

**PSYCHOLOGICAL STRESS LEVEL AND AWARENESS OF SOCIAL SKILLS  
AMONG MOTHERS OF CHILDREN WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER  
ACCORDING TO SOME DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES IN THE CITY OF RIYADH.**

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**Abstract:**

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) indicates several neurodevelopmental impairments. This study aimed to reveal the psychological stress level and awareness of social skills among mothers of children with autism spectrum disorder in the city of Riyadh according to some demographic variables including articulation difficulties of the autistic child, kinship between spouses, whether the child received any intervention or training, the educational level of the mother, and the gender of the autistic child. To achieve the objectives of the study, the comparative descriptive approach was used. The study sample comprised (120 mothers), and they were subjected to the psychological stress scale and the social skills scale for the autistic child, prepared by the researcher after verifying their psychometric properties. The results of the research concluded that the weighted average value of psychological stress among mothers of an autistic child was low, while awareness of social skills was medium; The results also showed that there were no statistically significant differences in the psychological stresses and awareness of social skills among the mothers of the autistic children according to the variables of articulation difficulties (those who have / and those who do not have articulation difficulties); kinship between parents (existing / non-existent), child support (for those whose children received support/or not), the gender of the autistic child (female-male), social skills of the autistic child according to the variable of the university qualification of the mothers. However, there were differences in psychological stress levels. Mothers with university qualification had higher stress levels; and there were also differences among mothers regarding awareness of social skills. These skills were

higher among mothers who have a female child. According to these results a number of recommendations were formulated.

### **Introduction:**

Disability is one of the psychological and social issues, becoming a major concern in different societies. Disability not only constitutes a burden on the disabled and family but also extends to a large sector of society. Severe mental disorders in childhood are similarly a subject of wide debate among researchers regarding their causes, classification or diagnostic criteria. The dominant view until the late sixties of the last century was that these disorders are infantile forms of psychosis or schizophrenia, or that they are mainly due to the disturbance of the emotional relationship between a mother and a child. At the same time, the clinical therapists, working in the field were concerned with multiple and varied forms of psychological disorders, regardless of whether they fall within the official diagnostic classification (Hulufman. and Kaufman, 2008, 85).

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has been highly concerned with those who have special needs being an integral part of the national fabric. Accordingly, the Ministry of Education was keen to provide the necessary educational, social and rehabilitative services for all categories of special education such as blind, deaf, mentally handicapped and autistic. Likewise, sought to adopt a large number of initiatives to develop the education of these groups to merge them in the education policy to boost their abilities, and enhance their role in the society (Al-Rousan, 2010). International statistics indicated a high rate of autism among children, which requires attention and focused health and psychological care by building special centers to take care of them. The Saudi ministry of education also made massive efforts to merge them into public education schools to help them fit in with the society.

Autism spectrum disorder is considered one of the comprehensive developmental disorders that affect children in early childhood, and it is a disability that has a negative impact on all aspects of the child's mental, social, psychological, kinetic and sensory development. The most obvious shortcomings in this disability are the communicative aspect and mutual social interaction. The autistic child finds difficulties in engaging in social interaction and building relationships with peers, in addition to lack of attention, following stereotyped behavior, and limited interests. (Al-Jalamdah and Hassan, 2013).

Disability leads to multiple psychological pressures. The inability of a disabled to conform to disability may simply lead to inconsistent behaviours, which extend to leave negative impacts on the family in general. The family is the greatest livelihood of people with disabilities and their appearance impose emotional, social, educational and economic requirements on the disabled child and those around. (Al Taweel, 2018, 17). The results of the study of Bousheeria and Al-Daykh (2017) indicated that there is a correlation between psychological stress and family adjustment among parents of autistic children. The study also found differences in the level of psychological stress between fathers and mothers in favor of mothers. The results of the study of both Katkie et al, 2017 showed that there are differences in the level of parental stress among mothers of children with autism spectrum disorder and normal in favor of mothers of children with autism spectrum disorder, and the results indicated that one of the most important predictors of psychological stress was the child's disability level.

Gernsbacher (2004) argues that the difficulties the autistic child brings to the family are

enormous, particularly to mother no matter how dedicated she is. A child with autism spectrum disorder needs more time from parents than normal siblings, and parents should use a special strategy in dealing with.

Weak social communication and inability to maintain social relationships are among the prominent features that all children with autism disorder share. It varies in the severity of deficiency, and some of them find it difficult to cheer when seeing their parents in early childhood, nor do smile appear when one of them holds or hugs them, in addition to the absence of convergence of looks between the child and parents. In this field, the theory of mind provides a special vision explaining the weakness of this communication, which is likely to be caused by the inability of the autistic child to understand the behavior of others, or even their way of thinking, or intentions.

The severity of the pressures on the parents of a child with autism is due to the continuity of these pressures for a long time, and the inability of the child to express the basic needs and desires, leading to physical and emotional exhaustion of the mother. The lack of social skills in a child with autism increases parental pressures and affects how they spend their free time, and the mother may have to change the daily routine, which increases family burdens.

The outcome of some studies confirmed that mothers of children with autism suffer from a clear feeling of psychological pressure, and some results showed that mothers of children with autism are more stressed than mothers of children with other disabilities, such as the study of (Alexandra et al., 2004). The mother is primarily responsible for raising children, as her failure to teach the child socially desirable behaviors always makes her blamed and accused of failing or neglecting the child's upbringing. The refusal of brothers and the father to take part in caring for the child on the pretext that they do not understand how leads to an increase in the child's dependence on the mother and also leads to an increase in the feeling of psychological pressure and tension, which affects her ability to agree with the husband and children or even in her social and professional life. She may have to leave work to devote herself to caring for the child, which increases the financial burden of the family. This was confirmed by the results of some studies that focused on the study of stress among mothers of disabled children (Kashef, 2000, Abdel Hafeez, 2006). The study of Elbahnasawy and Gerges (Girgis & Elbahnasawy, 2011) concluded that autistic children depend entirely on their mothers in their daily lives, which makes mothers vulnerable to psychological pressure. Benson (2017) conducted his study in America with the aim of identifying the sources of psychological stress, the level of depression, and strategies for dealing with psychological stress among mothers of autistic children. The study sample consisted of (110) mothers of children on the autism spectrum who were chosen intentionally. The study used the longitudinal survey descriptive method, which lasted for (12) years, during which the mothers were followed up and observed. The results of the study showed that the sources of psychological stress among mothers of autistic children were dependent on the nature of the autistic child's condition, and from the family burdens imposed on the mother, such as: looking after the house and other children. The results showed that the level of stress for mothers of autistic children was moderate.

