

**Al-Quds University**

**Deanship of Graduate Studies**



**Psychological Stress and Coping Strategies among Parents of Children  
with Autism in Gaza Strip**

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**MPH Thesis**

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with Autism in Gaza Strip**

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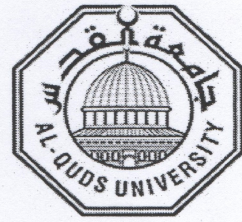
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### Thesis Approval

### Psychological Stress and Coping Strategies among Parents of Children with Autism in Gaza Strip

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

"وَإِنْ يَمْسَسْكَ اللَّهُ بِضُرٍّ فَلَا كَاشِفَ لَهُ إِلَّا هُوَ وَإِنْ يُرِدْكَ بِخَيْرٍ فَلَا رَادَّ لِفَضْلِهِ

يُصِيبُ بِهِ مَنْ يَشَاءُ مِنْ عِبَادِهِ وَهُوَ الْغَفُورُ الرَّحِيمُ"

107 / يونس

صدق الله العظيم

## *Dedication*

This work is dedicated to someone who is the closest to my heart in this world to my Father. You are always supporting me and encouraging me to achieve my goal.

To the soul of my mother, also to my children and my husband. Dr Hanni Ayyad who helped and supported me, to my son Adam. Moreover, to my son Ahmed the autistic child God the only one who can cure him.

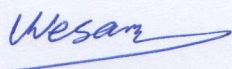
Also to my university college and to my lecturers specially, Prof. Abdel Aziz Thabet.

To all autistic children families and caregivers who participated in this research study. Finally, to everyone who remained beside me.

## Declaration

I certify that the work provided in this thesis, unless otherwise referenced, is the researcher's own work, and has not been submitted elsewhere for any other degree or qualification.

Signed:



Wesam Ayyad

Date: 16/2/2016

## **Acknowledgement**

I wish to thank the people who made this thesis possible: Prof. Abdel Aziz Thabet for his professional guidance, his support and encouragement through the years. Also for Dr. Itaf Abed for her time and constructive feedback, I am deeply grateful to my committee members for their time and effort in reviewing this work. I thank all participants in this study, and those who contributed to the completion of this thesis, thank for Right to Live Society, Autism Specialist's Center and Palestinian Autism Society. To All my friends

With respect.

Wesam Amin Ayyad

## Abstract

The present study examined the psychological stress and coping strategies among parents of children with autism in Gaza Strip. It was carried out in which 178 participants who agreed to participate, and were registered in the Psychiatric Hospital in Gaza Strip, were included. Both quantitative and qualitative data analysis methods have been used, psychological stress scale, the brief cope, socio demographic data and interviews questions were participated with about 50 parents who agreed to be included in the study.

Results showed that there are no statistically significant differences at the level of significance ( $\alpha \leq 0.05$ ) in the psychological stress among parents of children with 2autism in Gaza Strip, due to demographic characteristics. There are no statistically significant differences at the level of significance ( $\alpha \leq 0.05$ ) in coping measure among parents of children with autism in Gaza Strip, due to demographic characteristics. Stress about the future of the child was the first rank with mean 3.72. The second rank was the problems of the child with mean 3.60, inability to bear the burdens of child dimension was the third rank with mean 3.35, fourth rank was family problem dimension with mean 3.30 also fifth rank was independent performance of child problems dimension with mean 3.23, psychological and organic symptoms dimension at sixth rank with mean 2.74 while feelings of despair and frustration at seventh rank with 2.56. In addition, the problem-focused coping dimension take first rank with mean 2.54, then religious denial coping dimension at second rank 2.51, positive coping dimension take third rank 2.46, while active avoidance focused dimension take fourth rank 2.37.

The result of qualitative part was the most serious stresses that parents faced, child future, problems with the lack of normal language, disruptive and bad behavior, inappropriate eating and toileting in addition most parents used a variety of coping strategies, the most common of which included, active avoidance focused, problem-focused coping, positive coping, religious denial coping but in different degrees.

