

**CARE OF AUTISTIC CHILDREN: THE BURDENS OF SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS AND  
INCOME EXPENDITURE ON PARENTS IN PORT HARCOURT METROPOLIS IN RIVERS  
STATE, NIGERIA**

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**ABSTRACT**

*The focus of the study was the care of autistic children and the burdens of social relationships along with income expenditure on parents in Port Harcourt Metropolis in Rivers State, Nigeria. Two objectives and two research questions were generated for the study. Descriptive design was used for the study. The population of the study consisted of parents of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in autism centres in Port Harcourt Metropolis in Rivers State. A sample of 100 respondents was randomly selected for the study. The selection was done through the use of simple random sampling and accidental sampling techniques. A questionnaire was used for data collection. The questionnaire was face-validated by professionals in the Department of Sociology, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Port Harcourt, Choba. In addition, the reliability value of 0.82 Correlation Co-efficient was established for the study. Biographic data of the respondents and responses from research questions were analysed using percentage and frequency tables. The results of the analyses revealed that the care of autistic children increased and were linked to the burdens of social relationships and income expenditure on parents in Port Harcourt Metropolis in Rivers State. Based on the findings, the study recommended, among others that the State Government should carry out serious programmes that would sensitise members of society on the pains of stigmatization and discrimination of parents and their autistic children suffer, so that they adopt a lenient and sympathetic relationship with the members of the families of autistic patients.*

**Keywords: Care of Autistic Children, Burdens of Social Relationships, Income Expenditure, Parents**

**INTRODUCTION**

According to Karimi *et. al.* (2017), Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a developmental disability with age of onset in childhood (under 3years old). Also, ASD is defined as a family of neuron-developmental disorders which is characterized by definite impairments in social interactions, abnormalities in speech, and stereotyped pattern of behaviour (Monz *et. al.* 2019). Truly, because of the heavy complications and impairments associated with this disorder, Masaba *et. al.* (2021) averred that caring for children with ASD is demanding, especially where access to services and support are inadequate.

In fact, caring for children with ASD has a lot of implications. It puts the burdens of social relationship with others on parents and also involved high income expenditure which constitutes a nightmare for parents. Obviously, parents of children with ASD suffer challenges associated with social behaviour relationship denial, income depletion, traumas, among other inconveniences, in society. For instance, Seymour (2013:40) in a study entitled "Relationship between Maternal Fatigue, Maternal Stress and Coping, and Behavioural Problems of Children with ASD" which involved a total of 65 mothers who have children with ASD found that mothers suffer fatigue and this maternal fatigue also influenced the relationship between a child's problem behaviour and maternal stress. The study also revealed that such fatigue caused in parents as a result of the

characteristic behavioural problems of children with ASD negatively impacted such parents that are coping with stress level (Seymour, 2013).

Also, apart from mental stress, the majority of parents interviewed feels embarrassed and rejected when they go out with their autistic child as reported by Oduyemi *et. al*, (2021). Indeed, as they also noted, ASD stigma affects both the children suffering the syndrome and their parents. In fact, most of these parents, if not all, internalize their stigma and carry it about consciously as a heavy burden on their psyche. So, as for the children with ASD, these individuals are considered to be most vulnerable worldwide (Appiah and Osei, 2023). This, according to Appiah and Osei (2023), they are most vulnerable due to the fact that they suffer discrimination, inequality in access to health and education services and other societal opportunities.

Apart from social relationship burden and the discriminatory attitudes of people towards parents and caregivers as well as the autistic children, there are as mentioned earlier in the discussion serious financial burdens on parents, the world over. For instance, Liao and Li (2019) noted, concerning the parents of autistic children, that they were susceptible to adverse employment impacts and increased financial burdens, especially for mothers. Also, Ou, *et. al*. (2015) in their study entitled Employment and Financial Burden of Families with Preschool Children Diagnosed with ASDs in urban China: Results from a Descriptive Study noted that fifty eight per cent of families with ASD children and 19% of families with other disability (OD) children reported that child care had greatly affected their employment decisions, compared with 9% of families with typically developing (TD) children.

