

# The Socio-economic Challenges Faced by Parents of Children with Autism Spectrum in Zimbabwe

Overson Musopero

Social Worker, Endless Possibilities Disability Trust, Harare Zimbabwe

---

**Abstract:** The study investigated the socio-economic challenges faced by parents of children with autism in Zimbabwe. Four research questions were raised and the related literature was reviewed. The study was guided by the Family Systems Theory. The study employed Qualitative Research Design. The target population was very small and it constituted a sample. In-depth interview schedules were used to collect data from 20 parents of children with autism who are members of Autism Support Network. Key informants and documentary review were used to validate the study. Purposive sampling was also used to select key informants and Key informant guides were used to collect further data from key informants. Data analysis was done using thematic content analysis. The results showed that special education and supervision, good health and social inclusion are special needs of children with autism. Their parents face stigma and discrimination, communication problems, high financial costs and lack of resources, challenges to access social services, marital and unemployment problems. These parents use both positive and negative coping strategies. The study concluded that there are many socio-economic challenges in raising a child with autism in Zimbabwe. Many people lack knowledge about autism and the existing laws and policies are not fully executed to improve the welfare of children with autism in Zimbabwe. The study recommended the establishment of special facilities to improve the education of children with autism, improvising related policies and laws, formalising autism support groups, initiating national training of care givers of children with autism, subsidising and ensuring access to social services and spreading autism awareness.

**Keywords:** Socio-economic challenges, parents, children and autism spectrum.

---

## 1. INTRODUCTION

According to the Centre for Disease Control and Prevention [2012], the prevalence of autism is increasing globally. The current rate is 1 in 88 people (1.1%) have autism but in the past fifteen years the rate was 1 in 5 000 people (0.02%). However, in Zimbabwe there is no current updated statistics of children with autism spectrum. The country uses global level statistics of 1 in 88 people [Zimbabwe Mail, 2012]. Despite the absence of current statistics, the global statistics indicate that many families are raising children with autism in Zimbabwe where the economic atmosphere is not conducive.

Therefore, it is against this background that the purpose of the study was to investigate the socio-economic challenges faced by parents in raising their children with autism in Zimbabwe. According to Passer et al [2009] children with autism have a lot of special needs to be met by their parents. The study sought to identify these needs in the Zimbabwean context. In a bid to meet the needs of their children, these parents face a plethora of both social and economic challenges. The study established the social challenges faced by parents of children with autism. It also explored the economic challenges encountered by these parents. Lastly the study determined the copying strategies adopted by parents in taking care of their children with autism.

Autism has been defined as a spectrum of disorders affecting the child's ability to communicate verbally and interact socially [Centre for Disease Control, 2009]. It is characterised by unusual repetitive behaviours and hyperactivity. According to the American Psychiatry Association [2000] autism is a pervasive developmental disorder characterised by deficits in social behaviour, verbal communication, unusual and restricted repetitive behaviours. Autism is a lifelong psychosocial developmental disability that exists in all cultures and ethnic groups [Maston et al, 2009]. As the prevalence of autism is increasing many parents are facing various socio-economic challenges in raising their children especially in the developing countries like Zimbabwe. Children with disabilities is a social issue that needs attention in Zimbabwe. Especially developmental disability like autism which is surrounded by various negative beliefs, myths and perceptions. Although children with autism needs maximum attention as compared to their counterparts who are considered functioning within the normal range, lack of autism awareness is still a major problem within the Zimbabwean communities and this calls for action through appropriate researches and interventions. A clear situation had been revealed by UNICEF Zimbabwe in the Living Conditions among Persons with disabilities Survey Report [2013]. The report indicated that lack of awareness on disability issues is affecting the living standards of children with disabilities like autism.

### ***1.1 Theoretical Framework***

The study was guided by the Family Systems Theory by Murray Bowen 1960. The Family Systems Theory holds that individuals can be best understood as part of their families than in isolation. Since the family is an emotional unit, the theory helped the study to involve the whole families to identify and understand the special needs of children with autism. The family and its relationship to the whole society influences the fulfilment of the needs of children. Bowen [1960] alluded that families are systems of individuals who are interdependent and well interconnected.

