

South African families raising children with Autism Spectrum Disorder: Relationship between family routines, cognitive appraisal and family quality of life

Easy-to-read
version of



By Dr. Liezl Schlebusch
Post-doctoral researcher & Lecturer
liezl.schlebusch@up.ac.za

Supervised by Dr. Alecia Samuels and Prof. Shakila Dada
Centre for Augmentative & Alternative Communication
University of Pretoria

What did we aim to find out?

Much of what we know about families raising children with autism comes from research that has been conducted in other countries. Therefore, we wanted to find out more about the perspectives of South African families who are raising young children with autism.

We conducted a research study in 2015 to explore this. We believe that by knowing the answers to these questions, we can help service providers to understand and support families who are raising children with autism.

We know that all families everywhere in the world have family routines – those things that they do together every day, such as preparing and eating a meal together or getting a child ready for bed. Earlier research found that regular family routines are important for the well-being and coping of families. However, we also know that for families raising a child with autism, managing daily family routines may be particularly troublesome. This left us with a few questions…?

- Do families who have more regular family routines think about the impact of raising a child with autism as more positive and less negative? (this is what we call ‘cognitive appraisal’) 👍👎
- Do families who have more regular family routines feel happier about their family’s well-being? (this is what we call ‘family quality of life’) 😞😟😐😄😁

How did we do the study?

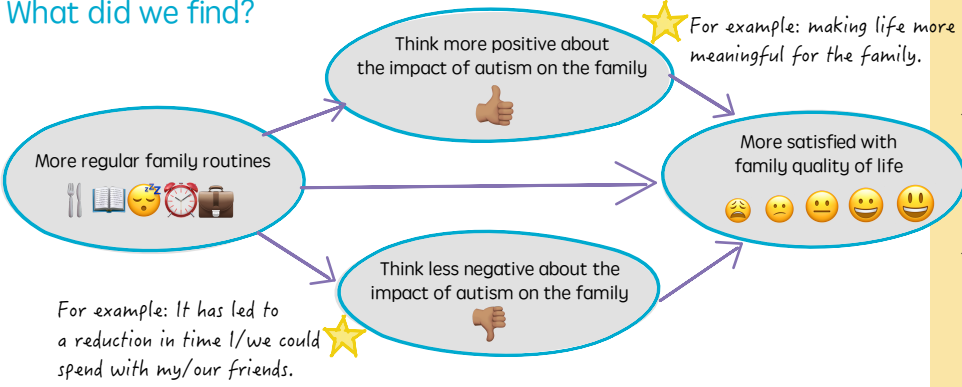


We asked 35 public and private autism schools and centers (located throughout the five municipal districts of **Gauteng**) to help us find families that are raising children with autism. The children had to be younger than 9 years old. **One hundred and eighty families** completed a questionnaire about their family routines, how they feel about the impact of autism on the family, and how satisfied they felt about their family quality of life. The data collected from these families allowed us to use statistical tests to answer our questions.

What can we learn from all this?

- ✓ It is important for service providers to **get to know families** and what they do on a daily basis. Conversations about the family’s routines can identify areas of family strengths (for example family routines that are going well) and areas of family needs and concerns (for example family routines that are difficult to create and maintain).
- ✓ **Interventions** that focus on **creating and maintaining regular family routines** can potentially help to enhance the quality of life of the family.
- ✓ Any supportive intervention to help a child with autism should **facilitate the family’s sense of competence and confidence in managing their daily lives**, and not interfere with the existing resources and capabilities that they require to maintain their family routines.

What did we find?



We found that families who have more regular family routines (what we call a ‘rhythmic’ family life) were generally more satisfied with their family’s quality of life. Families with more regular family routines also thought more positive (and less negative) about the impact of raising a child with autism, which in turn, made them feel happier about their family quality of life.

Acknowledgements
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Want to know more?
This easy-to-read version was created from the article called ‘South African families raising children with autism spectrum disorders: relationship between family routines, cognitive appraisal and family quality of life’ that was published in 2016 in the *Journal of Intellectual Disability Research* (doi: 10.1111/jir.12292).

The published article was based on [Liezl’s PhD study](#) - completed at the University of Pretoria. We created this simplified version to share what we have learned with service providers and families raising children with autism. Please contact Liezl if you are interested in the full version of the article - liezl.schlebusch@up.ac.za OR liezl@treesofhope.co.za

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