#### **Study Problem and Questions:**

Unquestionably, autism is one of the severe childhood problems. This disorder combines mental and social disabilities, which negatively affect the normal life of the family, especially when accompanied with ineffective parenting skills. It decreases family interactions, which affects the

child's social behavioural skills. (Al-Baghdadi and Al-Ashmawi, 2019, 4-5). This is confirmed by the results of Smart's Study (2016), which showed that parents of children with autism spectrum disorder had the lowest level of perceived self-efficacy in parental upbringing compared to parents of children with other disabilities. Perceived self-efficacy and the level of psychological stress, social support and parenting skills of parents of children (autism spectrum disorder, children with Down syndrome and children with emotional and behavioural disorders). The results of the Gupta and Singhal study (2005) showed that children with autism exposes 70% of mothers and 40% of fathers to psychological pressure due to the child's disability, and the study also showed that these parental pressures affect various aspects of development in a child with autism cognitive, behavioural and social disorder. The results of the Pochtar study (2010) indicates that parents of children with disabilities experience higher levels of psychological pressure than parents of normal children, and these pressures significantly affect the behavior of parents, which has a profound impact on the emotional aspects of the child. This is what was highlighted by the results of the Al-Othman study (2012) that mothers of children with autism are more stressed than their fathers. Rivard and colleagues (Rivard et al, 2014) also found that fathers' stress can be predicted by the variable severity of autism spectrum disorder symptoms. The mothers of these children are exposed to enormous psychological pressures, limiting their performance and functions in the required manner. Accordingly, the researcher felt the extent of anxiety, confusion and sadness those mothers suffer. They may develop feelings of guilt, self-blame, and isolation from society. As the relationship between the family represented in the mother and the child is deeper and clearer than the relationship between the father and the child, especially in the first six years. During these years the mother is responsible for satisfying biological and psychological needs. The mother is the key for the upbringing and providing care for children, while the father's contribution at this stage is less clear. Nevertheless, there must be complementarity and mutual dependence between the roles of both the father and mother, as any change in the roles of one of them must be followed by a change in the roles of the other. It is thus reflected on their relationship with their children, and affects children's behaviours and attitudes towards their parents (Person et al., 2012, 53).

The Bilgin et al 2010 study focused on exploring and categorizing the experiences of mothers with autism by interviewing (43) mothers who presented their experiences with their autistic children in Turkey. as well as their role and future expectations for the autistic child,

By reviewing the Arab and foreign databases, the researcher did not find studies that dealt with the same variables as the current study combined. Based on the foregoing, the study problem is summarized in the following two questions:

1. What is the level of psychological stress and awareness of social skills among mothers of children with autism spectrum disorder according some demographic variables in Riyadh?
2. Are there statistically significant differences in psychological stress and awareness of social skills among mothers of children with autism spectrum disorder according to demographic variables (speech difficulties of the autistic child, kinship between spouses, the child received any intervention or training, the educational level of the mother, the gender of the autistic child and complexity of the care their children need at home?)

**This study aims to reveal:**

1. The level of psychological stress and awareness of social skills among mothers of children with autism spectrum disorder according to demographic variables in the city of Riyadh.

2. Differences in psychological stress and awareness of social skills among mothers of children with autism spectrum disorder according to demographic variables (speech difficulties of the autistic child, kinship between spouses, whether the child received any intervention or training, the educational level of the mother and the gender of the autistic child).

### **Study Significance:**

Theoretically, the significance of this study is due to:

- The worldwide increasing concern in the recent past for people with disabilities in general and for children in particular, as the growth of their personality requires integrated care and family assistance in taking care of them, facing their problems and satisfying their needs.
- The importance of the targeted group, which is the mothers of children with autism spectrum disorder, who face psychological pressure.
- Enriching the libraries of autism spectrum disorder rehabilitation centers in particular, and Arab libraries in general, with such scientific research.

The importance of this study from an applied point of view lies in increasing the awareness of mothers to deal with their autistic children and to benefit of psychological counsellors, social workers; and work on providing counselling programs based on cognitive-behavioural theory, strategies, and techniques, and using it to reduce psychological stress among mothers.

### **Study Limitations:**

Objective limits: They are represented in psychological stress, awareness of social skills and some demographic variables

Human boundaries: a sample of mothers of children with autism spectrum disorder.

Spatial boundaries: Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Time limits: This study was applied in the academic year 1442 AH-2021 AD

Tools: The Psychological Stress Scale was used in this study, based on the cognitive-behavioural theory, and its strategies and techniques for use in reducing the degree of psychological stress.

### **Study Terminology:**

#### **1. Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD):**

It is defined as a neurodevelopmental disorder, characterized by a decrease in social communication, reciprocal social interaction, and repetitive behavioural patterns, and appears in the child in early childhood, and it has specific diagnostic criteria, which are defined in the Fifth Statistical and Diagnostic Manual of Mental Disorders.

It is a comprehensive developmental disability that affects children in their early childhood, and it has a total impact on all aspects of the child's mental, social, psychological, motor and sensory development. The fifth edition of the Diagnostic Manual included autism spectrum disorder within the umbrella of neurodevelopmental disorders, which includes the following categories: Aspect of the autism spectrum disorders category: mental disorders, communication disorders, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, specific learning disabilities, and disorders (American Psychiatric Association, 2013))

Procedurally: in this study, it is defined as a type of developmental disorder that appears during the first three years of a child's life. This disorder is often accompanied by a lack of mental abilities in varying degrees, meaning that it is a cognitive and social disorder at the same time, as well as suffering from some behavioural disorders.

#### **2. Mothers of Autistic Spectrum Disorder Children: psychologically Stressed Mothers as a result**

of their children having autism and who are present with their children in a hospital, association or rehabilitation centre for autism spectrum disorder.

3. Psychological stress: Khalifa and Issa (2008) define psychological stress as “the physiological response that results from an individual’s attempt to conform and adapt in situations to which he is exposed.

Fink defines it (2-1, 2016, 2016) as continuous and repeated exposure to environmental factors that divert the body from a state of equilibrium, which imposes physiological, emotional, or psychological requirements that lead the individual to mobilize all energies to confront those pressures, which lead to negative effects on the life of the individual. The period of exposure to stress contains three phases: the reaction and alert phase, the phase of resistance and the phase of exhaustion. Psychological stress is defined procedurally by the degree to which the individual obtains on the psychological stress scale used in this study.

#### **4. Social Skills:**

Hamad (2019, 1088) defines social skills as “any skill that enables a person to interact and communicate with others in order to convey in a clear way, and to form social relations. Verbal communication takes place through language, which serves as the basis for organizing cognitive mental processes, and an inevitable mediator of human communication.” .

Yaghmour (2019, 17) also defines verbal communication as “all the words and sayings that a child with autism issues through verbal expression, that is, the language used. Expressiveness, such as: facial expressions, body movements, and voice variations.

