



Through the Eyes of Fatherhood: Exploring the Lived Experiences of Fathers Raising Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder in Laguna

Moses G Andrada ^{1*} and Lourdes Jusay ²

^{1,2} University of Perpetual Help System Laguna, Philippines

* Corresponding Author: **Moses G Andrada**

Article Info

ISSN (online): 2582-7138

Volume: 06

Issue: 03

May-June 2025

Received: 09-03-2025

Accepted: 10-04-2025

Page No: 44-53

Abstract

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a neurodevelopmental disorder characterized by social communication difficulties and the presence of repetitive behaviors. Although there have been international studies exploring how ASD impacts the family, few have explored the paternal caregiving experience in the context of the Philippine environment. Caregiving has been a traditionally female practice, so much so that little is known about what fathers go through in taking care of ASD-diagnosed children. This research uses a phenomenological method to explore the lived experiences of fathers in Laguna, Philippines, to gain an in-depth understanding of their challenges, coping mechanisms, and construction of parental identities. Using qualitative methods, the research explores financial stress, emotional distress, and social expectations that define their caregiving roles. Through this, the research reveals the resilience and adaptive processes of fathers, and valuable insights can be gained to inform inclusive caregiving policies and support systems. The findings seek to add to the existing body of literature on fatherhood and ASD, and the importance of certain interventions recognizing and empowering fathers as active agents in their children's development.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.54660/IJMRGE.2025.6.3.44-53>

Keywords: autism spectrum disorder, phenomenology, special education, parents, Philippines

1. Introduction

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a neurodevelopmental disorder characterized by persistent impairments in social communication and interaction, and restricted and repetitive patterns of behavior (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). The global prevalence of ASD has increased significantly in recent years, with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimating that approximately 1 in 54 children in the United States has the disorder (Maenner *et al.*, 2020). Likewise, studies in mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan have a combined prevalence rate of 11.8 per 10,000 children (Sun *et al.*, 2019). Yet in the Philippines, large-scale national prevalence studies are the exception. In 2012, the Department of Health (DOH) estimated that at least 500,000 Filipino children had ASD, and the number has likely increased due to increased awareness, shifting diagnostic criteria, and increased access to early detection services (Quilendrina, 2022). Yet, few studies have been done on the experience of caregivers, especially fathers.

Fatherhood is an evolving and adaptive role that extends beyond economic provisioning. It includes emotional involvement, active care, and socialization responsibilities that influence a child's development (Lamb, 2010). Historically in most cultures, including the Philippines, gender roles construct fathers as providers and not as direct caregivers, and this can affect their level of participation in childcare (Roxas *et al.*, 2022). Modern literature, however, highlights the major role fathers can play in the cognitive, emotional, and social development of children (Sarkadi *et al.*, 2008). Though there is an extensive and burgeoning literature on parenting, much of the research already conducted on caregiving for ASD has largely targeted mothers, and therefore, the experiences of fathers have been disregarded (Chisa *et al.*, 2024) ^[7].

Fathers of children with ASD are also faced with special challenges compared to fathers of neurotypical children. Fathers in patriarchal cultures such as the Philippines might also struggle to balance traditional masculinity expectations with the practical and emotional work of ASD care, potentially causing role conflict and additional stress (Roxas *et al.*, 2022). Disabled children such as children with ASD also need special care in different areas of their lives, such as education, socialization, and health care (World Health Organization, 2011). Raising a child with a disability is emotionally and financially stressful, sometimes necessitating special intervention and long-term care planning (Pelchat *et al.*, 2003). Having a disability in the household may also change parental roles, activities, and interactions within the household (Hastings & Taunt, 2002). Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) experience numerous challenges related to communication, social interaction, and sensory integration, which demands the application of individualized caregiving strategies (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). The children's unique needs put extra burdens on parents, particularly in obtaining appropriate education and therapy (Zwaigenbaum *et al.*, 2015). Parent involvement and intervention at an early stage are key to optimizing the development of ASD children (Dawson *et al.*, 2010). Consequently, fathers of ASF children experience higher levels of stress, anxiety, and emotional distress in comparison to fathers of children without ASD (Hastings *et al.*, 2005). Socially, these fathers are likely to face stigma and a lack of support from extended family and community services, which makes them feel isolated (Gray, 2002). Practically, these fathers have to deal with the complexities of accessing appropriate healthcare, therapy, and education for the children while juggling work pressures and domestic commitments (Dabrowska & Pisula, 2010). In coping with these challenges, fathers employ various coping styles. Some employ problem-focused coping styles, such as seeking information and professional help, while others employ emotion-focused coping styles, such as religious beliefs, social support, and acceptance (Pottie & Ingram, 2008). Attending support groups, maintaining open communication with their partners, and developing strong parenting styles have also been found to increase the well-being and resilience of fathers (Hartley *et al.*, 2012). Irrespective of these coping styles, research on Filipino fathers who are raising children with ASD is still limited, underscoring an essential gap in knowing how they experience life. This study seeks to address a number of gaps in the literature, especially in the Philippine setting. Firstly, there is little research on Filipino fathers' involvement in ASD caregiving, given that most of the literature was centered on mothers. Secondly, research on ASD parenting in the Philippines lacks a gendered approach, which does not acknowledge the distinctive experiences, challenges, and coping strategies of fathers. Thirdly, there is a need for localized understanding of how cultural expectations, socioeconomic factors, and support systems influence the lives of fathers caring for children with ASD in the Philippines. Addressing these gaps, this study will contribute significant knowledge that can be used to inform culturally appropriate interventions, support services, and policies to enhance the well-being of Filipino fathers and children with ASD.

Understanding the experiences of fathers raising children with ASD is essential for developing targeted support

programs that address their unique challenges. By examining the interplay of traditional gender roles, emotional well-being, and coping mechanisms, this study aims to contribute to a broader discourse on fatherhood in the context of ASD. Furthermore, insights from this research can inform policies and interventions that promote inclusive and supportive parenting environments for families affected by ASD.

2. Methods

Given the research problem, this study explored the lived experiences of fathers who raised children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in Laguna, focusing on the difficulties, struggles, and challenges they encountered. To gain a deeper understanding of their experiences, this research employed a qualitative descriptive design with a phenomenological approach.

Phenomenological research aimed to uncover the shared experiences of individuals facing a particular phenomenon, allowing for a deeper exploration of their emotions, perceptions, and realities. The goal was to move beyond isolated accounts and identify the underlying essence of fatherhood within the context of raising children with Autism Spectrum Disorder. As Creswell (2018) emphasized, this approach focused on returning to firsthand experiences and capturing the complexities of lived realities.

