Caring for a Child with Autism; Burden and Quality of Life of the Caregivers in Qatar

Introduction: Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) affects children at around the age of 3 years old and lasts throughout the person's lifetime. ASD imposes great burden on the family, and forces family members to considerably modify their daily lives to suit their reality with autistic child(ren). To our knowledge, no previous research assessed the burden of ASD on the lives of parents/caregivers of autistic children in Qatar or the Gulf region.

Methods: Caregivers of a child with autism between 3-17 years were recruited from children rehabilitation clinics. The control group was represented by caregivers of a typically-growing child visiting a primary health care facility for a routine medical examination. Data collected from both groups included demographic information of caregivers and children and quality of life information. The Lebanese Arabic version of the Short Form-36 (SF-36) was used to assess quality of life.

Results: Children in the AG spent more time indoors, watching TV, or sleeping than children in the control group (p≤0.05). Around 40% of caregivers in the AG said they would encourage their child to get married and become parent when s/he grows up. Half of the sample in the AG utilizes special education classes and other facilities, and the remaining half has access problems. There was no statistically significant difference between quality of life domains between the two groups of caregivers, but caregivers of autistic children rated their health as poor and likely to get worse (p=0.003). However, mental health components were consistently poorer in the AG compared to the physical components, and female caregivers also had poorer mental health than males in this cohort of participants (p<0.05).

Conclusion: This study provided evidence for the impact of caring for a child with autism on the life of the caregiver. The findings should help health policy-makers provide more focused support to the children with autism and their families.

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Medications in Qatar’s Homes: What Are They and Where Are They?

Background: Drug therapy is the most used intervention for the treatment and prevention of diseases. However, if used inappropriately, drugs can cause more harm than good. Improper drug storage and disposal can have direct impact on public safety, the environment, and healthcare services. No previous studies have examined how medications are stored, used or disposed-off in Qatari homes.

Objectives: To explore how medications are stored in Qatari homes, and to identify how unwanted medications are disposed of.

Methods: This was cross-sectional, descriptive, and epidemiological study. A list of randomly selected telephone numbers was generated from Qatar’s telephone directory. Individuals answering calls were provided with the study objectives, and asked if they wished to participate. Those who offered verbal consent were interviewed in Arabic or English using a multi-part pre-tested survey instrument. The survey contained questions related to the participants’ socio-demographic characteristics as well as to the stored medications at home.

Results: Data were collected from a total of 49 households. The sample contained an ethnic mix of whom 28% stored medications in their bedroom, and 13% in a fridge. Most respondents disposed of unwanted medicines by throwing in the trash. The majority of respondents sought information related to drugs from doctors. Only 6% identified pharmacists as their primary source of information related to drugs. There seems to be poor or no correlation between household income and number of drugs stored or the method of disposal of medicines.

Discussion and Conclusions: The results raise concerns about how medications are stored and disposed-off in the community. The fact that no household routinely returned unwanted medications to a pharmacy for proper disposal places the environment at risk. There is need for societal awareness on the safe handling and storage of drugs in homes, and pharmacist should do more to raise awareness about their expected professional role.

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