**PARENTING AN ADULT CHILD WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER:**

**A QUALITATIVE EXAMINATION OF THE LIVED EXPERIENCE**

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**Objectives:** Parents of children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) continue to fulfill important roles throughout their child’s adulthood,creating parental distress, anxiety, depression, and uncertainty surrounding their child’s future. It is thus not surprising that when compared to mothers of typically developing adult children, mothers of adult children with ASD experience greater levels of negative affect. Further parental challenges arise when an intellectual disability (ID) is diagnosed along with ASD, as these individuals will present with more persistent maladaptive behaviours. While much of ASD-ID related research focuses on developmental periods during infancy and childhood, aging demographics support the need for systematic exploration of adulthood among this population. Of the available literature, much research focuses solely on a deficit-based narrative, which subscribes to a medical model of disability emphasizing pathology, weakness, and abnormality. Continuously employing this theoretical perspective limits the richness of the information shared by respondents, making it impossible to capture an intimate, authentic, and detailed account of the lived experience of parenting an adult child diagnosed with ASD-ID. Therefore, we will explore the lived experience of parenting an adult child diagnosed with ASD-ID from a strengths perspective, with the aim of outlining positive outcomes, navigation of challenges, and parental concerns related to this unique role.

**Methodology:** Situated within a social constructionist epistemology, the present study acknowledges that disability can only be understood within the social world that creates its meaning. As such, meaning is sought through the interaction and exploration of one’s own reality. To facilitate the understanding of participants’ constructed lived experience, a strength-based perspective will be relied upon to counter the traditional deficits-based approach where parenting a child with ASD-ID is viewed as a ‘burden’ or ‘challenge’. Purposeful sampling will be used to recruit ten mothers of adult children (21 years of age or older) diagnosed with ASD-ID who will participate in a semi-structured interview, followed by a second in-depth interview that will employ an interview guide created from the initial interview data. This two-step interview approach will facilitate rapport between researcher and participant, which will aid in the sharing of intimate details of the lived experience. Data will be analyzed using inductive thematic analysis.

**Results:** This research will help establish a strengths-based narrative related to parenting an adult child with ASD-ID. By fostering a theoretical shift away from dominant deficit-based accounts, we will emphasize that positive outcomes can be experienced, challenges can be navigated, and future concerns can be alleviated as families transition to caring for an adult diagnosed with ASD-ID.

**Discussion:** Findings from this research will support the development of knowledge translation activities, including a presentation to interested parties (i.e., adults with ASD-ID and their families, developmental service sector agencies, and policy makers) and a parent-directed information sheet. By providing a novel account of this parenting experience, it may encourage the development of new services, showcase strengths and resources of parents and current outlets of support, and substantiate the need for specific changes related to services and supports available to adults with ASD-ID.

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