In addition to understanding the challenges they faced, this study also examined how these fathers coped with the demands of raising a child with Autism Spectrum Disorder. It explored the ways they navigated their caregiving responsibilities, managed stress, and adapted to their circumstances. By analyzing their experiences, the study provided a comprehensive perspective on the realities of fatherhood within this context.

To ensure a diverse yet relevant sample, ten (10) fathers were selected based on specific criteria, including residence in Laguna, having a child with a confirmed ASD diagnosis, and active involvement in caregiving. Participants came from various employment backgrounds, encompassing both full-time workers and stay-at-home caregivers, to capture a wide range of caregiving experiences. According to Creswell (2018), selecting participants based on clear criteria allows researchers to engage with individuals whose experiences are most relevant to the study, ensuring the collection of rich and meaningful data. This approach provides a well-rounded perspective on the caregiving dynamics within the local context.

The researcher conducted interviews using a semi-structured interview protocol, administered through both Facebook messenger and hardcopy. The interview protocol was a predesigned form containing open-ended research questions, following the guidelines of *Morse and Field (1995)* ^[18] as reintroduced by *Woodgate (2018)* ^[25]. However, the interview questions were self-developed and not standardized. To ensure validity, the researcher sought feedback from experts in qualitative research, who provided comments and recommendations for refinement. The researcher-designed interview protocol was initially presented to the adviser for validation and subsequently submitted to research validators for finalization.

The researcher conducted in-depth interviews with ten fathers from various backgrounds in Laguna who had raised children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Before the interviews, the researcher sought permission and informed the participants about the study through phone calls and

messaging apps. Establishing rapport and ensuring participant availability were prioritized to facilitate meaningful data collection, as emphasized by Creswell (2018).

A semi-structured interview guide served as the primary data collection instrument, designed to balance structure and flexibility. This format allowed participants to provide detailed responses while enabling the researcher to ask follow-up questions for deeper insights into their experiences. After validation, the interview guide was submitted to participants via email and hardcopy, containing open-ended questions with follow-up communication to ensure clarity and completeness. Some questions were also sent through chat for convenience and accessibility.

The interviews were conducted face-to-face in a mutually agreed-upon location that ensured comfort and privacy for the participants. To maintain accuracy and reliability in data collection, each session was audio-recorded with the participants' consent. The recordings were later transcribed for thematic analysis, ensuring that all relevant insights and nuances were preserved.

Ethical standards were carefully maintained throughout this study to ensure the protection and rights of all participants. One of the most important ethical considerations in any research was obtaining informed consent (Scott *et al.*, 2018). In this study, participants were given a detailed explanation of the research's purpose and objectives before signing an informed consent form. They were also made aware of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequences.

Another key ethical responsibility in qualitative research was safeguarding participants' privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality. To ensure this, all interview data were transcribed and coded so that participants remained anonymous. The collected data were securely stored for a reasonable period and later discarded to prevent unauthorized access or misuse (Creswell, 2018). In addition, pseudonyms or aliases were used in any publication of the research findings. This study also strictly adhered to Republic Act No. 10173, also known as the Data Privacy Act of 2012, to comply with legal and ethical data protection standards.

To facilitate analysis, the researcher transcribed all interviews and field notes using Microsoft Word. The transcripts were then carefully reviewed multiple times to identify meaningful statements and gain a deeper understanding of the participants' experiences. To extract key themes, van Manen's (1990) ^[24] selective highlighting approach was applied. This method involved identifying and emphasizing sentences or clusters of sentences that captured the essence of the lived experiences described by the participants. Notes were taken to document significant thematic statements, and all textual data were systematically refined until the core themes emerged.

Each identified theme was then categorized into textural and structural themes, which were analyzed based on the direct responses of the participants. The discussions of these themes were further synthesized to develop textural and structural descriptions. From these descriptions, the study derived the overall essence of the fathers' experiences, representing a comprehensive summary of their lived realities.

The final phase of the qualitative data analysis involved verification. To ensure accuracy and validity, the researcher presented the synthesized findings to the participants, allowing them to review the interpretations of their responses.

Any corrections or additional insights provided by the participants were incorporated into the final findings of the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

3. Results and Discussions

This part presents the structured elements of bracketing, horizontalization, textural and structural descriptions, overall essence, and the verification of the lived experiences of the fathers who are raising children with autism spectrum disorder. As discussed in the methods section, the treatment, analysis, and interpretation of data follow a structured pattern to ensure consistency and rigor. At the outset, the bracketing element of this study requires the researcher to acknowledge personal experiences and perspectives that may influence data interpretation. It is essential to set aside any preconceived notions to allow the authentic voices of the participants to emerge.

With over 11 years of experience as a behavior therapist for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), I have worked closely with parents, particularly fathers from diverse backgrounds, who are actively involved in raising their child with ASD. This professional journey has given me firsthand insight into the challenges, struggles, and resilience that fathers exhibit in navigating their parenting roles. Through numerous interactions, I have observed how fathers balance emotional, financial, and societal expectations while ensuring their child's well-being. These experiences have deepened my curiosity about their lived realities—how they cope with the demands of fatherhood, the obstacles they face, and the strategies they employ in response to these challenges.

Recognizing the significance of my experiences, it is imperative to engage in bracketing to ensure that the themes emerging from the study are grounded in the actual narratives of the participants rather than influenced by my prior knowledge. By setting aside biases and assumptions, the goal of this research remains clear—to gain an in-depth understanding of the lived experiences of fathers raising children with ASD, capturing the authentic realities of their journey within a broader social and cultural context.

In analyzing the lived experiences of fathers raising children with ASD, the process of horizontalization was employed. This qualitative approach involves treating each statement from participants with equal value, allowing patterns and significant insights to emerge organically. Through this method, statements were carefully examined, categorized, and grouped into meaningful clusters, ultimately forming themes that encapsulate shared experiences.

The participants in this study included ten (10) fathers from diverse backgrounds who are actively involved in raising their children with ASD. Some participants had access to extensive resources and support systems, while others faced significant financial and social challenges. Despite these differences, they shared common struggles and aspirations. After identifying key statements from their ideas, the researcher conducted theme clustering in alignment with the research problem, which aims to explore the lived experiences of fathers raising children with ASD. A total of thirty (30) significant statements were analyzed and categorized into nine (9) theme clusters. These clusters were then organized into two overarching theme groups, each directly addressing the study's two core questions.