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## List of abbreviations

ABC	The Autism behavioral checklist
ADI-R	Autism diagnostic interview – revised
ADOS-G	The autism diagnostic observation schedule–generic
ASD	Autism spectrum disorders
CARS	The childhood autism rating scale
CHAT	The checklist for autism in toddlers
DSM-IV	Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders, fourth edition, text revision
DSM-5	Diagnosis and statistical manual of mental disorders fifth edition
IQ	Intelligence quotient
KS	Kolmogorov Smirnov
M-CHAT	The modified chat
MOH	Ministry of health
NGOs	Non-governmental organizations
PDD-NOS	Pervasive developmental disorder-not otherwise specified
PECS	The picture exchange communication system
PL-ADOS	Pre-linguistic autism diagnostic observation schedule
SCQ	The social communication questionnaire
SPSS	Statistical package for social sciences

# **Chapter1**

## **Introduction**

### **1. Background**

Parent may exposed to problems or sudden situations that cannot be resolved at all, especially if a child diagnosed with one of autism spectrum disorders. Autism disorder regarded as a chronic illness, problems with communication, emotional expression and antisocial behaviors, all combined to place tremendous stress on the families of children with autism. (Bristol 1984; Marcus et al. 1997). In addition the absence until this time of any cure for the condition means that the families have to care for a disabled member. In Gaza, there is no governmental services for the autism spectrum disorder (ASD) children and the few available centers are private, very limited and expensive. The people live in difficult situation especially in the contentious Israel violence, and political conflicts. They exposed and suffered from variety of stressors and traumatic events, such as poverty, unemployment and that lead to bad psychological impact (holtz, 1998). However, some families, despite having children with severe autism spectrum disorder, have still managed successful psychological adaptation. Families with autistic children must find ways to cope with their illness. In Gaza, there is a lack of studies investigating this phenomenon, according to Community Mental health Rehabilitation Center (Psychiatric Hospital) in Gaza Strip the number of cases of autism spectrum disorder is about 200 case. The proposed research will examine psychological stress and coping strategies among parents of children with autism in Gaza Strip.

## **1.1 Research problem**

This study will be the first to handle this topic, because there is a lack of studies investigating what is the psychological impact and coping-strategies of parents of autistic children in Gaza city , the purpose of the study is to examine psychological stress and coping-strategies among mothers and fathers who have children diagnosed autism spectrum disorder in Gaza Strip. In addition, the study examines the relationship between selected socio-demographic characteristics (age, sex, educational level, and occupation) of parents of children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder and psychological stress.

## **1.2 Justification**

On the other hand, raising a child with autism places some extraordinary demands on parents as individuals and on the family as a whole. The important issue that the researcher is a mother of 10 years old autistic child and have difficulties in communication thus, I decided to have more understanding about this issue to help myself first and other parents who have autistic children by increasing awareness and knowledge about (ASD) in Gaza Strip.

## **1.3 General objective**

To explore the psychological stress and coping strategies among parents of children with autism in Gaza Strip.

## **1.4 Specific objectives**

1. To measure the types of psychological stress experienced by autistic children's parents in Gaza Strip.
2. To find type of coping-strategies used by autistic children's parents.

3. To examine the relationship between selected socio-demographic characteristics (age, sex, level of education, and occupation) of parents of children diagnosed with (ASD) and the level of psychological stress and coping-strategies.

## **1.5 Research questions**

1. What is the types of psychological stress among mothers of children diagnosed with (ASD) in Gaza Strip?
2. What is the types of psychological stress among fathers of children diagnosed with (ASD) in Gaza Strip?
3. What is the level of psychological stress among parents of children diagnosed with (ASD) in Gaza Strip?
4. What is the relationship among selected socio-demographic characteristics (age, sex, educational level, and occupation) of parents of children diagnosed with (ASD) and psychological stress?
5. What is the relationship among selected socio-demographic characteristics (age sex, educational level, and occupation) of parents of children diagnosed with (ASD) and coping-strategies?

## **1.6 Definitions**

### **1.6.1 Autism spectrum disorders**

According to the (DSM5) autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a serious neurodevelopmental disorder that impairs a child's ability to communicate and interact with others. It also includes restricted repetitive behaviors, interests and activities. These issues cause significant impairment in social, occupational and other areas of functioning.