 3, 2, 1), respectively. The following scale was used for the purpose of analyzing the results:

- 1.00–2.33: Low
- 2.34–3.67: Medium
- 3.68–5.00: High

The scale was calculated using the following equation:
 (Upper limit of the scale (5) – Lower limit of the scale (1)) / Number of desired categories (3)
 $= (5-1)/3 = 1.33$

Then, the value (1.33) was added to the end of each category.

Statistical Analysis Tools:

For the purpose of analyzing the data collected from the participating mothers in this study, the researchers employed a set of statistical methods appropriate to the study questions and the nature of the data, using SPSS software. The procedures were as follows:

1. **Descriptive Statistics:** To answer the first and second research questions, descriptive statistical methods were used, including means, standard deviations, and percentages, to determine the level of challenges faced by mothers of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and to assess the mothers' level of awareness regarding ASD.

2. **Correlation Analysis:** To answer the third research question, which examines whether a statistically significant correlation exists at the significance level ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) between the challenges faced by mothers and their level of awareness of ASD, the Pearson Correlation Coefficient was employed. This choice was appropriate as the data were quantitative and met the assumptions of normal distribution.

3. **Internal Consistency and Reliability:** To assess the internal consistency of the instrument's domains, Cronbach's Alpha was calculated. Additionally, to verify the reliability of the instrument, the Test-Retest method was applied to a pilot sample of 30 mothers outside the main study sample, with a two-week interval between administrations.

Handling Missing Data and Outliers: Since the study sample included the entire target population (N=40), special attention was given to ensuring the completeness and accuracy of the data. All questionnaires were manually reviewed prior to entry into SPSS to verify completeness, and no questionnaire with missing data was accepted. Outlier analysis indicated that there were no extreme values requiring exclusion, confirming the homogeneity and suitability of the data for statistical

Presentation and Discussion of Results

Question One: What are the challenges faced by mothers of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder in Tafila Governorate?

To answer this question, the arithmetic means and standard deviations for the level of challenges faced by mothers of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder in Tafila Governorate were calculated. The following table illustrates this.

Table 5. Arithmetic Means and Standard Deviations of the Level of Challenges Faced by Mothers of Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder

Rank	No.	Domain	Mean	Standard Deviation	Level
1	3	Psychological Challenges	4.05	0.65	High
2	2	Economic Challenges	3.88	1.02	High
3	1	Social Challenges	3.44	0.76	Medium
Total Challenges Scale			3.79	0.70	High

It is evident from Table (5) that the level of challenges faced by mothers of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder in Tafila Governorate was high, with a mean of (3.79) and a standard deviation of (0.70).

Regarding the domains, the arithmetic means ranged between (3.44 – 4.05), with the psychological challenges domain ranking first with the highest mean of (4.05) and a standard deviation of (0.65) at a high level, while the social challenges domain came last, with a mean of (3.44) and a standard deviation of (0.76) at a medium level.

Researchers attribute the high level of psychological challenges among mothers to the nature of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) itself. ASD is a complex and chronic developmental disorder that persists throughout the child's life and requires continuous effort in care and daily

follow-up. These characteristics associated with the disorder place an increasing burden on mothers that often exceeds their psychological and physical capacities, particularly in the absence of specialized support.

This result can also be interpreted within the framework of several interrelated psychological and contextual factors. Among the most prominent are the mother's persistent anxiety about the child's future, the difficulties in managing repetitive and stereotyped behaviors, and the feelings of frustration and helplessness that arise from the child's slow response to therapy or training. In addition, the local environment in Tafila Governorate contributes to the intensification of these psychological challenges, due to the limited availability of psychological and counseling services directed at mothers, as well as the scarcity of training programs designed to enhance coping skills. The lack of community awareness regarding the characteristics of ASD also exposes mothers to social judgment and stigma, which weakens positive social support. In the absence of organized professional assistance, mothers tend to rely on personal or non-scientific experiences in caring for their children—an approach that often increases their sense of failure and ongoing psychological exhaustion. Researchers emphasize that these conditions explain the elevated psychological challenges compared to other domains, as the psychological dimension is the most affected due to the interaction of familial, social, and economic factors simultaneously.