1. As to what challenges do fathers raising children with autism spectrum disorder experience.

Theme 1: Emotional and psychological challenges

The emotional and psychological challenges fathers face when raising children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) creates a multifaceted emotional journey marked by worry, frustration, and resilience. Fathers have experienced shock, denial, or confusion upon receiving the diagnosis, which is often followed by persistent anxiety and emotional exhaustion. As they navigate their roles, many fathers struggle with deep fears about their child's future and internalize feelings of helplessness, isolation, and inadequacy. These emotions are frequently suppressed as they try to maintain a strong and supportive presence within the family. Despite these internal struggles, fathers remain dedicated to their caregiving roles, driven by love and the desire to protect and support their children. This resilience underscores the need for mental health support for fathers, recognizing it as an essential component of autism-related interventions.

1. *F1: "At first, it was really difficult to accept the diagnosis. I felt lost, questioning if I had done something wrong. But over time, I learned to be strong for my child."* (Noong una, sobrang hirap tanggapin ng diagnosis sa kanya. Pakiramdam ko parang nawala ako sa sarili, tinatanong ko kung saan ba ako nagka-mali. Pero habang natagal, natutunan ko na lang maging matatag para sa anak ko.)
2. *F2: "There are days when I feel completely drained. But whenever I see my child smile, I realize that every sacrifice is worth it."* (May mga araw na sobrang pagod na ako. Pero kapag nakikita ko na ngumingiti yung anak ko, nare-realize ko na lahat ng sakripisyo, sulit.)
3. *F3: "I worry a lot about my child's future. Will he be able to live independently? What will happen when I'm no longer around? These thoughts keep me up at night."* (Lagi ako nag-aalala sa future ng anak ko. Makakapag-isa ba siya? Ano mangyayari pag wala na ako? Laging ganyan ang mga isipin ko hanggang magdamag.)
4. *F4: "Sometimes, I feel like I'm carrying the weight of the world on my shoulders. The emotional strain can be overwhelming, but I try not to show it."* (Minsan pakiramdam ko ako na na yung may dalang bigat ng buong mundo. Sobrang hirap ng emotional strain, pero sinisikap kong hindi ipakita.)
5. *F5: "It's hard to talk about it with others. No one really understands the pressure we're under. It's like a silent struggle that I go through every day."* (Mahirap pag-usapan sa iba. Walang nakakaintindi ng pressure na nararamdaman namin. Parang isang tahimik na laban na araw-araw kong dinaranas.)
6. *F7: "There are moments when I just break down. Not because I'm weak, but because I love my child so much, and I wish I could make life easier for him."* (May mga sandali na bigla na lang akong bumibigay. Hindi dahil mahina ako, kundi dahil mahal na mahal ko ang anak ko, at sana mapadali ko ang buhay niya.)
7. *F7: "Seeing other kids hit their milestones so easily makes me feel a bit of sadness. But then I remind myself—my child has his own timeline, and that's okay."* (Kapag nakikita ko yung ibang bata na ang bilis nilang natututo, may kirot sa puso ko. Pero pinaaalala ko sa sarili ko—may sarili kaming timeline, at ayos lang 'yon.)

8. *F8: "People always ask how my child is doing, but rarely how I'm holding up. Sometimes, I just want someone to acknowledge that this is tough for me too."* (Laging tinatanong ng tao kung kumusta ang anak ko, pero bihira akong tanungin kung kumusta ako. Minsan gusto ko lang maramdaman na may nakakaintindi na mahirap din ito para sa akin.)
9. *F9: "I learned to appreciate the little victories—like hearing my child say a new word or making eye contact for a second longer. Those moments mean everything to me."* (Natuto akong pahalagahan yung maliliit na tagumpay—kapag may bagong salitang nasabi ang anak ko o kaya kung kaya niya na ba tumingin sa akin nang mas matagal. Yong mga moments na yon, sobrang halaga para sa akin.)
10. *F10: "No matter how exhausted I am, I always remind myself—my child didn't choose this, and he needs me. That thought keeps me going."* (Kahit gaano ako kapagod, lagi kong sinasabi sa sarili ko—hindi pinili ng anak ko 'to, at kailangan niya ako. 'Yon ang nagpapalakas sa akin.)

Theme 2: Social stigma and misconceptions.

Fatherhood becomes even more complicated when it's intertwined with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), as societal stigma and misconceptions add layers of stress. Many fathers feel misunderstood or judged by others who don't fully understand autism or misinterpret their children's behavior. Often, people assume these behaviors are a result of poor parenting, rather than recognizing the neurological differences that come with autism. This not only increases the emotional burden but also creates a sense of isolation and alienation. To cope with these challenges, many fathers take on the role of advocates. They push to educate family, friends, and the community about ASD—not just to protect their children, but to spread awareness and fight against the misunderstanding that often surrounds it. While this advocacy can be emotionally exhausting, it also offers a way for fathers to address misinformation and work toward greater acceptance and inclusion for their children.

1. *F1: "People often look at my child strangely when he has meltdown in public. They don't understand that it's not misbehavior—it's his way of coping."* (Madalas tinitingnan ng mga tao ng weird ang anak ko kapag may meltdown siya sa public. Hindi nila alam na hindi 'yun misbehavior—yun lang ang way niya ng pag-coping.)
2. *F2: "Some relatives still think my child will 'outgrow' autism. They don't understand that it's a lifelong condition, and we need their support, not their judgment."* (May mga kamag-anak pa rin na iniisip na "lalampasan" lang ng anak ko ang autism. Hindi nila naiintindihan na panghabang-buhay na 'to, at kailangan namin ng support nila, hindi ang paghuhusga.)
3. *F3: "It hurts when people assume that my child is not smart just because he doesn't talk much. He has his own way of expressing himself, and I wish people would take the time to understand."* (Masakit kapag iniisip ng mga tao na hindi matalino ang anak ko kasi hindi siya masyadong nagsasalita. May sarili siyang paraan ng pagpapakita ng nararamdaman, sana lang maglaan ng oras ang iba na maintindihan siya.)
4. *F4: "It's frustrating when people stare or make comments. They don't realize how hard we're working"*

for my child's improvement. They would just resort to judging us rather than understand" (Nakakainis na tinititigan kami ng mga tao or kapag nagbibigay ng komento. Wala silang idea kung gaano kami naghihirap para umayos lang anak ko, tapos huhusgahan pa kame di na lang kame intindihin.)

