

Parents' perceptions of raising children with autism spectrum disorders in the United States and Arab countries: A comparative review

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We report on a review of the literature comparing parents' perceptions of raising children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) in the United States and Arab countries, and investigate key factors that influence those perceptions. We found 14 studies published in English by Arab researchers and 55 studies published by U.S. researchers. We found that most Arab studies used quantitative (numerical) methods whereas U.S. studies more frequently used a mix of quantitative (numerical) and qualitative (non-numerical) methods. Although more fathers than mothers participated in the Arab studies, mothers were the primary participants in the majority of U.S. studies. Furthermore, most participants in the U.S. studies were college educated whites/Caucasians with incomes ranging from middle class or above. The results also showed that ASD has many of the same effects on Arab and American families. Parent perceptions of raising children with ASD focused on six themes common to both countries: financial burden; mental health problems; quality of life; health, education and social services; religious faith; social stigma and negative attitudes. Religious faith and financial burden were emphasized more in the Arab literature, whilst services were more readily available in the U.S. Although the Arab literature examined differences in perceptions between mothers and fathers, the U.S. studies offered more explanation of factors that impacted these areas. Overall, the experience of raising a child with ASD was a challenge for both American and Arab parents with greater challenges facing Arab families due to fewer professional services and reduced awareness of ASD.