Additionally, these researchers also reported that the average loss of annual income associated with having a child with ASD was Chinese Ren Min Bi (RMB) 44,077 (\$7,226) compared with RMB 20,788 (\$3,408) for families of OD children (Ou, *et. al*, 2015). Also, regarding the cost-care of children with ASD, Suhaimi and Mohamed (2022) explained that fathers faced financial challenges in three aspects: education, therapy or treatment and transportation cost. Ahmad (2020) in a study entitled The Challenges Faced by the Parents of Autistic children in Jordan also found that the parents of autistic children in Jordan not only face financial, but also experience social, marital, psychological and other challenges. Emphasizing the financial challenges, Ahmed (2020) noted that the costs of providing special education and medication are high.

## **Literature Review**

### **Care of Autistic Children and Burdens of Social Relationship on Parents**

There are several social challenges faced by parents with autistic children. Some parents are saddled with problem of stress, most specifically distress due to the burden involved in the care of children with autism. In fact, because of this, some parents lose most of their time taking care of their autistic children and because of their situation, some of these parents do not also have time for themselves and are not regular in attending to their paid jobs. In fact, commenting on these inconveniences suffered by parents, the Hands Centre for Autism (2022:1) observed as follows:

Many parents of children on the autism spectrum will leave their desires behind to entirely focus on their child's wellbeing. While parents do this out of love, it can cause problems if parents do not take care of themselves as well. Children will pick up on their parents' feelings, especially when they feel frustrated, exhausted, or burned out. Parents of children with autism must remember that they are still human themselves and deserve breaks for their health.

Apart from the frustration associated with the burden of care of children with autism, parents most time are discriminated as well as stigmatized for having children that are not normal. These

children have certain unusual physical features that are different from those of the other children. Some members of society have even attributed the physical features and/or social skills of the autistic children to punishments from the gods and goddesses on their parents. They link the conditions of autistic children to deities that are offended by parents rather than to medical situation.

Indeed, the discrimination and stigmatization of parents of autistic children is a global issue, and has assumed many dimensions. For instance, in Turkey, Rfat, *et. al.* (2023) stated that parents of children with ASDs diagnosis are more likely to experience exclusion, belittlement and discrimination when they take their children into community. Also, Rfat, *et. al.*, (2023:21) as well, found other challenges in their study entitled "Parenting Challenges in Families of Children with a Diagnosis of ASD: A Qualitative Research Study in Istanbul". According to the results:

Parents of autistic children experience a range of challenges in Turkey, including mental health issues, familial disputes, economic problems, and social discrimination. Although it is difficult to generalize from this study, we have observed severe consequences of exclusion criticism, and labelling of families in their social environment, which have pushed them away from their communities. The economic and mental health burdens parents faced require extra attention from policy makers as well as social workers and health providers. The government, alongside social workers, should allocate more resources for these parents to alleviate their struggles (Rfat, *et al*, 2023:21).

In fact, the problems of autistic parents are complex, and are more compounded by the irregular and strange behaviours of these affected children. Many of these autistic children regrettably have sleep disorder and scream at night and also exhibit irregular behaviour responses; this negatively affects their parents' social dispositions. Some parents, as a result develop social phobia and / or stress. It is in line with this experience by parents that Khanam (2018) asserted that there are high-risk factors that might induce acute or chronic stress and trauma to the parents of autistic children and, lead to dysfunctional parenting. Furthermore; Khanam (2018:82) pointed out that:

Parents of autistic children feel hesitation to communicate; ...They feel isolation from social activities and feel sadness for this curse. Parents feel mental disorder in their daily life. Parents think about what will be the future of their children and how they will improve and cooperate with others. The stress of caring for an autistic child is both real and acute.

### **Care of Autistic Children and Burdens of Income Expenditure on Parents**

There is no gainsaying the fact that parents of children with autism spend much money for their care. These cases of expenditure include money spent for their hospital care, education and other social care in society. According to Parish *et. al.* (2011), there is a robust association between state medical spending for children with disabilities and financial burdens incurred by families raising children with autism, whose care is exceptionally costly. Also, Parish *et. al.* (2011:1) in their study entitled Families Financial Burden of Raising Children with Autism: Association with State Medicaid Spending elaborated on such spending thus:

Families living in states with more generous Medicaid programmes, measured in per capita spending for disabled children, report reduced health care costs incurred in caring for their children with autism. Overall, 78% of families with a child with autism had health care expenditures for their child the prior to 12 months. Among

these families, 54% reported expenditures over \$500 with 34% spending over 3% of their total household income.