#### **Theoretical Framework and Previous Studies:**

##### **First: Autism**

Those suffering autism can be classified under special groups or special needs. This disorder requires further research and cooperation among different specialties, because it must be studied from multiple sides (1990 (Marica , Halawani (1996) believes that psychological studies on autism are relatively recent and almost all of them have been conducted in foreign environments, but at the level of the Arab world there is a dearth of studies that dealt with.

The World Health Organization (WHO, 1993 in Bosbon, 2000) defines autism in the Tenth International Classification of Diseases (ICD-10) as a type of pervasive developmental disorder, and it is the most difficult developmental disability for the child in particular, and for his family in general. Suleiman (2000) said that autism is a complex and comprehensive developmental disability, and its main symptoms appear during the first three years of the child’s life due to the presence of a defect or disorder in the nervous system and other disorders affecting the nervous system. Autism's disability occurs within a spectrum, so its symptoms appear in the form of different, overlapping, and varying forms in the degree of its severity. Therefore, there are individual differences between autistic children, which necessitates taking into account the special needs of each child separately. Affected people usually have impaired verbal and nonverbal communication, social and emotional interaction, play activities or leisure time, and the disorder affects their ability to communicate with others. They may display repetitive bodily movements (such as hand flapping and rocking), unusual responses to others or attachment to things around them while resisting any change in things (routines), and in some cases autistic people may display self-harming or aggressive behaviours. Autism is one of the conditions of disability that prevents the brain from absorbing information and processing it, leading to communicate problems, and disorders in learning. Autism is one of the most common diseases

that affect the developmental system of the child (Al-Shammari, 2001). Rafiq (2001) indicates that autism impedes the natural growth of the brain in the areas of thinking, social interaction, effectiveness and communication skills with others in their social environment and thus makes it difficult for them to become independent members of society. They may display repetitive bodily movements (such as hand flapping and rocking), unusual responses to others, or attachment to things around them, while resisting any change

### **Indications of Autism Spectrum Disorder:**

There are many factors associated with autism spectrum disorder, including the presence or absence of mental disability, impairment in verbal and nonverbal communication, and additional mental health problems, which are as follows:

- Environmental factors: There are a variety of non-specific environmental risk factors, such as parents' age at conception and birth weight. (DSM, 2013)
- Genetic and physiological factors: It was estimated that from 37% to 90% of developing autism spectrum disorder are due to compatibility rates of the twin, and it may reach (15%) because of certain genes associated with a disorder in families. Different, however, and even when autism spectrum disorder is associated with a known genetic mutation, it does not appear complete.
- Cultural factors: The diversity and cultural differences of the rules of social interaction, verbal and non-verbal communication, and interpersonal relations, and thus children may have autism spectrum disorder (Machado, et al, 2013). . Recent changes (ASD) that have occurred in the conceptual structure of the category of autism spectrum disorders and its transition from the concept of categorical diagnostic to the concept of continuity of non-categorical diagnosis.

### **Characteristics of Autistic Children**

The category of autistic children is a heterogeneous category in its characteristics. Two children with autism may have the same classification and diagnosis, but their characteristics may differ and vary. Some children with autism show complete isolation from the social environment and tend to loneliness, while others show patterns of interaction, and some of them develop language skills. Verbal well, while others do not develop such skills, and some children with autism may have talents or excel in one area of performance, while most of them suffer from weakness and deficiencies in all areas, and behavioural characteristics such as: stereotyped movements are different among children In general, The severity and number of characteristics in autistic persons are affected by factors such as: mental abilities, disabilities, accompanying disorders and the environment in which the person lives. (Janzen, 2002).

### **Social Characteristics:**

Weakness in social interaction in autistic children is one of the basic and essential characteristics in detecting autism. Indicators of this weakness may appear in the early stages of life, which is the avoidance of eye contact with the mother during breastfeeding or the failure to respond to The smile issued by the mother or that this response is issued but not at the time or in situations that do not require smiling. The child may not show any reaction if the mother extends her hand to hold him, or does not get upset when left alone and scream and cry when trying to touch or when approaching (Weaknesses in social interaction in autistic children include weakness in forming effective relationships with others, and emotional coldness, poor joint interest and tendency to individual play. Studies and research have divided autistic children in terms of their

social interaction into three categories:

1. Aloof: These children do not show any interest or social attachment and do not ask for any help from others to meet their needs. They get irritated and angry when they are near others or they refuse physical or social contact with them.
2. Passive: These people do not initiate social interaction, but agree to the initiatives of others to interact with them.
3. Active but strange: They interact socially, but in inappropriate and unusual ways, which makes them rejected and not accepted by others. (Garside et al, 2000).

### **Behavioural Characteristic:**

Autistic children are characterized by a set of behavioural characteristics that vary largely among them and perhaps the most important of these characteristics are stereotypical movements such as: hand flapping, body shaking, walking on tiptoes, hand waving in front of the eyes, rotation around the soul, and behaviors Monotonous such as: excessive preoccupation with interest, or specific topics, insistence on similarity and similarity, and routine behaviour.

### **Cognitive Characteristics:**

Autistic children show marked deficiencies in their functions, or in their cognitive characteristics, with a rate of (75-80%) suffering from a mental disability of varying degrees. They face difficulties in understanding and realizing the dimensions of situations and absorbing and responding to stimuli. They show a clear defect in the field of comprehensive vision of things, as they look at the thing from one side without perceiving the form in its total dimensions. In addition to all this, autistic children face difficulties in the ability to solve problems, weak ability to generalize, and transfer the effect of training between different situations and environments. The problem, whether it requires verbal or visual ability to solve (Nasr, (2001, 39). In addition to problems in transferring attention, distraction, poor memory, and the inability to predict events and facts.

Emotional disorders are among the most important and most serious problems as they limit the effectiveness and efficiency of training and rehabilitation programs and also extends their impact on the level of autistic children with their surroundings. It was simple, which affects a negative impact on their consensus, whether at the psychological or social or emotional level that regular individuals often suffer from weakness at their level of social skills, where their degrees are mostly low on skill standards and this leads to many problems Autism can occur at any social or cultural level, and the risk of autism is higher among male children compared to females, as out of four or five approximately one male and one male.

Some old estimates of the prevalence of autism indicate that about four children out of every ten thousand have autism, and some recent studies show that this percentage may increase to reach ten to twelve cases in every ten thousand children (Williams, 1992), (in Al-Zahrani, 2006).

The mother assists specialists in understanding many aspects of weakness or strength in The child, which does not usually appear in the places of observation and examination such as the clinic or the center, but appears in the mother only because the child does it only at home, so here comes the importance of the active participation of the mother from the first diagnosis process until the formulation, application and evaluation of educational programs on the child.

Studies have indicated that the mother is one of the most important members of the work team. She has information that practically, its members qualify them to take an important role in selecting objectives, setting priorities, following up on training, recording progress on their child



at home, and training them to generalize the skills and skills learned by the school and the technical skills. Many mothers have reached the innovation to work with their autism child, and generate new options and alternatives to resolve some behavioural problems facing at home and thus overcome by experimentation and observation, and its insistence on changing her child's behavior, involving social activities, visits and interaction with others.

