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Title: "You are not alone": A Qualitative Study on various support structures as perceived by mothers with children with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

Across the world more and more children are being diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (Jacobs, Steyaert, Dierickx & Hens, 2018). Over the last 25 years, many mothers have had to face the stigma and shame surrounding Autism Spectrum Disorder within the Middle Eastern region (Nahad,2015). In addition, little to no academic research has been conducted within the region regarding mothers' experiences and the various support structures in their lives. This research has thus been designed to address the perceived paucity in the Middle East, specifically in the United Arab Emirates. A Thematic Approach was adopted and data from 17 participants were collected. To address the various types of support structures more effectively the research has yielded main themes such as Developmental History and Personal Information and Educational Support Structures. The above-mentioned themes have been analysed according to Braun and Clarke (Howitt & Cramer 2014) to ensure validity and reliability of the data. The research results indicated that 29% of participants were satisfied with the initial support that they received from medical professionals and that the majority of participants (71%) indicated that they receive most of their support from online support groups or small gatherings, as mother-to-mother advice is more valued than the advice of professionals. The relatively small sample size in this research study might not convey the experiences of all mothers of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder in the United Arab Emirates but may be supported through the words of Guest, Bunce and Johnson (2006) who mention that the accuracy of sample sizes are often challenging within homogeneous "hard-to-reach, stigmatized" and or "hidden populations".

Biography:
Angelique obtained a BEd in Education and a BEd Honors degree in Learning Support through the University of Stellenbosch in South Africa. Additionally, she has a master's degree in Applied Psychology through Middlesex University and will soon graduate with a UK Level 7 CCET and JCQ Access Arrangement Qualification through Éirim: The National Assessment Agency Limited. She has been working as a learning support practitioner and specialist in the UAE since 2015, and prior to that she was a part time tutor and taught university students. Angelique is is currently employed as a Special Needs Coordinator in Abu Dhabi, UAE. She enjoys supporting children of all ages and has expiernce workig with children with learning difficulties and barriers to learning including hearing and visual difficulties, cerebral palsy, dyslexia, dyscalculia, dyspraxia, attention deficit disorders, autism spectrum disorders, down syndrome, developmental delay and speech and language disorders.

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