5. F5: "I've had people suggest that my child's behavior is a result of our bad parenting. It's so frustrating because they have no idea what autism truly is." (May mga tao na nagsasuggest na baka yung ugali ng anak ko eh dahil may mali sa paraan ng pagpapalaki namin ni misis. Nakakainis lang, eh kasi wala silang alam kung ano talaga ang autism.)
6. F6: "Sometimes, even family members don't believe me when I explain my child's condition. They think I'm just making excuses for his behavior." (Minsan, kahit mismong pamilya ko, hindi naniniwala kapag ipinapaliwanag ko ang kondisyon ng anak ko. Iniisip nila na palusot lang ang sinasabi ko sa behavior niya.)
7. F7: "I've heard people say that autism is just an 'excuse' for bad behavior. It's heartbreaking because they don't see the daily struggles my child faces." (May mga nagsasabi na ang autism daw ay palusot lang sa pagiging pasaway. Ang sakit pakinggan, kasi hindi nila nakikita ang araw-araw na hirap na pinagdadaan ng anak ko.)
8. F8: "It's painful when other kids avoid my son because they don't understand him. I just wish parents would teach their children about acceptance and kindness." (Ang sakit sa pakiramdam kapag iniwasan ng ibang bata ang anak ko dahil hindi nila siya maintindihan. Sana lang tinuturuan ng ibang magulang ang mga anak nila tungkol sa pagtanggap at kabutihan.)
9. F9: "There are people who assume my child is 'rude' because he doesn't respond the way they expect. I wish they knew how hard he tries to connect in his own way." (May mga taong akalaing 'bastos' ang anak ko kasi hindi siya sumasagot sa inaasahan nilang paraan. Sana alam nila kung gaano siya nagsusumikap na makipag-ugnayan sa sarili niyang paraan.)
10. F10: "I used to feel ashamed when people stared at us in public. Now, I've learned to ignore them and focus on what truly matters—my child's happiness and well-being." (Dati nahihiya ako kapag tinitingnan kami ng mga tao sa labas. Pero natutunan kong balewalain na lang yon at mag-focus sa mas mahalaga—ang kasiyahan at kapakanan ng anak ko.)

Theme 3: Financial burden and accessibility of resources.

The financial strain of raising a child with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is one of the heaviest burdens fathers often carry. The costs of therapy, medical care, specialized education, and developmental interventions can quickly add up, leaving families stretched thin. Many fathers find themselves making significant personal and professional sacrifices to afford the necessary treatments, often cutting back in other areas of family life to make ends meet. For those living in rural or underserved areas, this burden is even heavier. Access to autism-related services is limited, and when they are available, they can be far away, requiring long travel times. This not only creates logistical challenges but also intensifies emotional stress, as fathers worry about their ability to provide the best care and support for their children. The constant juggling of financial pressures and the desire to do what's best for their children can leave fathers feeling

overwhelmed and uncertain.

1. F1: The cost of therapies is overwhelming. I sometimes wonder if I can keep up with the expenses, but I know it's necessary for my child's development. (Sobrang laki ng gastos sa therapy. Minsan naiisip ko kung kaya ko bang sabayan ang mga gastusin, pero alam ko na kailangan 'yun para sa pag-unlad ng anak ko.)
2. F2: It's frustrating that our salaries combined don't cover all the services my child needs. It feels like we have to fight for every little bit of support. (Nakakainis na yung pinagsama na sahod namin hindi pa sapat para matustusan lahat ng kailangan ng anak ko. Parang kailangang makipaglaban pa kami para sa bawat maliit na suporta.)
3. F3: I wish there were more accessible resources for families like ours, especially in rural areas where support services are scarce. (Sana may mas maraming accessible na resources para sa mga pamilya katulad namin, lalo na sa mga probinsya na kulang ang mga serbisyo.)
4. F4: The financial strain has definitely taken a toll on our family. We have to cut back on so many things just to make sure our child gets the care he needs. (Talaga namang naging mabigat ang financial strain sa pamilya namin. Kailangan namin magtipid sa marami para matiyak na makakakuha ang anak ko ng tamang pangangalaga.)
5. F5: I feel guilty sometimes that I can't provide everything my child needs, but there's just not enough money to go around. (Minsan nakakaramdam ako ng guilt na hindi ko kayang ibigay lahat ng kailangan ng anak ko, pero wala talagang sapat na pera.)
6. F6: Sometimes, I wonder if I can keep going. The therapy expenses are draining all our savings. But I know it's for my child, so I have to push through. (Minsan, iniisip ko kung kaya ko pa bang ituloy. Yung mga gastos sa therapy, parang nauubos na ang lahat ng savings namin. Pero para kase, para to sa anak ko, kaya kailangan ko magpatuloy.)
7. F7: Sometimes, I wonder if I'm doing enough. The financial strain weighs on me, and I question if I'm providing the best for my child, even though I'm doing everything I can. (Minsan naiisip ko kung sapat ba ang ginagawa ko? Ang bigat ng pinansyal na pasanin, tapos naiisip ko kung nabibigay ko ba ang pinakamabuti para sa anak ko kahit na ginagawa ko ang lahat.)
8. F8: It's really hard not being able to afford all the therapies and resources my child needs. The waitlists are long, and sometimes, we have to settle for whatever is available. (Sobrang hirap na hindi namin kayang makuha lahat ng therapy at resources na kailangan ng anak ko. Matagal pa ang pila, tapos minsan, ang natitira na lang ay 'yung mga available na lang.)
9. F9: It's so frustrating when there are no support services in the province. It feels like no one understands what we're going through, and I'm always looking for resources that don't even exist. (Sobrang frustrating yung wala kang mahanap na support services sa probinsya. Parang walang nakakaintindi sa mga pinagdadaan namin, at lagi na lang akong naghahanap ng resources na wala.)
10. F10: We've had to sacrifice a lot just to make sure our child gets the right care. Sometimes, it hurts, but nothing is more important to me than his well-being. (Marami

kaming kailangan isakripisyo para lang matustusan ang pangangalaga ng anak ko. Minsan masakit, pero walang tanging mas mahalaga sa akin kundi ang kapakanan niya.)

1. As to how do these fathers cope with the challenges of raising their children with autism spectrum disorder?

Theme 4: Time and energy management.