### **Second: Psychological Stress**

The concept of psychological stress:

There are many definitions for psychological stress with the multiplicity of theoretical approaches adopted by. Monat & Lazarrus pointed out that there is a confusion between the views on the definition of stress, as some considered it a stimulus, while others took it as a response. A third group referred to it as an interactive process between the stimulus and the response, while a new group tried to remove confusion by distinguishing between the concept of pressure, the source of pressure, and the individual's reaction to pressure. (Al-Masry, 2:2007)

Ress defined psychological stress as any stimuli or changes in the internal and external environment, characterized by intensity and permanence that occur in certain circumstances. These circumstances lead to behavior imbalance or incompatibility, or dysfunction that leads to disease. 1992:19), Blocher (1987) defined it as “a threat facing the satisfaction of a basic need, and that any new adventure may raise pressure to a degree. He believes that psychological pressure does not always have negative effects, rather its presence in an individual’s life leads to new and acceptable behaviors, but exposure to pressure for long periods or not being able to control it may make it psychologically and physically devastating. (In Al-Masry, 2:2007)

### **Theories Explaining Psychological Stress:**

Researchers and theorists have concluded a number of theories in psychology; which can explain psychological pressures such as:

1. Analytical theory: Psychoanalytic theorists have referred to psychological pressures within the concepts of repression, unconsciousness and aggression. The feeling of pressure is nothing but the result of suppressing forbidden motives that do not express themselves clearly. Thus, finding an outlet for them by transferring or displacing them to other topics (Al-Harbi, 2002).
2. Cognitive theory: Beck focused on three levels of knowledge, the first level includes automatic thoughts and is called internal dialogue or self-talk, and if the thoughts are negative, they are stressful. in the second level comes cognitive processes, and it includes how the individual interacts with The stimuli, That is, the ways of presenting and organizing information about the environment and the self and the method of forecasting and evaluating future events, The third level refers to the cognitive structures or schemes, which are knowledge and experiences that the individual acquires during their growth. This knowledge is stored in the form of fixed mental formulas called schemas. If these schemes are frustrating, they create negative thoughts that come to the mind of the individual without noticing them, and lead to an adverse effect on their performance.

Beck explains psychological stress as the result of a disorder of knowledge, which leads to a distorted perception of problems and pressures. He believes that we cannot understand people's reactions to events and stresses that they are going through unless we understand the way they think. According to Beck's approach, the person who is intelligent is the one who takes charge of perceiving and interpreting cognitive events, and therefore our reactions to the same stressful

situation vary from one person to another, but from the same individual if their viewpoint changes or is modified as a result of a different life experience (Atiya, 2010). The cognitive theory confirmed that individual behaves according to the image of perceiving events. as believed - \ (Al-Harbi, (2002).

**Previous studies:**

Mansour's study (2012) aimed to reveal the psychological stress of mothers of autistic adolescents. The study sample comprised (40) mothers of autistic adolescents who were chosen randomly. The researcher developed a psychological stress scale. The results of this study showed that the level of psychological stress for mothers of autistic adolescents is high. In the Leithead study (2012), which aimed to identify the level of parental stress among parents of children with autism disorder and compare its levels with symptoms of autistic disorder, the study sample included (106) individuals, including (99) mothers and (7) fathers of children with autism disorder in Omar (412). The results showed that the parents of children with autism had a much higher level of stress than the parents of normal children. The results also revealed a positive correlation between the level of parental stress and symptoms of autism. That is, the parents of children with poor performance have more stress related to the child than the parents of children with high performance.

Melhem and Asfour (2012) studied the symptoms to detect the psychological stress of mothers of autistic adolescents in Amman on a sample of (40) mothers who were chosen randomly. Some results of the study showed that the level of psychological stress of mothers of autistic adolescents in all areas of the scale was within the average level. And that the highest average was for the dimension of bearing the burdens of the autistic teenager, while the dimension of feelings of despair and frustration for the mother of the adolescent was lower than the average parental stress and autism symptoms, That is, the parents of children with poor performance have more child-related pressures than the parents of high-performing children.

The study of Allen & Webe (2013) aimed to assess the psychological stress of parents of children with autism spectrum disorder in their relationship to four dimensions associated with the symptoms of autism. The first dimension is speech, language and communication, the second dimension is social interaction, the third is related to sensory and cognitive awareness, and the last dimension is related to health and physical behavior. The sample consisted of (124) participants from multiple places. The results indicated that the lack of social interaction increases the psychological pressure of mothers, while the lack of sensory and cognitive awareness is related to the psychological stress of fathers, while the other variables did not predict a significant degree the psychological stress of the fathers. The results indicated the necessity of developing programs to manage the psychological stress of the fathers of children with autism spectrum disorder.

The Haisley study (2014) aimed to identify the level of psychological stress among parents of children with autism spectrum disorder and its relationship to the level of perceived social support and adaptive skills. The study sample consisted of (225) parents who were chosen randomly. The parental stress scale, demographic data questionnaire, and autism symptoms note card were used. The results indicated the presence of an average level of psychological stress among the parents of the research sample, and a negative correlation was found between the level of parental psychological stress and the high level of adaptive skills among children

with autism spectrum disorder.

The study of Brajel and Jabali (2015) revealed the degree of psychological stress experienced by a sample of (33) mothers of autistic children, and the nature of the differences between mothers in the degree of psychological stress according to the variables (mother's age, educational level and work) the researchers designed a questionnaire on psychological stress among mothers. The results concluded that mothers of autistic children have a medium degree of psychological pressure, and there were no statistically significant differences in the degree of psychological stress between mothers of autistic children according to the research variables (age, educational level and work).

Hsiao (2018) conducted a study to identify the level of psychological stress among mothers of children with autism spectrum disorder in light of some variables (educational level, family income) and their relationship to their quality of life. The study sample consisted of (236) mothers of children with autism spectrum disorder. To achieve the goal of the study, the psychological stress scale and the quality of life scale were used, in addition to a questionnaire for demographic data. The results showed that the level of psychological stress among mothers of children with autism spectrum disorder was high. The results also revealed that there are differences in the level of psychological stress among mothers of children with autism spectrum disorder. This is attributed to the educational level in favor of the less educated, and the family's monthly income variable, in favor of those with the lowest income. The results also showed a negative correlation between the level of psychological stress among mothers of autism spectrum disorder children and their quality of life.

Al-Suhaimi study (2021) aimed to reveal the level of psychological stress among parents of children with autism spectrum disorder and to detect differences in psychological stress through demographic variables (gender, educational qualification, and financial conditions), The study sample consisted of (52) from the parents of children with autism spectrum disorder. The researcher used the psychological stress questionnaire, which was prepared by the researcher, and the results revealed that the level of psychological stress among parents of children with autism spectrum disorder came to a medium degree, and the results also showed that there were no statistically significant differences, in the level of Psychological stress attributed to the variables: gender, educational qualification, and their financial conditions.