In regrettable circumstances, Lavelle *et. al.* (2014:523) in their study entitled "Economic Burden of Childhood ASD" reported that the average annual medical expenses for a child diagnosed with autism in 2011 was about \$3020; this cost was 18% higher than that of a child without a diagnosis of autism. In a similar vein, Aadil *et. al.* (2014) also commented on such heavy spending in the following words: Like other forms of childhood disability, parents of a child with autism often face greater outlays of time and money. As well, Befkadu *et. al.* (2022) also observed that autism imposes extra and costly expenses to provide a balanced diet, to cover medical therapies, and to pay for extracurricular activities. They also noted that besides the expenses, autism affects parents' income and caused or rather forced a few parents to resign from their jobs, or work fewer hours to care for their children.

In line with the foregoing, Liao and Li (2019) in their study entitled Economic Burdens on Parents of Children with Autism: A Literature Review found that parents of autistic children were susceptible to adverse employment impacts and increased financial burdens, especially the mothers. In a related study entitled Mothers of Autistic Children, Jaslow (2012) found that mothers of children with autism earned 56 per cent less money – almost \$15,000 per year - than moms of children with health issues other than autism.

Generally, costs towards traditional ASD – related therapies such as physiotherapy, speech therapy, equestrian therapy, occupational therapy, and music therapy are usually seen to be very high. In support of the above view, Geldenhuys (2019) reported that the use of more than one intervention can carry tremendous costs, as consultation fees to visit health professionals are expensive, especially for those from the lower social class in South Africa. Geldenhuys investigation was actually entitled The Financial and Psychological Cost of Raising a Child with ASD: A Qualitative Study. In conformity with the above findings, Kamau (2017:5) in a special project report carried out in Kenya explained *inter alia*:

Guardians travel over 100 miles from remote parts of the country for monthly clinic to a national hospital. This is because most of the expert professionals are largely available within the confines of big cities. Furthermore, results of the present study noted that caregivers' financial crises state is worsened by their low socioeconomic status in society.

### **Statement of the Problem**

In traditional Nigeria societies, autism was not seen as a medical condition, but as a curse from deities to punish parents who offended them or violated the customs and traditions of their lands. But as societies continue to evolve, people began to have different interpretations about autism. In the post independence Nigeria, the medics understood autism as medical condition, but had little or no knowledge about its management or care. But further developments in the study of autism show that this syndrome could be given expert attention and care. However, these attention and treatment carry a lot of financial commitment. Thus, parents of children with ASD were saddled with socioeconomic and socio - psychological burdens, due to the rising cases of autism in Nigeria.

Autism has been ascertained as a complicated medical health condition and so involved a lot of activities and inputs on the part of the parents as well as caregivers of autistic children. As a matter of fact, Rada and Kika (2012) in their study entitled The Role of Parents in Assisting Children with Autism found that their roles consisted in

- (i) Everyday services of personal care such as eating, washing, dressing, personal security etc.;
- (ii) Socializing of the child in and out of home environment as well as their encouragement to participate in games and other activities with his/her peers;
- (iii) Accompaniment of children in receiving service provided for them and implementation at home of specific tasks asked by the professionals;

In all of these activities, mothers are the ones bearing more responsibilities due to the fact that fathers are the main bread winners at home.

In a similar investigation, Schuck *et. al.* (2022) in their work entitled How is Parental Educational Involvement Related to School Satisfaction for Parents of Young Autistic Children? Schuck *et. al.* (2022) reported that parental involvement is positively correlated with school satisfaction. This investigation however, noted that how various involvement activities are differentially related to satisfaction has not been extensively investigated. Chin *et. al.* (2023) in their study entitled Exploring Coping Strategies of Parents of Children with ASD in Taiwa: A Qualitative Study found that Taiwanese parents of children with ASD coped with the psychological impacts of parenting by employing problem – focused and emotion – focused strategies.

In fact, Centre of Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) (2022) in a study entitled ASD, Family Health History and Genetics explained that although the cause of ASD is known in some people and not known in others. This is so because genetic, biologic and environmental factors are important in change of behaviours in humans. Also, as part of the responsibilities of parents towards contending with the issue of autism among children, Monnarino and Ghazai (2023) with a view to helping out, undertook a study entitled Genetic Testing before pregnancy: What You Need to Know and found that the preconception testing, or genetic testing before pregnancy, involves screening parents for genetic disorders or abnormalities before trying to conceive. According to Monnarino and Ghazai, (2023), this can help people trying to conceive as well as make them feel more informed about their own health history before making the choice to have a child.