Managing time and energy becomes a delicate balancing act for fathers raising children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Between work, therapy sessions, medical appointments, and caregiving duties, many fathers find themselves physically and emotionally drained. Personal time becomes a rare commodity, often disappearing entirely as there's little room for self-care, rest, or even socializing. This constant juggling of multiple roles can quickly lead to burnout, as fathers strive to meet the needs of their child while also trying to fulfill their work and family obligations. Despite the exhaustion, fathers continue to put their caregiving responsibilities first, showing remarkable resilience in the face of constant, overwhelming demands. It's a relentless cycle, but their commitment to their children pushes them forward.

1. **F1:** *I've missed out on so many things because I've been so focused on my child's needs. I've had to put my own life on hold in some ways.* (Marami na akong na-miss na bagay kasi sobrang nakatutok ako sa mga pangangailangan ng anak ko. Kailangan ko ipagpaliban ang ibang aspeto ng buhay ko.)
2. **F2:** *It's hard to find time for myself. Every day feels like a whirlwind of appointments, therapies, and caring for my child. I have to learn to manage my time better.* (Mahirap maglaan ng oras para sa sarili ko. Parang araw-araw isang bagyo ng appointments, therapy, at pag-aalaga sa anak ko. Kailangan ko matutunan kung paano pagkasyahin oras ko.)
3. **F3:** *There are moments when I feel like I'm losing touch with everything else—friends, hobbies, even myself. But I just push through because my child needs me.* (Minsan pakiramdam ko nawawala ako sa lahat ng ibang aspeto—kaibigan, libangan, pati na sarili ko. Pero pinipilit ko lang dahil kailangan ako ng anak ko.)
4. **F4:** *I try to take care of myself, but it's hard when there's always something demanding my attention. I have to keep reminding myself that self-care is important, too.* (Sinusubukan kong alagaan ang sarili ko, pero mahirap kasi palaging may kinakailangan ng atensyon ko. Kailangan ko lang palaging ipaalala sa sarili ko na mahalaga rin ang self-care.)
5. **F5:** *There are times when I wish I could rest even for just one full day. But responsibilities don't stop, so I keep going despite the exhaustion.* (Minsan gusto ko na lang magpahinga kahit isang buong araw. Pero hindi tumitigil ang responsibilidad, kaya kahit pagod na, tuloy pa rin.)
6. **F6:** *The constant juggling between work and therapy appointments leaves me with very little time for anything else. It's a constant struggle, but I just keep going.* (Yung patuloy na pag-juggle ng trabaho at therapy appointments ay nag-iiwan sa akin ng konting oras para sa iba. Patuloy na laban, pero nagpapatuloy lang ako.)
7. **F7:** *Sometimes I feel like I'm running on empty. It's difficult to balance work, home life, and caring for my child. But I try to make sure my child's needs come first.*

(Minsan pakiramdam ko wala na akong energy. Mahirap mag-balance ng trabaho, buhay pamilya, at pag-aalaga sa anak ko. Pero sinisigurado ko na ang pangangailangan ng anak ko ang nauuna.)

8. **F8:** *My energy is completely drained by the end of the day. The physical and emotional exhaustion can be overwhelming, but I keep pushing through.* (Totally drained na ang energy ko sa pagtatapos ng araw. Yung physical at emotional na pagod, sobrang nakakabigat, pero pilit ko pa ring pinapalakas ang sarili ko.)
9. **F9:** *The pressure of managing everything can be exhausting. My wife and I try to share the load, but it's still a lot to handle.* (Nakakapagod yung pressure ng pamamahala ng lahat. Nagpapakaya kami ng asawa ko na magtulungan, pero talagang marami pa rin.)
10. **F10:** *It's hard to find balance. By the time I'm done with work, managing the farm, and all the therapy sessions, I barely have time to rest. But I remind myself it's all for my child.* (Mahirap maghanap ng balanse. Pagkatapos ng trabaho, pag-aasikaso sa bukid, at mga therapy sessions, halos wala na akong oras para magpahinga. Pero pinapaalala ko na lahat ito para sa anak ko.)

Theme 5: Personal growth and reflection.

Raising a child with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) often sparks significant personal growth and self-reflection in fathers. The challenges they face force them to reassess their values, priorities, and beliefs, leading to a deeper understanding of themselves. As they navigate the complexities of parenting a child with autism, many fathers find themselves developing a greater sense of patience, empathy, and resilience. This shift in perspective often means moving away from rigid expectations and embracing a more flexible, understanding approach to both parenting and life in general. Along the way, fathers learn to appreciate the unique developmental journey of their child, finding joy in the small milestones and meaningful connections that redefine success in their caregiving roles. Through this process, they not only grow as parents but as individuals.

1. **F1:** *Raising my child has taught me a lot about patience. I've learned to take things one day at a time and appreciate the small victories.* (Ang pagpapalaki sa anak ko ay nagturo sa akin ng pasensya. Natutunan kong tanggapin ang mga bagay araw-araw at pahalagahan ang maliit na tagumpay.)
2. **F2:** *I've become more understanding and compassionate. I've learned that my child may not show love in the way I expected, but he shows it in his own way.* (Naging mas maunawain at mahabagin ako. Natutunan kong hindi ipinapakita ng anak ko ang pagmamahal sa paraang inaasahan ko, pero may sarili siyang paraan.)
3. **F3:** *This journey has made me reflect on what's truly important in life. It's not about material success; it's about loving my son, patience, understanding and our family.* (Tong Journey na ito ay nagpasigla sa akin para mag-isip kung ano talaga ang mahalaga sa buhay. Hindi lang kase ito tungkol sa materyal na tagumpay eh, kundi ang pagmamahal sa anak ko, pagpapasensya at pagintindi, at pamilya namen.)
4. **F4:** *I've had to let go of a lot of my expectations for what I thought fatherhood would be like. It's been a huge shift, but I'm learning to accept and embrace it.* (Kailangan ko nang bitawan ang mga inaasahan ko sa kung ano ang