By extrapolating previous studies, a similarity was in handling of the psychological stress variable among mothers of children with autism spectrum. However, it differs from them in handling awareness of social skills. There is a similarity in one of the studied demographic variables, which is the mother's educational level, while the current study differs in addressing the variable of awareness of social skills and variables of speech difficulties in the autistic child, kinship between spouses, whether the child received any intervention or training, and the gender of the autistic child.

### **Study Hypothes**

1. The level of psychological stress and awareness of social skills differs among mothers of children with autism spectrum disorder.
2. There are no statistically significant differences in psychological stress and awareness of social skills among mothers of children with autism spectrum disorder according to the demographic variables (speech difficulties of the autistic child, kinship between spouses,

whether the child received any intervention or training, the educational level of the mother, the gender of the autistic child.

**Study Sample:**

The study sample consisted of all members of the study community, who are (120 mothers).

**Research Methodology:**

To achieve the objectives of the study, the comparative descriptive method was used.

**Study Tools:**

1. Psychological stress scale:

Psychometric properties of the psychological stress scale:

To find out the psychometric properties of the scale’s paragraphs, the researcher applied its modified form, under the guidance of the arbitrators, which consisted of (14) paragraphs on an initial sample of size (50) or monotheistic, they were chosen in a simple random way from the current study population, and after correcting the responses, the researcher monitored the scores and entered them into the computer and from then the following was done:

a. The validity of the internal consistency of the paragraphs:

To calculate the validity of the scale’s paragraphs consistency with the total score, which consists of (14) items, the following table shows the results of this procedure.

Table (1) shows the result of the Pearson correlation coefficient between the scores of each paragraph with the total score of the psychological stress scale on the exploratory sample

Number	correlation coefficient	Number	correlation coefficient
1	.511**	8	.815**
2ie	.533**	9	.510**
3	.441**	10	.477**
4	.689**	11	.627**
5	.469**	12	.659**
6	.690**	13	.421**
7	.757**	14	.435**

From the above table, it is noted that the correlation coefficient of all items are statistically significant at the level of significance (0.01) and have internal consistency with the total degree of the scale.

b. Stability coefficient:

To calculate the stability of the total degree of the psychological stress scale in its final form in the current study community, the researcher applied the Cronbach's alpha equation and the mid-term segmentation on the data of the exploratory sample.

From all the previous procedures, it is clear that the psychological stress scale is valid for application to the basic sample members.

**Scale of social skills for the autistic child:**

Psychometric properties of the social skills scale:

To calculate the psychometric properties of the scale’s paragraphs, the researcher applied its modified form, under the guidance of the arbitrators, which consisted of (17) paragraphs, on

an initial sample of (50) or monotheistic, who were chosen in a simple random way from the current study population. Then the following was done:

a. The validity of the internal consistency of the paragraphs:

To calculate the consistency of paragraphs' validity with the total score of the scale, which consists of (17) items, the following table shows the results of this procedure.

Table (2) shows the result of the Pearson correlation coefficient between the scores of each paragraph with the total score of the social skills scale on the exploratory sample

Number	correlation coefficient	Number	correlation coefficient
1	.399**	10	.555**
2	.482**	11	.590**
3	.440**	12	.627**
4	.273**	13	.366**
5	.451**	14	.520**
6	.117	15	.284**
7	.086	16	.119
8	.453**	17	.594**
9	.399**		

From the above table, the researcher notes that the correlation coefficient of all items are statistically significant at the level of significance (0.01), except for phrases 6, 7, 16 that are not statistically significant, which were deleted, and thus the scale consisted of (14) phrase with honest internal consistency with the total degree of the scale.

b. Stability coefficient:

To calculate the stability of the total score of the social skills scale in its final form after deleting the expressions that are not related to the total score, the researcher applied the Cronbach's alpha equation and the mid-segmentation to the data of the exploratory sample. They are acceptable values of stability.

From all the previous procedures, it is clear that the social skills scale for the autistic child is valid for application to the basic sample members.

### Study Results and Discussion:

The results of the first hypothesis, which states that "the level of psychological stress and awareness of social skills differs among mothers of children with autism spectrum disorder."

To test the validity of this hypothesis, the arithmetic mean, standard deviation, weighted mean, and evaluation level were calculated, and Table (3) shows this.

Table (3) The arithmetic mean, standard deviation, weighted mean, and evaluation level for the level of psychological stress and awareness of social skills

Variables	Arithmetic mean	Standard deviation	Weighted average	Level* Rating*
Psychological stress	32.97	10.39	2.35	
Awareness of social skills	36.68	9.38	2.62	

\*1 to less than 1.80 very low, 1.80 to less than 2.60 low, 2.60 to less

3.40 medium 3.40 to less than 4.20 high 4.20 to 5.00 very high

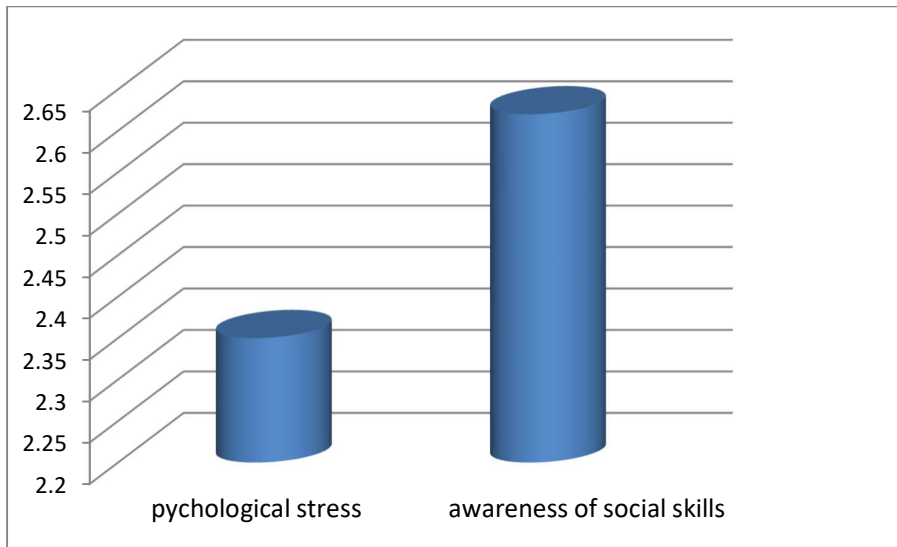


Figure (1) shows the weighted averages of the study variables from the point of view of the mothers of the autistic child

It is clear from Table (3) and Figure (1) that the weighted average value of psychological stress for mothers of autistic children was low (2.35), while awareness of social skills was medium, with a weighted average of (2.62).

