

Descriptive Study of the Sensory Experiences of Autistic Mothers



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Introduction

The majority of autistic individuals experience sensory processing challenges. Although sensory demands during parenting are high, little research exists on how difficulties with sensory processing impact autistic mothers' full engagement in meaningful occupations during parenthood.

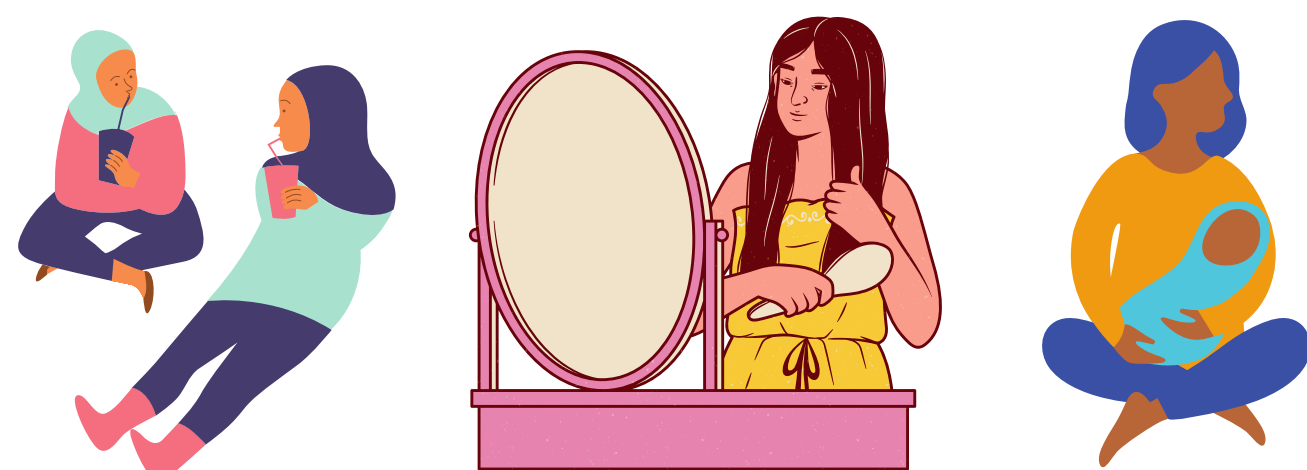
Methods

An online anonymous survey was developed to explore autistic mothers' personal and sensory experiences throughout early motherhood.

Questions explored the following areas of occupation: self-care, childcare, leisure, work, emotional wellness, socialization, birthing process, sleep, and other.

Participants were recruited through autistic mother-specific Facebook groups.

The sample was made up of 175 autistic mothers.



Themes/Results

Demographics



Participant Locations

- | | |
|-------------------|------------------|
| 1. United States | 8. Luxembourg |
| 2. United Kingdom | 9. Israel |
| 3. Canada | 10. Belarus |
| 4. Australia | 11. Hungary |
| 5. New Zealand | 12. Sweden |
| 6. Norway | 13. Denmark |
| 7. Ireland | 14. South Africa |

93% Discovered Autism Diagnosis After Becoming a Parent

81% Had a Family Member with a Suspected Autism Diagnosis
53% Had a Child with Suspected Diagnosis

95% Reported a Co-occurring Mental Health Condition

56% Were Self-Diagnosed Autistic

Most mothers can experience stress and anxiety at some point during motherhood, however, autistic mothers with sensory processing difficulties presented with more extreme and pervasive challenges, affecting their role as a mother. (Talcer, 2021)



Discussion & Impact to Occupational Therapy

Most autistic women presenting to healthcare providers are undiagnosed/unidentified, meaning they do not know they are autistic until later in life, often after having children.

Findings can educate and support OTs working in spaces with neurodiverse children to provide family-centered and neurodiverse-affirming care. OTs can also assist parents of their clients or the clients themselves with autism identification and access to services.

The results of this study can also significantly impact the lives of autistic mothers by helping them to navigate their unique experiences of motherhood better.

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References

