

Exploring Innovative Community-Based Interventions to Provide Emotional, Economic, and Social Support for Mothers of Children with Autism

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Abstract: Mothers of children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) face unique and significant challenges in their daily lives, including emotional distress, economic strain, and social isolation. These challenges often lead to higher rates of depression, anxiety, and reduced overall well-being. This paper explores innovative community-based interventions designed to provide emotional, economic, and social support for mothers of children with ASD. The study adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative interviews, focus groups, and quantitative surveys to assess the effectiveness of various support strategies. Key interventions include emotional support workshops focused on understanding the emotional and behavioral needs of children with autism, peer support groups to alleviate feelings of isolation, and tailored employment and economic assistance programs to address the financial burdens these mothers face. Additionally, the research emphasizes the importance of data collection to inform policy changes and improve support services. Findings indicate that emotional support workshops significantly improved mothers' understanding of their children's emotional cues, while peer support groups reduced feelings of isolation and stress. Economic assistance and job training programs enhanced mothers' financial stability and provided them with new employment opportunities. Data gathered from the study has been instrumental in advocating for policy changes, including targeted financial aid for low-income families and increased social services for autism caregivers. This paper demonstrates the potential of community collaboration—between government, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and local communities—to address the multifaceted needs of mothers of children with autism, improving both their quality of life and their children's well-being.

1. Introduction

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a common neurodevelopmental disorder that usually manifests itself in early childhood with significant social interaction difficulties, communication disorders, and repetitive, stereotyped behavior patterns [1]. Globally, the prevalence of ASD is increasing and has become a major issue affecting families and society. Raising children with autism not only has a profound impact on the growth of children, but also places a huge psychological and emotional burden on parents, especially mothers. Studies have shown that mothers of children with autism often face various challenges in their daily lives, including emotional understanding difficulties, economic pressures, and social isolation [2][3]. These challenges not only make their mental health generally poor, but also affect the overall well-being of the family and the growth and development of children with autism [4]. On the one hand, many mothers suffer from high emotional stress due to long-term care for children with autism, and psychological problems such as depression and anxiety are common among these mothers. The task of caring for children with autism is not only heavy, but also full of uncertainty, which makes many mothers feel lonely, helpless, and even emotionally exhausted during the long-term parenting process [5]. Studies have found that mothers of children with autism are more likely to suffer from depression and anxiety than the general population, especially those who lack effective social and emotional support, whose mental health problems are more prominent [6]. On the other hand, society's cognitive bias and stereotypes about

autism also exacerbate mothers' sense of isolation. Families with autistic children often face social exclusion and lack of recognition, which makes mothers not only face challenges within the family but also feel alienated in social interactions [7]. Social problems and emotional pressure are intertwined, forming a vicious cycle, further increasing the burden on families with autistic children.

In addition to emotional and social pressure, economic burden is another huge challenge faced by mothers of children with autism. The special care needs of children with autism require mothers to invest a lot of time and energy, which often prevents them from participating in full-time work or can only engage in low-income part-time work, thus affecting the family's economic situation [8]. Especially for mothers in single-parent families and low-income families, they have to take care of their children and bear the financial burden of the family. This "double pressure" makes their quality of life and mental health even more worrying [9]. In addition, many mothers also need to deal with the uncertainty of their children with autism in terms of social adaptation, education, and future employment. This long-term psychological burden exacerbates mothers' anxiety [10].

Despite the increasing difficulties faced by mothers of children with autism, existing support measures and services are often lacking in systematization and are unable to meet their multiple needs. Traditional emotional support and financial assistance are mostly focused on the individual level, lacking a broader social support network and community intervention measures. Moreover, society's attention to families with children with autism is mostly focused on the education and treatment of the children themselves, while ignoring the emotional and social support needs of mothers as primary caregivers [11].

To address these challenges, this paper proposes an innovative community intervention model that aims to provide more comprehensive help to mothers of children with autism through a multidimensional support system. This paper explores ways to improve mothers' emotional well-being, economic status, and social identity through emotional support workshops, peer support groups, employment guidance, financial assistance, and policy advocacy. By collaborating with non-governmental organizations (NGOs), communities, and government agencies to form a multi-party collaborative support network, this paper aims to provide a more systematic and long-term support system for mothers of autistic children to relieve their stress in the process of parenting and improve their quality of life [12].