- inaasahan sa isang ama. Malaking pagbabago ito, pero natutunan ko nang tanggapin at yakapin.)
5. **F5:** *At first, I felt like I was failing as a father. But now I realize that being present, loving, and patient is all I can do. That's what matters most.* (Noong una, pakiramdam ko ay failure ako bilang ama. Pero ngayon, nare-realize ko na ang pagiging naroroon, mapagmahal, at matiyaga ang kaya ko lang gawin. Ito ang pinakamahalaga.)
 6. **F6:** *I never thought I had this much strength in me. But my child has shown me that love can push you to be stronger than you ever imagined.* (Hindi ko akalaging may ganito akong kalakasan. Pero ipinakita sa akin ng anak ko na ang pagmamahal ay kayang palakasin ka nang higit pa sa inaakala mo.)
 7. **F7:** *Before, I used to be impatient about everything. Now, I've learned to slow down, to see the world through my child's eyes, and to celebrate even the smallest progress.* (Dati, mabilis akong mainip sa lahat ng bagay. Pero ngayon, natutunan kong bumagal, tingnan ang mundo sa mata ng anak ko, at ipagdiwang ang bawat maliit na progreso.)
 8. **F8:** *Being a father to a child with autism has made me more resilient. I've faced challenges I never thought I could handle, but here I am, still standing.* (Ang pagiging ama sa isang batang may autism ay nagpapatibay sa akin. Maraming hamon akong hinarap na hindi ko inakalang kaya ko, pero nandito pa rin ako, lumalaban.)
 9. **F9:** *I've realized that strength isn't about hiding emotions. Sometimes, being strong means allowing myself to feel, to cry, and to keep moving forward.* (Narealize ko na ang pagiging matatag ay hindi yung itinatago mo ang emosyon. Minsan, ang pagiging malakas ay ang pagpapahintulot sa sarili na makaramdam, umiyak, at magpatuloy.)
 10. **F10:** *My child has made me a better person. I've learned to be more patient, more present, and to love in ways I never thought possible.* (Ginawa akong mas mabuting tao ng anak ko. Natutunan kong maging mas matiyaga, mas naroroon, at magmahal sa paraang hindi ko inakalang posible.)
- Theme 6: Hope and optimism for the future.**
- Although the journey was tough, many fathers held onto a deep sense of hope and optimism for their child's future. Despite the many obstacles they faced, fathers tended to focus more on their child's potential than on their limitations, believing that with time, therapy, and unconditional love, their child would grow and thrive. This unwavering hope became a powerful motivator, driving fathers to push through adversity and maintain resilience in their caregiving roles. Their belief in their child's ability to overcome challenges strengthened their commitment to offering continuous support and advocacy, no matter how difficult the road ahead seemed. This hope fueled their determination and kept them focused on the positive possibilities for their child's future.
1. **F1:** *"I know the road ahead is tough, but I believe my child will make progress. Every small achievement gives me hope for the future."* (Alam ko mahirap yung daan na nilalakaran namin, pero naniniwala akong magtatagumpay ang anak ko. Bawat maliit na achievement, nagbibigay sa akin ng pag-asa para sa future ng anak ko.)
 2. **F2:** *"I am optimistic that my child will have a good life,*
- even if it's different from what I originally envisioned. We will keep working hard for his future."* (May pag-asa ako na magkakaroon ng magandang buhay ang anak ko, kahit na iba ito sa mga plano ko noon. Patuloy kaming magsusumikap para sa hinaharap niya.)
3. **F3:** *"No matter the challenges, I believe my child can live a fulfilling life. We have to keep believing in his potential."* (Kahit anong pagsubok, naniniwala akong makakamit ng anak ko ang masayang buhay. Kailangan naming magpatuloy na maniwala sa kanyang potensyal.)
 4. **F4:** *"Some days are harder than others, but I stay hopeful. I believe that with time, things will get better, and my child will learn to thrive."* (May mga araw na mas mahirap, pero umaasa pa rin ako. Naniniwala akong sa paglipas ng panahon, gagaan din ang lahat, at matututo ang anak ko magtagumpay.)
 5. **F5:** *"I have faith that my child will find his way, no matter how long it takes. There are setbacks, but I always remind myself that progress is still progress."* (May pananampalataya akong matutuklasan ng anak ko ang daan niya, gaano man katagal. May mga setback, pero laging pinapaalala ko sa sarili ko na ang progress ay progress pa rin.)
 6. **F6:** *I see how hard my child tries every day, and that's what keeps me going. He may have his struggles, but he also has his strengths, and I choose to focus on those.* (Nakikita ko kung gaano nagsisikap ang anak ko araw-araw, at yun ang nagpapatuloy sa akin. May mga hamon siya, pero may lakas din siya, at pinipili kong doon tumutok.)
 7. **F7:** *I remind myself that my child's journey is not a race. He will develop at his own pace, and I will be here to support him every step of the way.* (Pinapaalala ko sa sarili ko na hindi ito isang karera. Magde-develop ang anak ko sa sarili niyang bilis, at nandito ako para suportahan siya sa bawat hakbang.)
 8. **F8:** *There are days when I worry too much about the future, but then I see how far my child has come. That reminds me to trust the process and celebrate the small wins.* (May mga araw na sobrang nag-aalala ako sa hinaharap, pero kapag nakikita ko kung gaano kalayo na ang narating ng anak ko, napapaalala sa akin na magtiwala sa proseso at ipagdiwang ang maliliit na tagumpay.)
 9. **F9:** *Hope is what keeps me strong. No matter how uncertain the future may seem, I know that my love and support will always be enough for my child.* (Ang pag-asa ang nagpapatibay sa akin. Kahit gaano ka-hindi tiyak ang hinaharap, alam kong sapat lagi ang pagmamahal at suporta ko para sa anak ko.)
 10. **F10:** *I used to be afraid of what the future holds, but now, I choose to focus on what I can do today. One day at a time, we're moving forward together.* (Dati takot ako sa kung ano ang naghinihintay sa hinaharap, pero ngayon, pinipili kong mag-focus sa kaya kong gawin ngayon. Isang araw sa isang pagkakataon, sabay kaming sumusulong.)
- Textural Description**
- This study revealed four prominent themes that described the lived experiences of fathers raising children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD): Theme 1: Emotional and Psychological Challenges, Theme 2: Social Stigma and Misconceptions, Theme 3: Financial Burden and

Accessibility of Resources, and Theme 4: Time and Energy Management. These themes reflected the multifaceted struggles fathers faced emotionally, socially, financially, and in their daily routines—as they navigated the responsibilities of caregiving. Fathers consistently described the emotional and psychological challenges of parenting a child with ASD as significant. Many shared feelings of frustration, anxiety, helplessness, and emotional fatigue, which often altered their perception of fatherhood. Despite these emotional hurdles, they expressed a deep and enduring love for their children and a strong commitment to their well-being. In response to these challenges, fathers employed strategies such as emotional regulation and reframing negative experiences to maintain a positive mindset. These coping strategies aligned with Stress and Coping Theory, which emphasizes how individuals adapt to stress through appraisal and emotion-focused coping mechanisms.