The result related to the level of psychological stress among mothers of children with autism spectrum in the current study differs from the results of the study of Lynde (Leithead, 2012), which found that parents of children with autism appeared to have high levels of stress. And the studies of Mansour (2012) and Hsiao (2018), which showed that the level of psychological stress among mothers of children with autism spectrum disorder was high. and Asfour Studies (2012); Haisley (2014, Haisley); Ehsan and Nouredine (2015), Benson (2017), Al-Suhaimi study (2021), which showed that the level of psychological stress for mothers of autistic adolescents was moderate.

This result seems illogical at first glance, especially since the theoretical frameworks and previous studies that dealt with this subject indicate that mothers of children with autism spectrum are exposed to psychological pressures, which vary from medium to high. That is why this result differs with what was confirmed by the results of some studies that mothers of children with autism suffer from a clear feeling of psychological pressure, and that mothers of children with autism are more stressed than mothers of children with other disabilities (Alexandra et al., 2004) and the study of El Bahnasawy and Gerges (Girgis). & Elbahnasawy, 2011), which concluded that autistic children depend entirely on their mothers in their daily lives, which makes mothers vulnerable to psychological stress; and Robinson's study (2017) the results of which indicated that psychological stress among mothers of autistic children stemmed from the nature of the child's condition. The Benson (2017) longitudinal study for a period of (12) years showed that the sources of psychological stress for mothers of autistic children were dependent on the nature of the autistic child's condition, and from the family burdens imposed on the mother.

The researcher explains the result of the first hypothesis through her interviews with mothers of autistic children (the study sample) in Riyadh, as these mothers were able, with their participation, specialists in the field of autism, in the centers and hospitals they frequented from since the first diagnosis process until the formulation, application and evaluation of educational programs on the child. Aspects of their children's personality, so that the mother has become one of the most important members of the work team and has information that qualifies them in practical terms to take an important role in selecting goals, setting priorities, and following up on training and recording their children's progress in learning. center and transported to home. In addition to the mothers attending some training and counseling programs based on rational emotional therapy or cognitive behavioral therapy, group counseling programs and other programs that lead to reducing psychological pressures, developing psychological toughness, psychological resilience, and developing awareness of social skills among them and solving some behavioral problems they face at home. Thus, they were overcome by experimentation and observation, and their insistence on changing the behavior of children for the better, and involving them in social activities, visits and interaction with others.

This result reflects the extent of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's interest in this category of children and their mothers. The Kingdom has been keen, in its 2030 vision to provide appropriate support for children with autism spectrum disorder and their mothers, and to provide educational, and training rehabilitation services to help them merge in society.

The results of the second hypothesis, which states that "there are no statistically significant differences in psychological stress and awareness of social skills among mothers of children with autism spectrum disorder according to demographic variables (speech difficulties of the autistic child, kinship between spouses, whether the child received any intervention or training, educational level for the mother, the gender of the autistic child).

Before verifying the validity of the second hypothesis, the researcher examined the moderation distribution of the measure of psychological stress and awareness of social skills among the study sample according to demographic variables using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov-Kolmogorov test, the Wild-Shapiro test, to use the appropriate statistics, and the table (4) illustrates this

Table (4) Smirnov-Kolmogorov test Wild-Shapiro test for study variables

Variables	Articulation difficulty	Demographic variable	Smirnov-Kolmogorov			Shapiro-Wilk		
Psychological stress	Yes	Articulation difficulty	0.158	101	0.000	0.948	101	0.001
	No		0.203	19	0.038	0.923	19	0.130
Awareness of social skills	Yes		0.116	101	0.002	0.936	101	0.000
	No		0.107	19	.200	0.967	19	0.714
Psychological stress	Yes	Kinship between parents	0.174	53	0.000	0.932	53	0.005
	No		0.156	67	0.000	0.959	67	0.026
Awareness of social skills	Yes		0.173	53	0.000	0.92	53	0.002
	No		0.131	67	0.006	0.946	67	0.006
Psychological stress	Yes	Intervention and training	0.163	111	0.000	0.949	111	0.000
	No		0.169	9	.200	0.957	9	0.765
	Yes		0.105	111	0.004	0.944	111	0.000

Awareness of social skills	No		0.172	9	.200	0.927	9	0.452
Psychological stress	Female	Gender	0.239	8	.200	0.892	8	0.242
	Male		0.162	112	0.000	0.953	112	0.001
Awareness of social skills	Female		0.144	8	.200	0.975	8	0.933
	Male		0.11	112	0.002	0.938	112	0.000
Psychological stress	undergraduate	Mother's education level	0.167	96	0.000	0.951	96	0.001
	Graduate		0.132	24	.200	0.952	24	0.306
Awareness of social skills	undergraduate		0.111	96	0.005	0.93	96	0.000
	Graduate		0.123	24	.200	0.962	24	0.483

It is clear from Table (4) that there is inconsistency in the data used in studying psychological stress or awareness of social skills according to demographic variables, so the differences were calculated using the Mann Whitney test for the second hypothesis as follows:a.

a. Variable speech difficulties in autistic children:

In order to find out the source of the difference in the average degrees of psychological stress and awareness of social skills, the Mann-Whitney test was used, and the results were shown in Table (5).

Table (5), the results of the Mann-Whitney test for psychological stress and awareness of social skills according to the variable of speech difficulties in the autistic child

Variable	Difficulty on articulation	Number	Ranking average	Ranking total	Weighted average	Arithmetic mean
	Yes	101	60.79	6139.5	930.5	0.834
	No	19	58.97	1120.5		
	Yes	101	62.34	6296.5	773.5	0.181
	No	19	50.71	963.5		

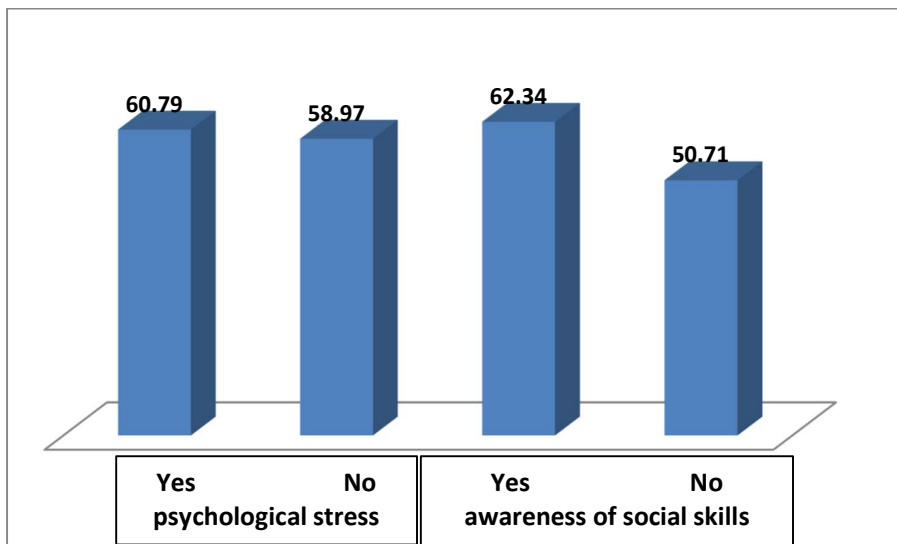


Figure (2), shows the differences between the mean ranks of the study variables according to the



variable of speech difficulties of the autistic child

It is clear from Table (5) and the previous figure that there are no differences in psychological stress and awareness of social skills among mothers of autistic children who have speech difficulties and who do not have speech difficulties.

b. Relationship between parents:

In order to find out the source of the difference in the mean scores of psychological stress and awareness of social skills according to the kinship variable, the Mann-Whitney test was used and the results were shown in Table (6).