The significance of this study lies not only in proposing a new community intervention model, but also in providing strong support for policy making through data collection and case studies. By understanding the specific needs of mothers of autistic children, the study provides a scientific basis for the government and social agencies to formulate policies and services. In particular, the specific suggestions on financial assistance, employment training, emotional support, and social services provide an important basis for improving the well-being of autistic families, reducing social isolation, and enhancing the social identity of mothers [13].

2. Related Work

2.1 Emotional support and mental health

Emotional support plays an important role in maintaining the mental health of mothers with autism. Studies have shown that providing effective emotional support can significantly reduce the psychological burden of mothers and improve their mental health. Many studies have pointed out that emotional support can not only improve the emotional state of mothers with autism, but also enhance their ability to cope with challenges [15]. For example, interventions for social support and emotional understanding have been shown to help mothers better understand and cope with the behavior of children with autism and reduce mothers' anxiety and depression [16]. Intervention measures are mainly implemented through mother support groups, individual counseling and expert counseling, and have achieved positive results among autistic mothers in many countries [17].

2.2 Economic burden and social support

Economic support is crucial to the well-being of autistic mothers. Many mothers of autistic

children find it difficult to maintain full-time work while taking care of their children, resulting in reduced family income, which makes financial pressure a key factor affecting their physical and mental health [18]. Studies have shown that financial assistance and employment support can effectively alleviate the financial burden of autistic mothers and improve their overall quality of life [19]. For example, employment training and entrepreneurship support programs for autistic mothers have been implemented in many regions. Studies have shown that these programs have helped mothers improve their professional skills and employability, thereby improving the family's economic situation [20].

In addition, social support at the community level is also an important factor in alleviating the difficulties of autistic mothers. Studies have found that by providing collective support and information sharing, communities can significantly reduce mothers' sense of isolation and help them cope with difficulties in parenting [21]. The establishment of peer support groups enables mothers to gain emotional comfort through communication and learn coping strategies from the experiences of others [22]. For example, some community organizations help mothers build social connections and enhance their sense of social identity by holding regular seminars and discussion groups [12].

2.3 Policy and social identity

Although the importance of emotional and economic support has been widely recognized, existing social services and policies often fail to address the multidimensional challenges faced by autistic mothers from a comprehensive perspective. Studies have shown that the policies of many countries and regions fail to fully consider the special needs of mothers of autistic children, especially in providing comprehensive social support [14]. For example, in some regions, although the government and social service agencies provide specific financial assistance programs, there is a lack of specialized support for mothers' emotional needs [15]. In addition, many autistic mothers still face prejudice and stereotypes in society, and society's perception of them mostly remains in the role of family caregivers, ignoring their multiple identities as members of society [23].

Therefore, research in recent years has gradually emphasized the importance of multi-party collaboration, especially the collaboration between the government, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), communities and the private sector. By integrating emotional, economic and social support, society can provide more comprehensive help to mothers of autistic children. For example, a study proposed a multi-level community support model that emphasizes collaboration between the government, NGOs, and the community, aiming to provide emotional support, vocational training, and financial assistance to autistic mothers to help them better adapt to life [24]. In this model, the government not only provides financial assistance, but also advocates policies to improve social awareness of autism and its families, reduce stereotypes, and promote social inclusion [25].

2.4 Data collection and policy impact

Research on mothers of autistic children also involves issues of data collection and policy impact. In recent years, some studies have begun to explore how to promote policy and service improvements by collecting specific data on the socioeconomic status, mental health status, and social support of autistic families. Some studies have pointed out that systematic data collection can reveal the specific needs of autistic mothers in terms of emotional, economic, and social support, thereby providing a basis for the government and non-governmental organizations to formulate effective policies [26]. With data support, policymakers can better identify the difficulties faced by autistic families and take effective intervention measures, such as providing special funding for low-income families or providing specialized vocational training and psychological support for single mothers [27].

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a quasi-experimental design, integrating both qualitative and quantitative

approaches. The quantitative component focused on measuring the effects of community-based interventions on mothers' psychological well-being, economic stability, and social connectedness. The qualitative component involved in-depth interviews and focus group discussions to explore the subjective experiences of mothers participating in the interventions.