In spite all of the various efforts by parents and experts in the field, there is still increase in children with ASD with consequent increase of their burdens on parents in many places including Port Harcourt Metropolis, Rivers State. It is on the basis of these facts, that this study investigated the care of autistic children and the burdens of social relationships as well as income expenditure on parents in Port Harcourt Metropolis in Rivers State, Nigeria.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The following objectives are set for the study:

- i. To investigate how the care of autistic children increases the burdens of social relationships on parents in Port Harcourt Metropolis in Rivers State.
- ii. To ascertain how the care of autistic children increases the burdens of income expenditure on parents in Port Harcourt Metropolis in Rivers State.

### **Research Questions**

- i. How does the care of autistic children increase the burden of social relationships on parents in Port Harcourt Metropolis in Rivers State?
- ii. How does the Care of autistic children increase the burden of income expenditure on parents in Port Harcourt Metropolis in Rivers State?

### **METHODOLOGY**

Descriptive research design was used for the study. The population of the study consisted of parents of children with ASD in autism centres in Port Harcourt Metropolis in Rivers State. A

sample of 100 respondents was selected for the study. The selection was done by the use of simple random sampling and accidental sampling techniques. The simple random sampling technique was used to select one autism centre in Port Harcourt Metropolis. In order to select the autism centre which should serve as the area of study, all the names of the autism centres in Port Harcourt were written on pieces of papers and wrapped up by the researcher. These wrapped up papers were then put into a basket for picking. One research assistant was called to shake up the wrapped papers for the purpose of picking one of the autism centres. Through this process, the research assistant called upon picked the paper that carries "OLG Heart Foundation and Autism Centre" for the study. The respondents were accidentally selected using accidental sampling technique (selected those they ran into). In all, 100 respondent parents of children with ASD were selected for the study.

The instrument used for data collection was the questionnaire. It was structured into Section A: Biographic data with multiple questions (items) based on educational status, occupational status, marital status, levels of income earned for livelihood, levels of burden of social relationships on parents of autistic children and levels of income expenditure on parents of autistic children at the time of this study; and Section B: which carries field responses based on research questions (multiple questions), with regard to care of autistic children and burdens of social relationships and income expenditure on parents in the study area.

Face validity of the instrument was established by professionals in the Department of Sociology, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Port Harcourt, Choba. Apart from this, test-retest method of reliability was used to ascertain the reliability value of 0.82 Correlation Coefficient for the study. Then researcher administered the copies of the questionnaire with the help of his paid assistants. The copies of questionnaire were collected immediately the responses were completed by the respondents. The statistical methods employed in the analysis were percentage and frequency tables. The percentage and frequency tables were statistical methods used to analyze biographic data and responses from the research questions for the study.

**Result**

The results of the study are presented in Tables 1, 2 and 3. Table 1 results deal with biographic data of respondents while Tables 2 and 3 results deal with responses from research questions for the study.

**Table 1: Biographic Data of Respondents**

<b>Biographic Data</b>	<b>No. of Respondents</b>	<b>Percentages</b>
<b>Educational Status</b>		
Non-formal education	80	80
Formal education	20	20
	<b>100</b>	<b>80</b>
<b>Occupation Status</b>		
Public servants	5	5
Civil servants	15	15
Crop farmers	30	30
Fisher men and women	30	30
Traders	20	20
	<b>100</b>	<b>80</b>
<b>Levels of Income Earned For Livelihood</b>		
High income	20	20
Moderate income	40	40
Low income	40	40
	<b>100</b>	<b>80</b>
<b>Levels of Burden of Social Relationships on Parents of Autistic Children</b>		
High level of burden for soc. rela.	50	50
Moderatelevel of burden for soc. rela.	30	30
Low level of burden for soc. rela.	20	20
	<b>100</b>	<b>80</b>
<b>Levels of Burden of Income Expenditure on Parent of Autistic Children</b>		
High level of burden of inc. exp	45	45
Moderatelevel of burden of inc. exp.	45	45
Low level of burden of inc.exp.	10	10
	<b>100</b>	<b>80</b>

NB (i) Soc. rela. stands for social relationships  
 (ii) Inc. exp. stands for income expenditure

**Source:** Oriji's (2023), Fieldwork

The results of educational status indicate that 80 respondents, representing 80% have no formal education, while 20 (20%) have formal education at the time of this study. For occupational status, the results depict that 5 respondents, representing 5% are public servants, 15 (15%) are civil servants, 30(30%) are crop farmers, 30(30%) are fishermen and women, while 20(20%) are traders. With these data, it is obvious that public servants and civil servants were not much engaged because they had fewer burdens of social relationships and income expenditure for the care of children with ASD. On the other hand, crop farmers were much more engaged because the

burdens of social relationships and income expenditure were on them due to the pressure and much time involved in the care of their autistic children.