As for the high level of economic challenges, researchers attribute this to several structural and contextual factors specific to the study environment (Tafila Governorate). Many families suffer from limited income and the high costs of therapeutic and educational services for children with ASD. Services such as behavioral and speech therapy, individual rehabilitation sessions, and transportation to service centers create a continuous financial burden that negatively impacts family economic stability. Moreover, many mothers are often compelled to leave their jobs or reduce their participation in the labor market to dedicate themselves fully to caring for their children.

Regarding the lower level of social challenges compared to the other domains, researchers interpret this finding as a result of the strong social cohesion and family solidarity characterizing the Tafila community. This social fabric fosters a support network that reduces the mothers' sense of isolation, as families typically maintain close relationships with relatives and neighbors, providing emotional and moral support that helps mothers cope and adjust. Furthermore, the conservative nature of the community reinforces values of cooperation and mutual support in facing hardships, which fosters a sense of belonging and protection and mitigates feelings of social rejection or alienation. Participation in family and community activities and interaction with other mothers facing similar challenges also strengthen mothers' social adaptation skills over time, helping to alleviate social stress.

In summary, this pattern of findings reveals that psychological and economic pressures constitute the greatest challenges for mothers, while the cohesive social structure in Tafila partially alleviates the intensity of social difficulties. This variation among the domains of challenges underscores the interrelated and inseparable nature of psychological, economic, and social factors. Consequently, any future interventions aimed at improving mothers' quality of life and reducing the difficulties they face should adopt a comprehensive and integrated

approach—one that combines psychological support, economic empowerment, and expanded community care.

This result is consistent with the study by Gomes et al. (2015), in which challenges were high, and the psychological challenges domain ranked first.

Question Two: What is the level of awareness of mothers of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder in Tafila Governorate regarding autism?

To answer this question, the arithmetic means and standard deviations of the level of awareness of mothers of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder regarding autism were extracted, as shown in the table below.

Table 6. Arithmetic Means and Standard Deviations of the Level of Awareness of Mothers of Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder Regarding Autism

Rank No.	Items	Mean	Standard Deviation	Level	
1	7	Early intervention helps children with autism develop their skills	4.23	1.42	High
2	5	Autism Spectrum Disorder is a neurodevelopmental condition, not a mental illness	4.10	1.39	High
3	9	Behavioral therapy helps improve communication skills in children with autism	4.08	1.39	High
4	13	Having autism does not mean that the person has an intellectual disability	4.00	1.36	High
4	15	Children with autism have the ability to learn and develop when provided with a suitable environment	4.00	1.36	High
6	2	A child with autism exhibits movements such as flapping and body rocking	3.98	1.35	High
7	1	There is an increase in the prevalence of autism compared to before	3.95	1.34	High
7	8	Individuals with autism face difficulties in verbal and non-verbal communication	3.95	1.40	High
9	14	Training families about autism spectrum disorder improves their interaction with affected individuals	3.93	1.33	High
10	6	Autism spectrum disorder appears from early childhood	3.80	1.38	High
10	10	Some children with autism show hypersensitivity to sounds, lights, or touch	3.80	1.27	High
10	19	Modern technology can help improve the skills of a child with autism	3.80	1.32	High
13	16	Children with autism show strong interest in specific subjects and excel in them	3.78	1.37	High

Rank No.	Items	Mean	Standard Deviation	Level	
14	4	Some children with autism have special abilities, such as drawing or quick memorization	3.68	1.47	High
15	11	Children with autism can be integrated into regular schools	3.65	1.23	Medium
16	17	A child with autism may show weak eye contact, which does not necessarily mean lack of interest in others	3.58	1.36	Medium
17	3	A child with autism is disturbed by changes	3.45	1.38	Medium
17	12	Individuals with autism can form social relationships, but differently from others	3.45	1.18	Medium
19	18	Dietary interventions contribute to improving some autism symptoms	3.43	1.36	Medium
—	—	Awareness Scale	3.82	1.23	High