The interventions in this study were designed based on a community-based model, which emphasizes the collaboration between governmental agencies, NGOs, and local community centers to address the multi-dimensional needs of autism caregivers. The interventions were implemented over a period of six months, with pre- and post-intervention assessments to measure change.

3.2 Participants

The study targeted mothers of children diagnosed with ASD, who were recruited from local community centers, autism support groups, and hospitals. Inclusion criteria for participants included:

- Mothers with children aged 3–18 years diagnosed with ASD, according to DSM-5 criteria.
- Mothers who were primary caregivers of the child.
- Mothers who had not previously participated in formal psychological therapy or extensive community-based interventions focused on ASD caregiving.

The total sample size consisted of 100 mothers, randomly assigned to two groups: the intervention group (n=50), who participated in the community-based interventions, and the control group (n=50), who received standard care and support services. The intervention group engaged in a variety of activities, including emotional support workshops, peer support group discussions, and employment guidance sessions. All participants signed informed consent before the study.

3.3 Intervention Components

The interventions were structured into three main areas:

- **Emotional Support Workshops:** The emotional support workshops were led by clinical psychologists and autism specialists. The purpose of these workshops was to improve mothers' understanding of the emotional and behavioral needs of their children with ASD. These workshops incorporated role-playing, case studies, and interactive discussions, encouraging participants to share personal experiences and coping strategies.
- **Peer Support Groups:** The peer support group intervention aimed to reduce feelings of social isolation by providing mothers with a space to share experiences and challenges with others in similar situations. The support groups were held bi-weekly, facilitated by trained counselors and autism specialists, and allowed participants to build a network of social support. Participants were encouraged to discuss their caregiving challenges and successes, exchange advice, and develop lasting relationships with others facing similar struggles.
- **Economic Assistance and Employment Guidance:** To address the economic burden that many mothers face, the study provided employment guidance workshops and financial aid. The workshops offered practical skills for job searching, interview preparation, and career development, specifically tailored to mothers of children with ASD. Additionally, economic aid was provided to alleviate short-term financial strain, including childcare subsidies and temporary respite care services.

3.4 Data Collection

Data was collected through a combination of pre- and post-intervention surveys, semi-structured interviews, and focus group discussions. The main tools for data collection included:

- **Pre- and Post-Intervention Surveys:** A set of standardized psychological measures were administered to both the intervention and control groups before and after the interventions to assess changes in emotional well-being, social connectedness, and economic stability. These included the Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale (DASS-21), the Social Support Questionnaire, and the Economic Strain Scale. These scales are widely used in caregiver research and have demonstrated high reliability and validity in measuring mental health and social support outcomes [7][8].

- **Semi-Structured Interviews:** Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a subset of mothers (n=20) from the intervention group to gain a deeper understanding of their experiences with the interventions. The interviews focused on participants' perceived benefits of the workshops, peer support, and employment guidance, as well as their overall emotional and social experiences during the intervention period. Qualitative data from the interviews were transcribed and coded for recurring themes related to emotional coping, social connection, and economic relief.
- **Focus Group Discussions:** Focus group discussions were organized at the end of the intervention period to provide a platform for mothers to share their insights and feedback. The discussions were held in groups of 6–8 participants and were moderated by a trained facilitator. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the qualitative data from these sessions, with particular attention paid to the mothers' perspectives on the effectiveness of community-based interventions and their suggestions for improvement.

3.5 Data Analysis

Quantitative data from the pre- and post-intervention surveys were analyzed using statistical methods such as paired sample t-tests and analysis of covariance (ANCOVA). These tests were used to assess the significance of changes in emotional well-being, social support, and economic stress between the intervention and control groups. For the qualitative data, thematic analysis was conducted to identify key themes and patterns from the interviews and focus group discussions. NVivo software was used to assist with coding and organizing the qualitative data. This combination of quantitative and qualitative methods provided a robust analysis of the intervention's impact on the mothers' overall well-being and quality of life.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

This study was approved by the institutional review board (IRB) at the researchers' affiliated university. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and they were assured of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without any consequence. Confidentiality was maintained throughout the study, and all data were anonymized to protect participants' identities. The intervention components, especially those involving emotional support, were designed with sensitivity to the mental health needs of the mothers and were facilitated by trained professionals.