Another major theme was the experience of social stigma and misconceptions. Fathers frequently reported encounters with misunderstanding and judgment from both the public and close relatives, largely due to a lack of awareness about ASD. These societal attitudes intensified feelings of isolation and stress. However, many fathers actively responded by educating others and advocating for greater acceptance and awareness, both within their communities and extended families. Ecological Systems Theory helped contextualize these findings, illustrating how larger societal and familial systems significantly influenced the fathers' lived experiences and responses.

Financial challenges were also a central theme. Fathers reported high expenses related to therapies, interventions, and educational support, often coupled with inadequate access to financial aid or government assistance. These financial pressures created additional stress and sometimes forced fathers to make personal or career sacrifices. In coping with this burden, fathers engaged in resource-seeking behaviors, budget adjustments, and persistent advocacy for more equitable access to services. Their resilience in the face of economic strain highlighted their dedication to their child's development and well-being.

Lastly, time and energy management was a recurring struggle. Fathers described the overwhelming task of juggling employment, household responsibilities, and caregiving. Many reported physical and emotional exhaustion due to these competing demands. To manage, they developed structured routines, delegated responsibilities with their partners, and, when possible, carved out moments for self-care. These efforts illustrated the fathers' adaptability and their commitment to maintaining a sustainable caregiving role.

In sum, the experiences of fathers raising children with ASD were marked by substantial emotional, social, financial, and practical challenges. Yet, through resilience, advocacy, and adaptation, these fathers continued to meet the demands of parenting with determination and purpose.

Structural Description

Among the six emerging themes in the study, Personal Growth and Reflection and Hope and Optimism for the Future highlight how fathers who are raising children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) structurally navigate the complexities of caregiving. These themes reveal how deeper meaning-making and emotional resources shaped the fathers' ability to cope and grow amidst the challenges they face.

Personal growth and reflection emerge as a pivotal dimension in the fathers' journeys. The process of raising a child with ASD compels fathers to reassess their values, priorities, and beliefs, often leading to increased self-awareness, compassion, and emotional maturity (Barker *et al.*, 2019) ^[2]. This transformation is not solely a response to the challenges of caregiving, but a structural outcome of being placed in roles that demand consistent emotional labor and adaptability. According to Gender Role Theory (Eagly, 1987), traditional masculinity often limits emotional expressiveness; however, these fathers demonstrate a shift away from stereotypical male norms. The caregiving role encourages emotional engagement, self-reflection, and nurturance—traits that may not typically be associated with conventional fatherhood but are vital in this context. Their development reflects an internal restructuring of identity and purpose, shaped by both the caregiving environment and societal expectations.

Similarly, hope and optimism for the future function as structural motivators that guide and sustain the fathers' commitment to their caregiving responsibilities. Fathers maintain a vision of progress and believe in their children's potential, even when confronted with uncertainty or societal barriers (Keen *et al.*, 2021) ^[14]. This forward-looking perspective aligns with Stress and Coping Theory (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), where hope serves as a psychological buffer that facilitates endurance under stress. Hope is not simply an emotional reaction—it is a strategic, cognitively mediated resource that structures how fathers interpret their experiences and persist in adversity. They often reframe setbacks as part of a long-term developmental path, which allows them to remain motivated and proactive in their caregiving roles. This ongoing sense of purpose helps structure their day-to-day decisions, encouraging perseverance despite the emotional and physical toll of caregiving.

In conclusion, the fathers' experiences with personal growth and hope are not incidental but are structurally embedded responses shaped by their caregiving roles, societal norms, and internal coping frameworks. These themes demonstrate how meaning-making, emotional adaptation, and future-oriented thinking enable fathers to confront challenges and transform their identities in the process of raising a child with ASD.

Essence

The lived experience of fathers raising children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a journey marked by profound emotional, psychological, and personal transformation. While they face complex challenges—including emotional stress, social stigma, financial strain, and overwhelming responsibilities—these fathers navigate their roles with unwavering love, resilience, and a deep commitment to their children's development. Their experiences reflect a continuous balancing act between managing external demands and nurturing internal growth.

Amid these challenges, fathers undergo meaningful personal evolution. They develop emotional strength, become more compassionate, and find new perspectives on fatherhood, masculinity, and success. Their caregiving role prompts self-reflection, pushing them to reevaluate their values and cultivate patience, empathy, and adaptability. Most importantly, hope and optimism emerge as central forces driving their journey. Despite uncertainty, they remain

steadfast in their belief in their children's potential, viewing each small victory as a powerful step forward. In essence, their lived experience is not solely defined by hardship, but by growth, transformation, and an enduring hope that shapes both their fatherhood and their futures.

Verification. For the verification process, the researcher arranged a follow-up meeting with the participants to present a synthesis of their responses. This was done to ensure the accuracy of transcription, analysis, and interpretation of their input. Additionally, the meeting served as an opportunity for the researcher to express gratitude to the participants for their involvement. Any corrections or feedback provided by the participants were incorporated into the writing of the essence, thus enhancing the study's credibility.

4. Conclusions

Fathers raising children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) encounter a range of challenges that encompass emotional, psychological, social, financial, and practical dimensions. These challenges often manifest as persistent stress, anxiety, and emotional fatigue, driven by concerns about their child's development and future. Fathers frequently experience feelings of isolation, as they feel compelled to suppress their emotions in order to stay strong for their families. The societal stigma and misunderstandings surrounding ASD further exacerbate their struggles, especially when others misinterpret their child's behavior or question their parenting abilities. Financial strain also plays a significant role, with expenses for therapy, specialized education, and healthcare creating additional hardships, particularly for fathers living in low-resource or rural areas. This combination of emotional, social, and financial stress highlights the urgent need for increased public awareness, more inclusive support networks, and greater access to affordable services.

Despite these overwhelming obstacles, many fathers experience profound personal growth and resilience. The experience of raising a child with ASD often sparks a transformative shift in their perspective on fatherhood and life. Fathers learn to adapt, persevere, and embrace their child's unique developmental journey, moving away from rigid expectations and towards a more flexible and understanding approach to parenting. This process of reflection and emotional adjustment helps them develop greater empathy, patience, and mental strength. In the face of adversity, they cultivate a deeper sense of meaning and fulfillment in their roles as parents, finding new ways to cope with the daily caregiving responsibilities. These coping strategies, including emotional regulation and reframing negative experiences, not only help them navigate the challenges of fatherhood but also contribute to their personal growth.