It is evident from Table (6) that the level of awareness of mothers of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder regarding autism was high, with a mean of 3.82 and a standard deviation of 1.23. Regarding the items, the arithmetic means ranged between 3.43 and 4.23. Item No. 7, which states "Early intervention helps children with autism develop their skills," ranked first, with a mean of 4.23 and a standard deviation of 1.42, at a high level. Item No. 5, which states "Autism Spectrum Disorder is a neurodevelopmental condition, not a mental illness," ranked second, with a mean of 4.10 and a standard deviation of 1.39, at a high level. Item No. 9, which states "Behavioral therapy helps improve communication skills in children with autism," ranked third, with a mean of 4.08 and a standard deviation of 1.39, at a high level. Meanwhile, Item No. 18, which states "Dietary interventions contribute to improving some autism symptoms," ranked last, with a mean of 3.43 and a standard deviation of 1.36, at a medium level.

The researchers interpret this result by noting that mothers in Tafila Governorate have developed greater awareness and understanding of Autism Spectrum Disorder, which may be the outcome of increased access to relevant information through digital channels and institutional initiatives that focus on issues concerning individuals with disabilities. This has helped form a better understanding of the nature of the disorder and ways to manage it in daily life.

Additionally, mothers live through the experience of raising a child with autism over a long course of continuous learning, which begins from the moment of the child's diagnosis. Each stage of development reveals new aspects and characteristics of the disorder, prompting mothers to investigate and understand the reasons behind their children's behaviors. Thus, this awareness can be considered cumulative experiential knowledge resulting from daily observation, deep interaction with the child, and real-life situations that help the mother develop her skills and effectively manage the child's behaviors.

This result may also be explained by the role of educational institutions in Tafila Governorate, which provide direct or indirect support through community awareness campaigns. Facilitating

communication between the family and educational and health institutions helps enhance mothers' awareness, understand the developmental characteristics of children with autism, and recognize the importance of behavioral and educational interventions.

Moreover, this result may reflect the psychological and social factors affecting mothers, as facing the psychological and social challenges associated with raising a child with autism has led them to seek knowledge about autism and strategies for managing the child, considering knowledge as a means to reduce stress, helplessness, and uncertainty.

This study differs from the result of Hwang et al. (2015), which showed a low level of awareness among mothers.

Question Three: Is there a statistically significant correlation at the level of ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) between the challenges faced by mothers and their level of awareness of autism?

To answer this question, the Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated between the challenges faced by mothers and their level of awareness of autism, as shown in Table (7).

Table 7. Pearson Correlation Coefficient for the Relationship Between Challenges Faced by Mothers and Level of Awareness of Autism

Type of Challenge	(r)	(p)	N
Social Challenges	-0.689**	0.000	40
Economic Challenges	-0.408**	0.009	40
Psychological Challenges	-0.546**	0.000	40
Challenges Scale	-0.613**	0.000	40

*Statistically significant at the 0.05 level.

**Statistically significant at the 0.01 level.

The results presented in the table indicate the existence of a statistically significant negative correlation between the challenges faced by mothers and their level of awareness of autism spectrum disorder. Social challenges showed the strongest negative correlation with the level of awareness ($r = -0.689$, $p < 0.01$), followed by psychological challenges, which also showed a strong negative correlation ($r = -0.546$, $p < 0.01$), while economic challenges showed a moderate negative correlation ($r = -0.408$, $p < 0.01$). Considering the overall challenges scale, a strong negative correlation with the level of awareness was observed ($r = -0.613$, $p < 0.01$). These results indicate that an increase in the challenges faced by mothers is associated with a decrease in their level of awareness of autism spectrum disorder, necessitating additional support to enhance their understanding and knowledge of this disorder.