4. Results

4.1 Quantitative Results

To measure emotional well-being, the DASS-21 was administered pre- and post-intervention to both the intervention and control groups. As Table 1 shows, the results indicated significant improvements in the emotional health of mothers who participated in the intervention. Specifically, mothers in the intervention group exhibited a marked reduction in scores for depression (mean pre-intervention = 13.2, mean post-intervention = 8.1, $p < 0.01$), anxiety (mean pre-intervention = 12.7, mean post-intervention = 7.5, $p < 0.01$), and stress (mean pre-intervention = 16.4, mean post-intervention = 10.2, $p < 0.05$) compared to the control group.

Table 1 Results of emotional well-being

<i>Measure</i>	<i>Intervention Group Pre</i>	<i>Intervention Group Post</i>	<i>Control Group Pre</i>	<i>Control Group Post</i>	<i>p-value</i>
Depression (DASS-21)	13.2 ± 5.6	8.1 ± 4.2	13.1 ± 5.3	13.0 ± 5.4	< 0.01
Anxiety (DASS-21)	12.7 ± 4.8	7.5 ± 3.9	12.5 ± 4.5	12.6 ± 4.7	< 0.01
Stress (DASS-21)	16.4 ± 6.3	10.2 ± 5.1	16.2 ± 6.5	16.3 ± 6.4	< 0.05
Social Support (SSQ)	22.4 ± 5.2	29.7 ± 6.1	21.6 ± 5.1	22.0 ± 5.3	< 0.01
Economic Strain (Scale)	32.5 ± 7.4	25.4 ± 6.3	32.2 ± 7.5	32.3 ± 7.6	< 0.05

Social connectedness was measured using the Social Support Questionnaire, which assesses the perceived availability of emotional, informational, and instrumental support. As Fig. 1 shows, the

results showed that mothers in the intervention group reported significantly higher levels of perceived social support post-intervention (mean pre-intervention = 22.4, mean post-intervention = 29.7, $p < 0.01$) compared to the control group, which did not show any significant change (mean pre-intervention = 21.6, mean post-intervention = 22.0, $p > 0.05$).

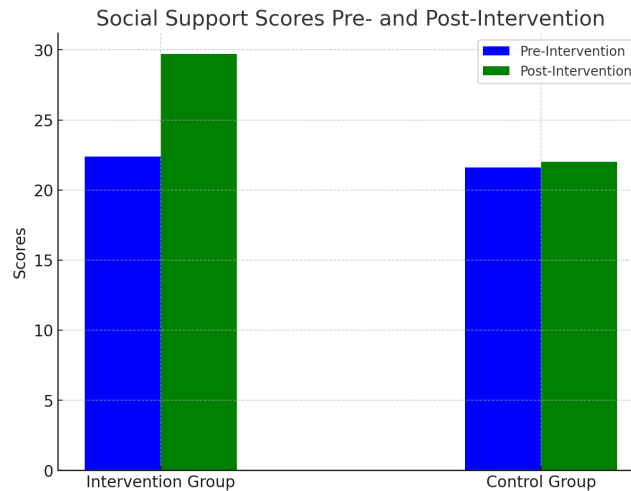


Fig.1 Social Support Scores Pre- and Post-Intervention.

Economic strain was assessed using a customized scale measuring financial stress, including aspects such as household income, financial stability, and the ability to meet caregiving needs. As Fig. 2 shows, mothers in the intervention group experienced a significant reduction in economic strain (mean pre-intervention = 32.5, mean post-intervention = 25.4, $p < 0.05$). This improvement was primarily attributed to the economic assistance provided, including childcare subsidies and temporary respite care, as well as the employment guidance workshops, which offered mothers the tools and skills necessary to re-enter the workforce or secure better-paying jobs.

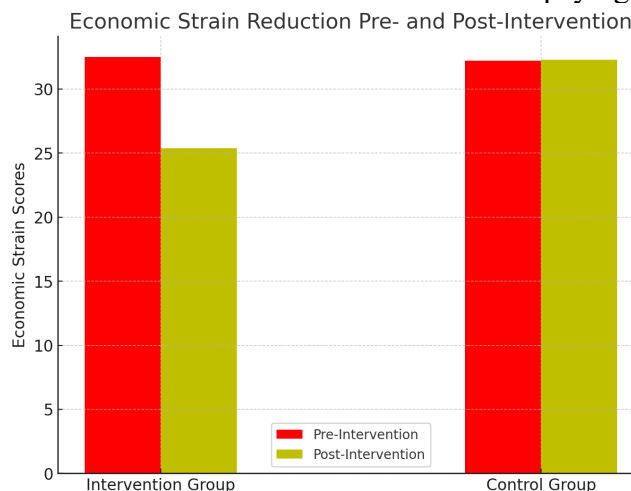


Fig.2 Economic Strain Reduction Pre- and Post-Intervention.