Hope and optimism emerge as powerful motivators in the parenting journey of fathers raising children with ASD. Even amid uncertainty, setbacks, and limited resources, many fathers maintain a strong belief in their child's potential to grow and thrive. They draw strength from small developmental milestones, finding encouragement in even the most gradual progress their child makes. This forward-looking perspective reinforces their commitment to caregiving, helping them to push through difficult times and maintain resilience. The belief in their child's ability to overcome challenges plays a crucial role in sustaining their

determination and advocacy. This optimism, supported by accessible interventions and social support, significantly enhances their well-being and strengthens their capacity to provide consistent care for their child.

In summary, while the experiences of fathers raising children with ASD are marked by substantial emotional, social, financial, and practical challenges, these fathers continue to meet the demands of parenting with resilience, determination, and an unwavering commitment to their children's growth and well-being. Through personal growth, coping mechanisms, and a hopeful outlook, they navigate their caregiving roles with purpose and dedication, fostering a deeper connection with their child and redefining what it means to be a father.

5. Recommendations

Based on the conclusions drawn, the following recommendations were made:

1. Schools, healthcare providers, and community organizations should offer workshops and educational materials specifically designed for fathers to help them understand ASD, its challenges, and how they can actively support their child's development.
2. Support groups tailored for fathers raising children with ASD should be established, allowing them to share experiences, exchange coping strategies, and receive emotional support in a setting where they feel understood and accepted.
3. Therapy sessions, special education programs, and ASD-related interventions should actively involve fathers to enhance their role in caregiving and decision-making. Fathers should be encouraged to participate in therapy sessions, school meetings, and advocacy efforts.
4. Counseling services and psychological support should be made available to fathers dealing with stress, emotional struggles, and burnout. Access to mental health professionals who specialize in parenting children with ASD should be expanded.
5. Employers should implement more flexible work policies, such as paternity leave and work-from-home options, to allow fathers to balance their professional responsibilities with their caregiving role.
6. Policymakers should enhance funding and programs that provide accessible services for ASD families, such as financial assistance, therapy subsidies, and respite care services to ease the financial and emotional burden on fathers.
7. Further studies should explore the experiences of fathers from different socio-economic backgrounds, cultural contexts, and family structures to gain a broader understanding of how ASD impacts fatherhood. Longitudinal research can also track how fathers' experiences evolve over time.

6. References

1. Ahmadi M. *Fatherhood in Iranian society: Navigating cultural expectations*. Tehran: Tehran University Press; 2021.
2. Barker E, Hartley SL, Seltzer MM. Paternal involvement in ASD caregiving: Predictors and outcomes. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*. 2019;49(3):1262–75. doi:10.1007/s10803-019-04289-1.
3. Bobadilla R. Hispanic fathers' experiences in ASD caregiving: Spirituality and extended family roles.

- Journal of Parenting and Family Studies. 2021;34(2):45–60. Available from: <https://link.springer.com/journal/10826>.
4. Brown M, Clark J, Gomez L. Emotional and practical challenges of fathers after receiving an ASD diagnosis. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*. 2021;51(7):2401–15. doi:10.1007/s10803-020-04831-6.
 5. Camilleri J. Communication difficulties and uncertainties about the future: Experiences of fathers of children with ASD. *Journal of Family Psychology*. 2022;41(3):186–98. Available from: <https://psycnet.apa.org/journals/fam>.
 6. Carter P. Fathers and education: Parental involvement and student outcomes. *Education Review Journal*. 2020;28(2):45–63.
 7. Chisa A, Garcia L, Soto M. Resilience strategies of Filipino female solo parents during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Journal of Social and Family Studies*. 2024;45(1):123–35. Available from: <https://journals.sagepub.com/home/sfx>.
 8. Coles R. *Historical perspectives on fatherhood and child development*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; 2015.
 9. Creswell JW, Creswell JD. *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. 7th ed. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications; 2023.
 10. Delgado L. The role of fathers in ASD caregiving: A literature review. *International Journal of Autism Studies*. 2020;34(3):112–28.
 11. Department of Health. *Annual report on autism prevalence and parental support*. 2023.
 12. Guralnick MJ. Family-centered care approaches for children with disabilities: The father's role. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*. 2020;53:15–28. doi:10.1016/j.ecresq.2020.05.005.
 13. Hastings RP, Taunt HM. Positive perceptions in families of children with ASD. *Journal of Intellectual Disability Research*. 2018;62(6):481–95. doi:10.1111/jir.12574.
 14. Keen D, Couzens D, Muspratt S, Rodger S. The effect of ASD on father-child attachment and engagement. *Autism Research*. 2021;14(2):109–23. doi:10.1002/aur.2421.
 15. Lamb ME, Lewis C. The role of fathers in child development: A contemporary analysis. *Parenting: Science and Practice*. 2020;20(4):321–40. Available from: <https://www.tandfonline.com/toc/hpar20/current>.
 16. Lashewicz B, Park M, Scott C. The personal growth of fathers through caregiving: Developing deeper bonds with children. *Journal of Parenting Psychology*. 2019;58(3):210–23. Available from: <https://psycnet.apa.org/PAR>.
 17. Le Monde. *New fathers: A modern kind of hands-off dads*. 2024. Available from: <https://lemonde.fr>.
 18. Morse JM, Field PA. *Qualitative research methods for health professionals*. 2nd ed. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications; 1995.
 19. Piven J, Elison JT, Zylka MJ. Neurodevelopmental pathways in ASD and their implications for caregiving. *Annual Review of Neuroscience*. 2020;43:159–78. doi:10.1146/annurev-neuro-091919-022109.
 20. PubMed. *Longitudinal studies on father involvement and child development outcomes*. 2024. Available from: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov>.
 21. Sanjaya S, Ibrahim T, Wibowo F. Father involvement in ASD caregiving: A review of gaps in research in non-Western contexts. *International Journal of Family Studies*. 2022;35(4):185–99. doi:10.1007/s12134-022-00944-8.
 22. Scott J, Wishart J, Bowyer J. *Ethical considerations in qualitative research: Informed consent and confidentiality*. London: Routledge; 2018.
 23. The Times. *How being a parent physically alters your brain – Dads included*. 2024. Available from: <https://thetimes.co.uk>.
 24. Van Manen M. *Researching lived experience: Human science for an action-sensitive pedagogy*. Albany: State University of New York Press; 1990.
 25. Woodgate RL. *Qualitative research: The essential guide to theory and practice*. London: Routledge; 2018.
 26. World Health Organization. *Autism spectrum disorder: Global statistics and support strategies*. Geneva: WHO; 2023.