This variation can be explained by the fact that mothers possess good theoretical knowledge about Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD); however, the psychological, economic, and social pressures they face limit their ability to utilize that knowledge and translate it into daily practice. Consequently, awareness becomes ineffective in serving a preventive or mitigating role against these challenges.

This result reflects a state of functional contradiction between cognition and emotion. Increased psychological and life pressures heighten the likelihood that acquired knowledge will remain unimplemented. For example, a mother who understands the importance of applying behavioral modification strategies with her autistic child may find herself unable to do so due to emotional exhaustion, continuous anxiety, or concerns about her child's future. Similarly, the financial

burden associated with therapeutic and rehabilitative sessions reinforces stress, turning awareness from an empowering tool into mere theoretical understanding — which, in turn, contributes to elevated challenges despite the mother's awareness of their causes and roots.

The strong negative correlation between social challenges and awareness level can also be explained by the socio-cultural context of Tafila Governorate. Although the community is characterized by close family ties, it remains influenced by misconceptions and inaccurate beliefs about autism—such as the notion that the disorder stems from poor parenting practices or negative upbringing methods. These attitudes foster a climate of reservation and self-isolation among mothers, leading them to avoid awareness activities or professional support out of fear of stigma or criticism. As a result, the accumulation of interactive knowledge decreases over time, which weakens practical skills in child care and behavioral management, consequently increasing psychological and family-related pressures.

The moderate negative correlation between economic challenges and awareness level is attributed to the limiting effect of financial factors on access to applied knowledge. Many mothers face low income, high costs of behavioral and speech therapy, and limited availability of specialized centers in remote areas of the governorate. Consequently, mothers become preoccupied with meeting basic needs, which restricts their ability to attend awareness workshops or apply what they have learned from counseling programs. Economic pressures therefore extend their impact beyond financial strain, reducing overall quality of life and the functional effectiveness of awareness itself.

Based on these findings, the negative correlation can be interpreted as a circular relationship: heightened psychological, social, and economic challenges diminish the practical application of awareness, while low functional awareness further intensifies these challenges by limiting mothers' ability to cope with stress or adopt evidence-based behavioral strategies with their children. This reciprocal relationship underscores the necessity of comprehensive intervention programs that not only aim to raise awareness levels but also empower mothers to apply that awareness effectively in real-life contexts.

The findings of the current study align with those of Sameea et al. (2025), which indicated a high level of awareness of Autism Spectrum Disorder among mothers; however, they still face evident psychological and social challenges. This demonstrates that theoretical knowledge alone is insufficient to reduce these pressures unless it is supported by appropriate guidance programs and practical interventions. Similarly, Papadopoulos (2021) confirmed that mothers encounter complex challenges related to the behavioral and emotional characteristics of their children, which impose significant psychological and social burdens. This convergence is explained by the fact that an elevated level of cognitive awareness among mothers does not automatically lead to a reduction in challenges; rather, its impact remains limited unless accompanied by comprehensive psychological, economic, and social support that enables mothers to effectively apply their awareness in managing their children.

Recommendations: In light of the findings of this study, it is recommended to:

- Develop continuous, targeted community awareness programs aimed at raising mothers' awareness of autism spectrum disorder, with an emphasis on practical skills for managing their child's behavior.

- Design specialized training units in coordination with universities and health authorities, including workshops for mothers, hands-on sessions, and regular monitoring to ensure maximum benefit.
- Provide ongoing psychological and guidance support services for mothers through individual or group sessions to alleviate the mental stress associated with caring for children with autism.
- Conduct future comparative studies across governorates to identify differences in mothers' awareness levels in various environments.
- Implement longitudinal studies to track changes in parental awareness and practices over time following the implementation of awareness and support programs.
- Include fathers as participants in future studies to broaden understanding of the impact of family awareness on managing the behavior of children with autism and to develop training programs that.

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