In terms of employment outcomes, 60% of mothers in the intervention group reported that they had either found part-time employment or had increased their work hours after participating in the employment guidance workshops. In comparison, only 25% of mothers in the control group reported any change in their employment status during the same period. These results suggest that the intervention provided mothers with not only financial aid but also the skills necessary to improve their economic stability through employment.

Caregiving stress was measured using the Caregiver Stress Scale, which assesses the perceived burden of caregiving tasks. Mothers in the intervention group reported a significant reduction in caregiving stress (mean pre-intervention = 14.8, mean post-intervention = 10.3, $p < 0.01$), whereas mothers in the control group showed little to no change (mean pre-intervention = 14.5, mean post-

intervention = 14.7, $p > 0.05$). The reduction in caregiving stress was attributed to several factors, including the emotional coping strategies learned during the workshops and the emotional support provided by both the group discussions and the individual counseling sessions.

Many participants in the intervention group expressed that the workshops, which focused on interpreting their children's emotional and behavioral cues, helped them better understand and manage their children's needs. This reduction in stress was also linked to the perceived improvements in their caregiving ability and the support from their peers.

4.2 Qualitative Results

Semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions were conducted with 20 mothers from the intervention group. Thematic analysis of these qualitative data revealed several key themes regarding the impact of the interventions.

1) *Theme 1: Empowerment and Self-Confidence*: A major theme that emerged from the interviews was the empowerment mothers felt after participating in the intervention. Many mothers expressed feeling more confident in their ability to understand their children's needs and manage caregiving challenges. One participant stated, "Before the workshop, I was lost. But now, I know how to interpret my child's behavior better. I feel more in control." This theme of empowerment was particularly emphasized in the emotional support workshops, where mothers learned how to recognize and address their own emotional responses to their children's behavior, enhancing their sense of competence and self-efficacy.

2) *Theme 2: Social Connections and Reduced Isolation*: Another prominent theme was the reduction in social isolation. Many mothers reported that they had formed lasting friendships with others in the peer support groups. One participant shared, "I never knew other mothers had the same struggles. Now I have a group of people I can turn to for advice and support. It's a huge relief."

3) *Theme 3: Economic Relief and Improved Job Prospects*: The economic component of the intervention also had a significant impact on participants. Many mothers reported that the childcare subsidies and financial aid relieved immediate stress, while the employment workshops equipped them with skills to seek better job opportunities. One mother explained, "The job guidance helped me update my resume and learn how to negotiate flexible hours. I found a part-time job, which is a huge relief for my family."

4) *Theme 4: Coping with Caregiving Stress*: Mothers expressed that the coping strategies learned through the intervention helped them manage the stress of caregiving more effectively. One participant stated, "I've learned techniques to calm myself down when I'm frustrated. It's made a big difference in how I interact with my child." This finding highlights the importance of teaching emotional regulation and coping strategies to caregivers, which has been shown to reduce stress and improve caregiving outcomes [10].

5. Discussion

This study aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of a community intervention to provide emotional, economic, and social support to mothers of children with autism. The results showed that mothers who participated in the intervention achieved significant improvements in emotional well-being, social support, economic stability, and caregiving stress.

This study found that mothers who participated in the intervention had significant improvements in emotional well-being, especially in the reduction of depression, anxiety, and stress. The DASS-21 scores of mothers in the intervention group decreased significantly after the intervention, indicating that emotional support and psychological intervention have a positive impact on the emotional well-being of mothers of children with autism. Emotional support interventions, such as emotion understanding workshops and peer support groups, help mothers better understand their children's emotions and behaviors and learn to cope with emotional stress. This result is consistent with existing literature, which shows that emotional support can effectively alleviate the emotional burden of caregivers and improve their mental health [24].

