

Chapter 1

Parental Stress During the Career Transition of Students With ASD

ABSTRACT

This study examined the dimensions of parental stress experienced during the career transition of students with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) in Nigeria. A sample of seventy-six parents completed the Career Transition-Related Parental Stress Questionnaire, which measured stress across six domains, namely, career planning stress, service navigation stress, financial stress, work-family balance stress, emotional stress, and social support stress. Findings revealed high overall stress, with service navigation representing the most intense stressor. Career planning, financial, work-family balance, and social support dimensions also showed high stress levels, while emotional stress was moderate. We did not identify meaningful differences in relation to demographic factors. These findings underscore the need for structured transition support and coordinated services that would address these stressors. Strengthening existing systems of care is crucial for reducing parental stress and improving transition outcomes for students with ASD.

BACKGROUND

Autism spectrum disorders (ASD) are regarded as neurodevelopmental conditions influenced by genetic predispositions and environmental factors (Crowell et al., 2019; Sraboni, 2023; Victor-Aigbodion & Eseadi, 2025). Children who have ASD (CASD) frequently experience concerns in communicating and interacting socially, along with restricted and recurrent patterns of behaviour, which generally appear in the initial years of life (Crowell et al., 2019; Mushambi et al., 2024; Obasi et al.,

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2019; Shen & Zhang, 2025). Although these characteristics do not originate from parental actions, the social and communication difficulties associated with ASD can place considerable strain on everyday interactions between parents and their children (Crowell et al., 2019; Nguyen et al., 2025). McStay et al. (2014) observed that among the various child characteristics, hyperactivity was the singular factor that notably predicted parental stress, outweighing the ASD severity and the child's overall life quality. This suggests that challenging behaviours have a substantial role in determining parents' stress levels and their perceptions of their own parenting competence than other developmental features that parents may believe they can manage or influence. Sustained parental stress may, over time, influence relational dynamics and contribute to developmental difficulties for the child (Crowell et al., 2019; Karst & Van Hecke, 2012). In essence, chronic parental stress can become a secondary risk factor that shapes how the child develops socially, emotionally, and behaviourally, amplifying existing challenges associated with ASD.

Parental stress encompasses the psychological and physiological responses parents experience when they perceive the demands of parenting as overwhelming and beyond their coping abilities (Abidin et al., 2022; Bochner et al., 2023). This stress, according to Ríos et al. (2022), is often characterised by an individual's perceived difficulty and inadequacy in managing parenting responsibilities, and is often experienced as a negative emotional response that can undermine positive parenting behaviours and contribute to dysfunctional parenting. Craig et al. (2016) indicated that parenting CASD is linked to greater stress than is observed among parents of neurotypical children. In their study, Ayinla et al. (2019) reported that 64.5 per cent of Nigerian parents whose children have ASD experienced mild to moderate stress, and their overall coping strategies were assessed as fair. The fact that coping strategies were rated as only fair implies that although parents are managing, they still lack access to effective support systems. This points to a gap in interventions, guidance, and resources that could strengthen Nigerian parents' capacity to manage the concerns of parenting CASD. A study by Ng et al. (2021) revealed four main factors which contributed to stress among parents of CASD, which included psychopathological symptoms of parents, cultural factors, problem behaviours displayed by the child, and the overall burden of caregiving. These factors were shown to influence how parents cope with daily demands and had significant implications for the family's overall quality of life. Nevertheless, we would like to emphasise that stress among parents of CASD can be understood through other dimensions, such as career planning stress, service navigation stress, financial stress, work-family balance stress, emotional stress, and social support stress.

Career planning stress refers to the anxiety and uncertainty parents experience when attempting to support their child with ASD in identifying and preparing for an appropriate vocational direction. It encompasses parents' worries about the availability

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