

**DOCTORAL THESIS IN BRIEF**

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Autism is a form of pervasive developmental disorder in many aspects, including mainly social relations skills, verbal communication, and abnormal behavior. Currently, the number of autistic children is increasing in all countries in the world, concentrated in big cities. In Vietnam, autism was known only in the 90s of the twentieth century. There are no official statistics on the number of autistic children nationwide, but statistics at small scales show that the number of autistic children is not small.

The identification of children with autism is a huge shock to their loved ones, especially young parents. Consultation is thought to be a form of psychological assistance suitable for parents of autistic children who are facing many crises and difficulties in life. Counseling helps them improve their ability to overcome these challenges and solve problems, change negative thoughts to improve the family atmosphere.

The thesis contributes to systematizing and adding some psychological theoretical issues on the psychological counseling needs of parents of autistic children in psychological theory in general and applied psychology in particular. From there, it analyzes the expression, the level of psychological counseling needs of parents of autistic children, and the factors affecting these needs.

Apart from the Introduction, Lists of tables and charts, Appendixes and References, the thesis is represented in 4 chapters. Chapter 1 provides a literature review; Chapter 2 clarifies the theoretical basis on the psychological counseling needs of parents of autistic children; Chapter 3 discusses the research methods and implementation; Chapter 4 presents the research results on the psychological counseling needs of parents of autistic children. The last part is the Conclusion and Recommendations.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), autism is a lifelong developmental disability, usually detected in the first 3 years of life. Autism is caused by a type of neurological disorder that affects brain function. Autism is manifested through impairments of social interaction, linguistic and nonverbal communication, behaviors, hobbies, and limited and repetitive activities. Autism can happen to any child, regardless of gender, rich or poor, race, or social status.

The need for psychological counseling of parents of autistic children is the need for interaction, exchanges, and psychological support before the psychological difficulties they face. In the process of interacting with parents of autistic children, the counselor helps them be aware of their problems exactly, and exploits their potentials to actively and effectively respond to psychological difficulties encountered in life, thereby contributing to psychological balance, improving the life quality of individuals and families.

The method of quantitative survey by questionnaire for 120 parents with autistic

children was applied in the thesis. The survey results show that most parents face psychological difficulties in the process of caring for and raising them (119/120 cases). Some parents face only one psychological difficulty, some encounters two or more, even all the difficulties raised by the thesis, including the ones: (1) in clearing negative emotions; (2) related to the lack of autistic children's care skills; (3) in demanding fair treatment, avoiding discrimination for children; (4) in accessing social and educational services; (5) associated with the lack of knowledge about autistic children. Facing these challenges, the majority of parents with children with autism often look to teachers who teach children with autism to learn experience (average score of 3.19 (1)); seek advice from experienced people or other parents who have children with autism (average score of 3.01); read related documents, or confide in acquaintances to seek advice, etc.

According to the author's assessment, most parents of autistic children (97.5%) have the need for psychological counseling when they face these difficulties in different issues and to different degrees. More than 90% of surveyed parents have the need to consult to overcome difficulties in clearing negative emotions, in requiring fair treatment, and avoiding discrimination; more than 80% have a need for psychological counseling because of their lack of knowledge related to autism, skills to care for children with autism, and difficult access to social - educational services. However, their needs are generally only moderate (2), that is, several parents of children with autism have certain concerns and hesitations when seeking psychological assistance. Many of them have known and even used this service,

but they think that it is not necessary to have psychological consultation. When there is a psychological problem, they will focus on the need for psychological counseling on that issue.

Comparing the need for psychological counseling based on variables shows that parents of autistic children, regardless of father or mother, currently living together or separately, monthly income, all have the same need for psychological counseling when they are experiencing psychological difficulties. There is no difference between groups. However, families with autistic daughters have a higher need for psychological counseling to "release their emotions" than families with autistic sons. The group of parents with lower education levels needs to consult about "access to social services", "lack of information related to autism" and "finding suitable environment and learning mode for autistic children" higher than parents whose educational attainment is university or higher. Parents who have looked after children with autism for 1 to 3 years have a higher need for psychological counseling to "release their emotions" than other groups; parents who have looked after autistic children for more than 3 years have a higher need for psychological counseling in order to "access social services" than parents who have looked after children for less than 1 year.

Parents of autistic children receive psychological counseling in the direct or indirect form, in which the former one is preferred. The overall need for psychological counseling of parents of children with autism is moderate (average score of 2.63). Parents have a much higher need for face-to-face counseling (average

score of 3.01) than for indirect counseling (average score of 2.17). The most chosen form of consultation is “Direct consultation at the office, center ...” (average score of 3.4), in which the majority (53.9%) of parents have high demand for this. Two other direct forms, “Group consultation” and “Personal consultation at home”, were also selected. Among the indirect consultation forms, “Telephone consultation” is highly appreciated; “Newspaper and/or Radio consultation” and “Mail consultation” are less selected.

When looking for a psychologist, most parents don’t care about age, but older counselors will be given priority. In addition, they also tend to seek mentors of the same gender and have extensive experience working on psychological counseling. Three factors affect the need for psychological counseling, namely, the perception of parents of autistic children about psychological counseling; level of social support; and social-cultural values. The results of the single regression test show that the level of social support is the most powerful factor affecting the psychological needs of parents of autistic children, but the impact level is not high. In terms of each manifestation of the need for psychological counseling, while both the level of social support and socio-

cultural values impact the expression of content and form of consultation, the former has a stronger effect.

Based on the analysis of the current situation of psychological counseling needs of parents of autistic children, the author made recommendations for parents of autistic children (such as fully aware of their psychological difficulties, acquiring knowledge related to autistic children; actively seek psychological counseling services; coordinate with counselors in the process of overcoming difficulties, etc.); for people who do psychological counseling (such as improve counseling skills; actively participate in groups of parents of autistic children, etc.); for psychological counseling centers, specialized schools and centers (such as improving the quality of psychological counseling; coordinating with relevant agencies in helping families with autistic children; actively communicate to reduce stigma associated with autistic children; etc.).

The thesis is successfully defended before the Thesis Examination Council, held at the Graduate Academy of Social Sciences (Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences) in 2019.

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