Also, for the levels of income earned for livelihood during the study, the results showed that 20 respondents, representing 20% had high income, 40(40%) had moderate income, while 40(40%) had low income during the course of the study. For levels of burden of social relationships on parents of autistic children, the results showed that 50 respondents, representing 50% had high level of burden of social relationships on them; hence they were discriminated and stigmatized because they have children with ASD. 30(30%) and 20(20%) of respondents had moderate and low burdens of social relationships, due to high level of coping strategies that arose from the care of their children with ASD. Finally, for levels of income expenditure on parents of autistic children, 45 respondents, representing 45% had high level of burden of income expenditure in the care of their autistic children, 45(45%) had moderate burden, 10% had low burden, hence they are well paid to manage their children with ASD in the study area.

**Table 2: Analysis of Autistic Children and Burden of Social Relationships on Parents**

S/N	Statements	SA	A	D	SD
1.	The care of autistic children predisposes parents (40%) to the burden of stigmatization	40 (40%)	40 (40%)	10 (10%)	10 (10%)
2.	The care of autistic children predisposes parents (35%) to the burden of discrimination	35 (35%)	35 (35%)	15 (15%)	15 (15%)
3.	The care of autistic children predisposes parents (30%) to the burden of irregular social relationship	30 (30%)	30 (30%)	20 (20%)	20 (20%)
4.	The care of autistic children predisposes parents (25%) to the burden of self denial behaviour disposition of autism	25 (25%)	25 (25%)	25 (25%)	25 (25%)

**NB** (i) SA means "Strongly Agree"  
(ii) A means "Agree"  
(iii) D means "Disagree"  
(iv) SD means "Strongly Disagree"

**Source:** Orijji's (2023), Fieldwork

Based on the results in Table 2, 40 respondents, representing 40% SA that the Care of Autistic children predisposes parents to the burden of stigmatization, 40(40%) A, 10 (10%) D, while 10 (10%) SD. In the instance of these results, it means that parents of children with ASD who SA and A covered 80% of respondents while only 20% did not experience high level of burden of stigmatization in the study area. For the item on whether the care of autistic children predisposes parents to the burden of discrimination, the results showed that 35 respondents, representing 35% SA, 35(35%) A, 15(15%) D, while 15(15%) SD.

Based on the foregoing results; 70% of respondents were highly discriminated while 30% were not in the course of the study. Also for the item on whether the care of autistic children

predisposes parents to the burden of irregular social relationship, the results revealed, that 30 respondents, representing 30% SA, 30(30%) A, 20(20%) D, while 20(20%) SD. From these results, 60% of parents of children with ASD were predisposed to the burden of irregular social relationship as a result of negative social behaviours from members of the society while 40% of them had coping strategies; hence they did not have serious impact of discrimination.

Finally, for the item on whether the care of autistic children predisposes parents to the burden of self-denial behaviour disposition of autism, the results showed that 25 respondents, representing 25% SA, 25(25%) A, 25(25%) D and 25(25%) SD respectively based on the experiences had in the study area. With these results all respondent parents showed equal evidence of self denial of 25% each in relationship to the level of societal ridiculing of them for having of children with ASD in the study area.

**Table 3: Analysis of Autistic Children and Burden of Income Expenditure on Parents**

S/N	Statements	SA	A	D	SD
1.	The care of autistic children predisposes parents (50%) to the burden of increase in income expenditure on food	50 (30%)	30 (10%)	10 (10%)	10 (10%)
2.	The care of autistic children predisposes parents (45%) to the burden in income expenditure on house rent	45 (45%)	45 (5%)	5 (5%)	5 (5%)
3.	The care of autistic children predisposes parents (30%) to the burden in income expenditure on clothing	30 (30%)	30 (20%)	20 (20%)	20 (20%)
4.	The care of autistic children predisposes parents (30%) to the burden of income expenditure on education	30 (30%)	30 (25%)	25 (15%)	15 (15%)

**Source:** Orijji's (2023), Fieldwork

With respect to the results in Table 3, 50 respondents, representing 50% decided for SA, that is, the care of autistic children predisposes parents to the burden of increase in income expenditure on food, 30(30%) A, 10(10%) D, while 10(10%) SD. With this, it is obvious that 80% of those who answered for SA and A spent their fortune on taking good care of their children with ASD while 20% did not, they had no good means for taking care of their ill children. For the item on whether the care of autistic children predisposes parents to burden of increase in income expenditure on house rent, 45(45%) SA, 45(45%) A, 5(5%) D and 5(5%) SD. What this means is that 90% of parents had financial burden to pay their house rent and still take care of their autistic children, and would require help to cope with it, while 10% did not because of their financial capacity to meet the challenges of paying their rents, and also take good care of their autistic children in the area of study.

