

## **A QUALITATIVE STUDY EXPLORING THE LIVED EXPERIENCES AND COPING STRATEGIES OF FAMILIES LIVING WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER**

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Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a developmental disability characterised by considerable social, communication and behavioural difficulties. Research shows that parenting a child with autism is stressful; however research into sibling relations is limited with many studies gathering information from the parent or teachers instead of the siblings. Literature suggests that siblings have difficulty adjusting and coping resulting in a strain in the relationship with the sibling with ASD. Objectives: The objectives include understanding the coping strategies used by families of a child with autism and to understand the lived experiences of these families. The new knowledge will inform occupational therapy intervention programs in the field of ASD. Methodology: Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory will be the theoretical lens for this study. The research design is qualitative. The chosen data collection methods are in-depth semi-structured interviews with the parent and the typically developing sibling. Through the interviews the researcher can explore the coping strategies and the influence on coping in the family environment. Furthermore rich and valuable information about the influences of culture, family dynamics, and coping can be explored. These interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. The researcher's reflective journal will be used as a source of data as well. Data will be analysed thematically. Findings: Themes extracted from the data will be shared in this presentation looking at implications for practice. Conclusion: This study will add new knowledge to autism research in South Africa to inform best practice in the care of families of children with ASD.