Table (6), the results of the Mann-Whitney test for psychological stress and awareness of social skills according to the kinship variable among the parents of the autistic child

Variable	Kinship relation	Number	Ranking average	Ranking total	Weighted average	Arithmetic mean
Psychological stress	Yes	53	62.61	3318.5	1663.5	0.553
	No	67	58.83	3941.5		
Awareness of social skills	Yes	53	60.46	3204.5	1773.5	0.992
	No	67	60.53	4055.5		

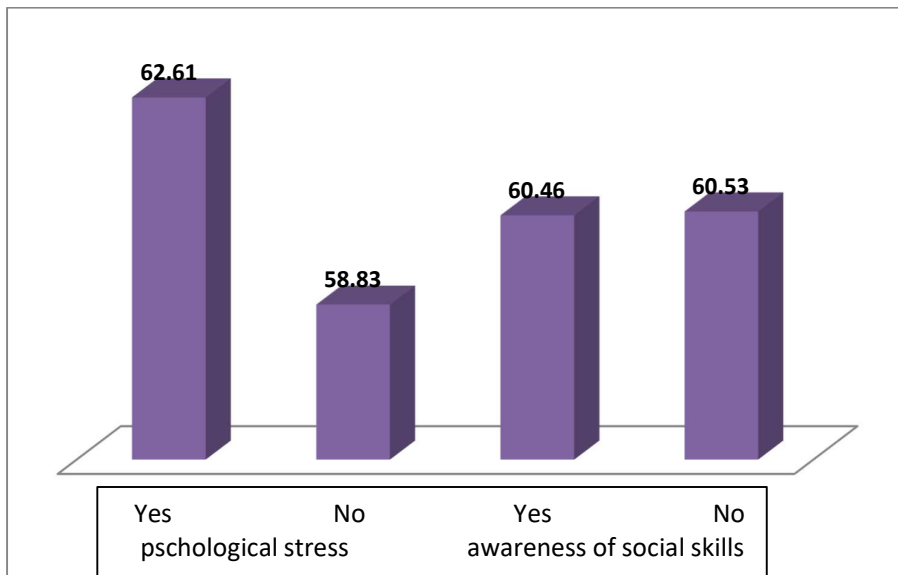


Figure (3), the differences between the mean ranks of the study variables according to the kinship variable among the parents of the autistic child

It is clear from Table (6) and the previous figure that there are no differences in psychological stress and awareness of social skills among mothers of an autistic child for the kinship variable between parents (yes-no).

c. Support provided (the child receiving any intervention or training in any center or facility specialized in speech, speech, communication and training inside or outside the Kingdom):

To find out the source of the difference in the average scores of psychological stress and awareness of social skills according to the variable of support provided to the autistic child, the Mann-Whitney test was used, and the results were shown in Table (7).

Table (7), the results of the Mann-Whitney test for psychological stress and awareness of social skills according to the variable of support provided to the autistic child from the mothers' point

of view

Variable	Suppose	Number	Ranking average total	Ranking total	Weighted average	Arithmetic mean
Psychological stress	Yes	111	60.08	6668.50	452.5	0.639
	No	9	65.72	591.50		
Awareness of social skills	Yes	111	59.41	6594.50	378.5	0.227
	No	9	73.94	665.50		

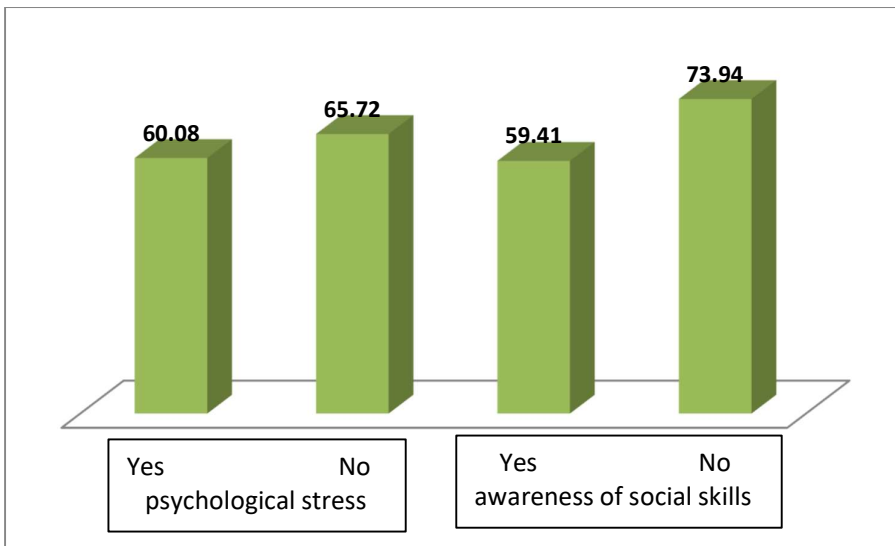


Figure (4), the differences between the average ranks of the study variables according to the variable of support provided to the autistic child from the mothers' point of view. It is clear from Table (7) and Figure (4) that there are no differences in psychological stress and awareness of social skills among mothers of autistic children in those whose children received support and those who were not.

c. The educational level of the mother:

To find out the source of the difference in the mean scores of psychological stress and awareness of social skills according to the variable of the educational level of the mother (below university - university), the Mann-Whitney test was used and the results were shown in Table (8).