For responses on whether the care of autistic children predisposes parents to the burden of increase in income expenditure on clothing, 30(30%) SA, 30(30%) A, 20(20%) D, while 20 (20%) SD. The import or meaning of this is that 60% of respondent parents faced serious income

expenditure burden for the care (clothing) of their children with ASD while 40% of them could cope with same, hence they are the rich ones on social rung in the study area. Finally, the results in Table 3 also showed that 30 respondents, representing 30% SA that the care of autistic children predisposes parents to the burden of increase in income expenditure on education, 30(30%) A, 25(25%) D, while 15 (15%) SD. Based on these results, 60% of parents suffer serious income expenditure burden, especially when combined with money spent on the education of autistic children. This situation is different from that of the 40% of respondent parents who have low income jobs, and hardly take care of their autistic children, not to talk about sending them to formal education centres in the study area.

### **Discussion of Findings**

The result of the first research question revealed that the care of autistic children increased the burdens of social relationships on parents in the study area. Similarly, the care of autistic children predisposed parents to the burdens of stigmatization, discrimination, irregular social relationships and self-denial behaviour disposition of autism in the study area. The result is in accordance with Rfat *et al* (2023) who explained that in Turkey, parents of children with ASD diagnosis are more likely to experience exclusion, belittlement and discrimination when they take their children into community.

In addition, the result of the second research question revealed that the care of autistic children increased the burdens of income expenditure on parents in the study area. As well, the care of autistic children predisposed parents to the burdens of increase in income expenditure on food, house rent, clothing and education in the study area. This result is in agreement with the position of Parish *et. al.* (2011) when they reported in their investigation that there is a robust association between state medical spending for children with disabilities and financial burdens incurred by families raising children with autism, whose care is exceptionally costly. Also, the result of the second research question is in consonance with Befkadu *et. al.* (2022) view which asserted that autism imposes extra and costly expenses to provide a balanced diet, to cover medical therapies, and pay for extracurricular activities.

### **CONCLUSION**

Based on the findings of the study, it is crystal clear that the care of autistic children increases the burdens of social relationships and income expenditure on parents in the study area. These findings are true because, apart from the burden of healthcare and time commitment on parents regarding the care of autistic children, parents still face the burdens of social relationships and income expenditure in the study area. Thus, in order to come out of the "maze of rising burdens of the care of children with ASD on parents completely", the study suggests precise researches on causes and treatment of ASD as well as the relationships between adherence to ASD therapies and level of recuperation of autistic children in Port Harcourt Metropolis in Rivers State, and indeed in Nigeria.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

- i. The State Government should carry out serious programmes that could sensitise members of society on the pains of stigmatization and discrimination parents and their autistic children suffer so that they could adopt a lenient and sympathetic relationship with the members of the families of autistic patients. In other words, they should be oriented to develop positive and healthy relationship with the affected parents and their children.
- ii. The State Government should as a matter of policy and law ensure that parents whose children are suffering from ASD are partially relieved of the financial burden by funding

the greater part of their care in hospitals. With this, the State Government should ensure that welfare for autistic children are enormously subsidized in government-owned hospitals. Besides, the education and training of autistic children for their physical and mental developments in society should also be subsidized by government to reduce the financial burden on parents.

- iii. The State Government should ensure that it establishes free care autism centre, autism school, autism recreational centre in three designated area in Port Harcourt Metropolis and as well, employ qualified professionals to manage children with ASD therein. With this, the burdens of social relationships and increase in income expenditure on parents would be reduced in society.
- iv. Religious and multinational companies should fund as well as donate equipment, buses, teaching aids, food, clothing, etc. to health, education and recreational centres or foundations for the treatment of autistic children to ensure their speedy physical and mental developments so that they enjoy equal living opportunities like the other children without ASD in the study area.

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