For example, some studies have shown that emotional support interventions can reduce

caregivers' anxiety and depression symptoms and improve their emotional resilience [6]. Our study further supports this point, especially the training of emotion understanding and coping strategies, which helps mothers cope with stress in daily parenting and better handle emotional interactions with their children. Most participants reported that they felt more connected to their children and more confident in dealing with challenges by learning how to read their children's emotional signals.

Social support also improved significantly in this study. Mothers in the intervention group had a significant improvement in their scores on the social support scale, indicating that participating in peer support groups and emotional support workshops helped alleviate mothers' social isolation. Many mothers said that by participating in group discussions, they found a sense of belonging, reduced loneliness, and received valuable parenting advice and emotional support. Mothers strengthened their trust and relationships with each other by sharing experiences and supporting each other. In addition, the study found that social support not only improved mothers' mental health, but also increased their confidence and coping ability in caregiving.

Financial assistance and employment guidance interventions also showed significant effects in alleviating the financial pressure of caregivers. The financial pressure of mothers in the intervention group decreased significantly, and their ability and opportunities in employment were improved. In particular, in terms of employment guidance and vocational skills training, mothers in the intervention group had more opportunities to find part-time jobs or increase their working hours. Participants reported that they were able to better balance work and care responsibilities through employment guidance and flexible work schedules. Many mothers said that financial assistance and job training helped them reduce their long-term financial burden, allowing them to focus more on their own well-being and family stability.

The significant reduction in caregiving stress among mothers in the intervention group, especially in coping with the emotional challenges of caregiving tasks, reflects the comprehensive effect of the intervention measures in this study. Through the interaction of emotional support workshops and peer support groups, mothers learned effective emotion regulation skills and coping strategies, thereby reducing caregiving stress. The results of the study showed that caregivers can better manage parenting stress and improve the quality of care by learning and applying coping strategies [9]. Mothers generally reported that through training in emotional understanding and coping strategies, they became more calm when facing their children's behavioral problems, and were able to effectively reduce emotional fluctuations and caregiving stress.

Although this study provides strong evidence that community intervention has a significant positive impact on the emotional, social and economic support of mothers of children with autism, there are still some limitations. First, the sample size of this study was small and limited to a specific area. Future studies can expand the sample size and consider a wider geographical range to improve the generalizability of the research results. Secondly, this study did not evaluate the long-term effects. Although the short-term intervention results were significant, it is unclear whether these effects can be sustained. Therefore, future research should focus on evaluating the long-term effects of the intervention to verify its sustained impact on maternal well-being. In addition, this study mainly relied on self-report data, which may be subject to subjective bias of participants. Although a variety of data collection methods were used, including quantitative measurements and qualitative interviews, reliance on mothers' own evaluations may lead to certain biases. Therefore, future studies can combine more objective data and third-party evaluations to further verify the intervention effect.

Overall, the results of this study show that comprehensive community intervention measures have a significant positive impact on the emotional, economic and social support of mothers of children with autism. By providing emotional support, peer support, financial assistance and employment training, the intervention can effectively reduce the care pressure of mothers and improve their mental health and quality of life. Therefore, society and the government should pay more attention to the multi-dimensional support for mothers with autism, promote the implementation of relevant policies, and promote the comprehensive inclusion of society.

6. Conclusion

This study highlights the significant positive effects of community-based interventions designed to provide emotional, economic, and social support to mothers of children with ASD. The results demonstrate that comprehensive support, including emotional understanding workshops, peer support groups, and economic assistance, can substantially improve the well-being of these mothers. Specifically, the intervention led to significant reductions in depression, anxiety, and caregiving stress, while increasing social support and economic stability. The findings underscore the importance of addressing the multifaceted challenges faced by mothers of children with ASD. Emotional support interventions and peer networks are critical for alleviating social isolation and enhancing coping strategies. Furthermore, the provision of economic aid and employment guidance plays a crucial role in reducing financial stress and improving mothers' ability to balance caregiving with employment. While the results are promising, future research should examine the long-term effects of such interventions and explore how they can be tailored to different cultural contexts. Policymakers should consider implementing more comprehensive support programs for autism caregivers, with an emphasis on creating inclusive and sustainable community resources. Overall, this study contributes to a growing body of evidence supporting the need for integrated, community-based approaches to improve the quality of life for caregivers of children with ASD.

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