**COVID-19 PANDEMIC: PARENTS FIND INNOVATIVE WAYS TO CONNECT WITH THEIR CHILDREN WHO RESIDE IN SUPPORTED INDEPENDENT LIVING ENVIRONMENTS**

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 **Objectives:** TheCOVID-19 pandemic has forced individuals with autism spectrum disorder and an intellectual disability (ASD-ID) out of their daily routines, often triggering anxiety and challenging behaviours. With the cancellation or modification to daily supports, parents have experienced difficulties accessing resources. Notably, the environment in which an individual with ASD-ID lives is crucial to their well-being. Unique challenges exist for parents with children residing in supported independent living environments. Social distancing measures often resulted in limiting interactions to ‘virtual visits’, or ‘physical distancing visits’, increasing anxiety for both parents and their adult child. In specific instances, families were no longer allowed to visit their loved ones at all. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore the everyday experience of parenting an adult child diagnosed with ASD-ID who were residing in supported independent living environments during the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Methodology:** Ten mothers (Mage = 60.3 years) of 8 male (Mage = 30.6 years) and 2 female (Mage = 34.5) adult children diagnosed with ASD-ID completed a semi-structured interview (May – December, 2020). A strengths-based perspective, which emphasizes abilities and resources, was utilized in this study to counter the traditional deficits-based perspective that focuses on impairment, weakness, and pathology. Non-directive probes were utilized to acquire information on resources, care, and alternative approaches that parents utilized. Inductive thematic analysis was used to analyze the data.

**Results:** Three themes emerged and were given meaning through participant quotes to expose the realities that parents faced through the COVID-19 pandemic. The first theme, **Visitation** **Restrictions**, helped to elucidate how parents experienced different challenges when living separately from their child – “I couldn't see him for months because of the rules put out by the Ministry of Health. So, that was a little bit hard for me as a mother.” Parents sought ways to bypass these restrictions - “We just went and sat outside for an hour.” The second theme, **Limitations in** **Communications**, demonstrated the difficulty parents had communicating with their child - “She can't talk, so I just felt that if I saw her or if she saw me [on video chat], she wouldn't understand why I wasn't there, and I was afraid she would get self-abusive or upset and agitated”. However, some were able to overcome these barriers – “They set up an Instagram for her... they would post pictures of her for me to see.” The third theme, **Need for Emergency Services**, signified the urgency for appropriate services during periods of crisis – “When she left home, ...she was only 15, and there wasn't a place for her (to go) at that time.” Parents laboured to ensure their voices were heard – “We had to advocate for the smallest things.”

**Discussion/Conclusion:** While restrictions have been put in place to prevent the spread of COVID-19, mothers and their adult children with ASD-ID residing in supported independent living environments have experienced several obstacles to their daily routines. However, mothers have been innovative in utilizing various strategies to adapt to the ever-changing protocols, illustrating profound resilience during this unprecedented time.

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