

## **‘Perspectives of Parenting a Child with Autism – A Maltese Case Study’**

Autism is a neurodevelopmental disorder with a lifetime impact on various functioning domains (Giovagnoli et al., 2015). This study explores the perceptions and experiences of Maltese parents of children with autism, whilst comparing maternal and paternal views. This study also explores parental views of local support services available and sheds light on gaps of such services. This research is based on close-ended questionnaires and audio-recorded interviews of twelve Maltese parents of children with autism of any age.

This study found that Maltese fathers and mothers are generally equally involved in the upbringing of their diagnosed children and thus reported similar levels of exhaustion and anxiety. This research also found some minor disparities, as mothers reported slightly higher stress levels, poorer quality of life (QOL) and well-being whilst fathers reported slightly higher levels of depression and physiological symptoms. The similarity of these results portray the cultural differences on how Maltese fathers are being as involved in parenting as equally as mothers, with both reporting similar implications of the diagnosis.

Conclusively, the results also suggest that Maltese parents are not satisfactorily guided with regards to support services available and are left to seek such services independently. Results imply that, there is a lack of professional support offered for parents and children particularly for older adolescents and a lack of suitable collaboration between health and education systems, which leads parents to seek private services adding on their financial burden.

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