Table (8), The results of the Mann-Whitney test for psychological stress and awareness of social skills according to the variable of the educational level of the mother

Variable	Qualification	Number	Ranking average	Ranking total	Weighted average	Arithmetic mean
Psychological stress	Undergraduate	96	56.72	5445.0	789.0	0.017
	Graduate	24	75.63	1815.0		
Awareness of social skills	Undergraduate	96	58.21	5588.0	932.0	0.148
	Graduate	24	69.67	1672.0		

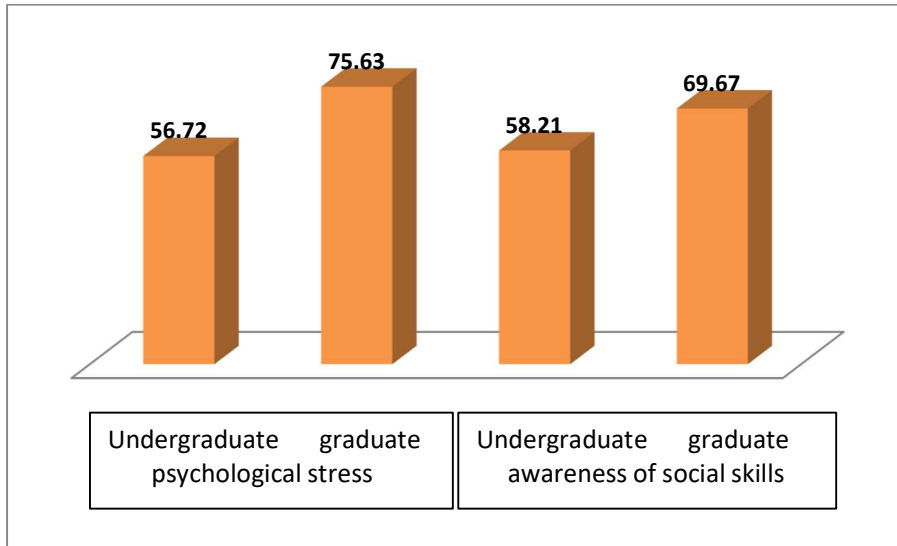


Figure (5), the differences between the mean ranks of the study variables according to the variable of the educational level of the mother

It is clear from Table (8) and Figure (5) that there are differences in psychological stress among mothers of autistic children in favor of those who have university qualifications. The variable of university qualification for mothers.

This result is consistent with the differences in psychological stress with the results of the study of Ihsan and Nour Al-Din (2015) and the result of the Al-Suhaimi study (2021), which concluded that there are no statistically significant differences in the degree of psychological stress among mothers of autistic children according to the educational level variable. However, it differs from the result of a study conducted by Hsiao (2018), which showed that there are differences in the level of psychological stress among mothers of children with autism spectrum disorder attributed to the educational level in favor of the less educated.

e. Gender (male-female) of the autistic child:

In order to find out the source of the difference in the average degrees of psychological stress and awareness of social skills according to the gender variable of the autistic child, the Mann-Whitney test was used, and the results were shown in Table (9).

Table (9), results of the Mann-Whitney Test for Psychological Stress and Awareness of Social Skills according to the gender variable of the autistic child (male-female)

variable	Gender	Number	Ranking average	Ranking total	Weighted average	Arithmetic mean
Psychological stress	Female	8	60.13	481.0	445.0	0.975
	Male	112	60.53	6779.0		
Awareness of social skills	Female	8	90.50	724.0	208.0	0.011
	Male	112	58.36	6536.0		

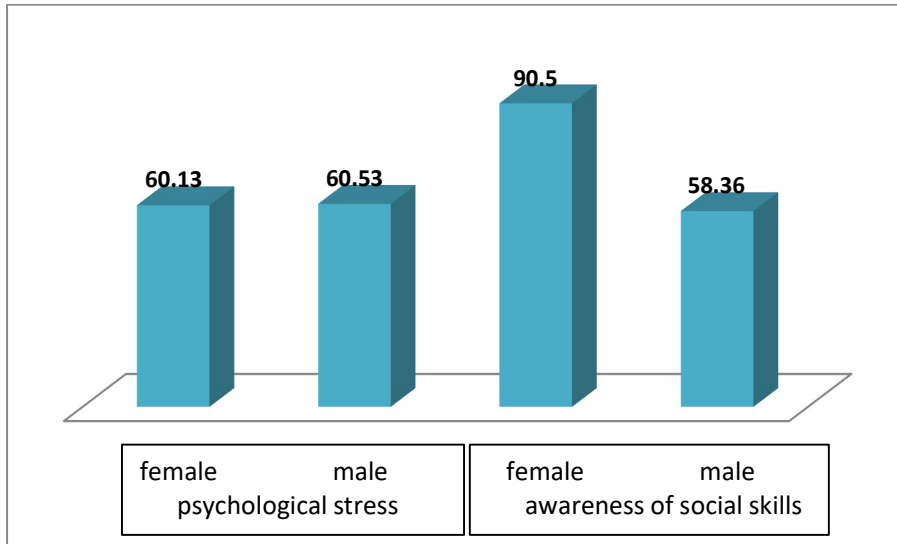


Figure (6), the differences between the mean ranks of the study variables according to the gender variable of the autistic child (male - female)

It is clear from the previous table and the previous figure that there are no differences in psychological stress among mothers of an autistic child according to the gender of the autistic child (female - male). Statistically significant at the level (0.05).

**Discussing the results of the second hypothesis:**

The researcher attributes the absence of statistically significant differences in each of the psychological stresses and awareness of social skills among the mothers of the autistic child according to the variables: speech difficulties (those who have / and those who do not have speech difficulties); Consanguinity between parents (existing / non-existent); Child support (for those whose children receive support/for whom support is not provided); And the gender of the autistic child (female-male). And the absence of differences between mothers in the awareness of the social skills of the autistic child according to the variable of the university qualification of the mothers. To the fact that the mothers of these children are not affected by their care and attention for their children, whether the child has difficulty speaking or not; received support or not; or whether there is a kinship relationship between the parents; or the child being female or male; this is due to the affection of motherhood. Those emotions that God created in the hearts of mothers and fathers, for the mercy, affection and tenderness deposited in the hearts of parents - and the mother in particular - parents can be patient in raising children. This may also be due to the social and psychological support that the mother receives from her family and from the specialized centres that provide their various services to care for these children. This may be due to the mothers' compatibility with their children's disabilities using adaptation strategies and coping with those pressures.

The researcher also attributes the existence of differences in the psychological pressures of the mothers of the autistic child in favour of those with university qualifications to the fact that the educational level has an impact on various aspects of personality, including the emotional aspect. And the negative effects of having an autistic child in the family. The existence of differences between mothers in awareness of social skills may be due to the benefit of those who have an autistic child (female), due to the nature of the female in being closer to the mother than the male son.

## Recommendations

- Conducting more studies on the level of awareness of social skills among mothers of children with autism spectrum disorder.
- Providing specialized training courses on a regular basis for mothers and educators of autistic children, in order to understand their guiding and preventive roles, and to identify how to develop their non-verbal communication.
- Preparing qualified cadres to work with autistic children.
- The necessity of paying attention to the autistic category, establishing classes for them, and creating special programs for them to help them integrate into society and become an effective and influential part in it.
- **Acknowledgment:**

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