As a system, every member in the family had roles to play as well as rules to follow and respect. However, the condition of children with autism limits them. Therefore, the Family Systems Theory assisted to investigate the measures used by parents to maintain the family systems balance. Through this theory, the peculiar challenges faced by parents in the process were unearthed. The Family Systems Theory focusses on the transitional shift from an individual perspective towards a family perspective. Hence this theory is very important in understanding challenges faced by parents in raising their children with autism because whenever problems arise in the family the whole family acts to deal with them.

### ***1.2 Statement of the Problem***

According to the American Psychiatry Association [2000] children with autism have difficulties in communicating, following family rules performing tasks, displaying usual behaviour, forming relationships and abstract concepts. Children with autism have many special needs as compared to their counterparts who are considered normal in their functioning. Therefore, their parents are usually involved in further responsibilities in order to create a positive family environment that are conducive to the physical, emotional and mental wellbeing of their children. Parents of children with autism have many roles to play so that conducive environments can be created to unlock the potential of their children to fit well in discriminatory societies. However, in Zimbabwe these parents are facing challenges in the process of raising their children with autism and these challenges need a thorough investigation.

### ***1.3 Research Objectives***

- (i) To establish the special needs of children with autism.
- (ii) To identify the peculiar social challenges encountered by parents of children with autism.
- (iii) To determine the economic challenges faced by parents of autistic children.
- (iv) To explore the copying strategies used by parents in raising their children with autism.

### ***1.4 Significance of the Study***

The study contributes to the overall knowledge related to the developmental disability fraternity. Most researches about autism has been done in Europe, North America, Australia, China and some parts of western Africa [Lainhart, 2008]. These researches were mainly concerned with the causes and prevalence of autism hence there is a gap in literature concerning the parents of children with autism. World Health Organisation [2002] noted that many developing countries lack empirical studies about disability issues and their governments are not fully informed. Most of the governmental

interventions are based on interferences and approximations which are not much effective in meeting the aspirations and demands of the children with autism in particular. Therefore, this study is a response to fill the gap by informing the policy makers the socio-economic challenges faced by parents of children with autism. The study will increase the awareness and widen the knowledge base about autism. The study findings will benefit the public, government and interested organisations.

## 2. RELATED LITERATURE

Autism spectrum disorder was considered to be not common but studies had shown that the cases of autism are increasing worldwide. Sanua [2004] suggested that many people perceive that autism disorder is common in western countries only. In Zimbabwe autism spectrum seems to be less visible because of stigma and lack of awareness. Disability in Zimbabwe is generalised without considering that every form of disability is unique.

According to the Centre for Disease Control [2009] the rate of autism is greater among children than their adult counterparts because only a few of them reach the adulthood stage. Maston et al [2009] also alluded that 1 in every 150 children have autism. This is a clear indication that autism is common among children. Centre for Disease Control [2012] estimated that among children at the age of 8 years, 1 out of 88 have autism. Similar autism statistics revealed that male children with autism are more than their female counterparts. In the foetal development male children's biological make up is easily affected by pathogens and genes. According to the American Psychiatry Association [2000] an approximate of 88% of children with autism are males. Wing [2012] supported that the prevalence of autism is 1 out of 54 males and 1 out of 252 female children. In this regard males have about four times chance of diagnosed with autism as compared to their female counterparts.

The causes of autism remain a controversial issue. Many scholars, researchers and scientists and experts have various arguments on what causes autism. However, all their arguments point out that environmental factors and genetics are the main causes of autism. According to the environmental scientists, autism is caused by environmental factors. A research by Blenner [2011] found out that the hair and blood samples of children with autism have high levels of toxins. Among these toxins were lead antimony and mercury. Other studies in America reported irregularity and malfunctioning in some of the brain parts of children with autism. Mancil [2009] discovered the abnormal levels of neurotransmitters in the brain function of children with autism. This shows that the disruption of normal brain development and defects in genes that control and maintain brain growth can cause autism. Both gene function and environmental factors influence the communication of the brain cells. According to Passer et al [2009] brain imaging among children with autism showed an average larger brain. Neurological, genetic, pathogens, bio-chemical and metabolic are the main causes of autism disorder [Bailey et al, 2005].

In most parts of Africa, it is believed that autism is caused by supernatural causes [Schopler, 2009]. The supernatural causes include witchcraft, demonic afflictions and avenging spirits. According to Fischer [2003] some African cultures attribute diseases like autism to bad parenting, hereditary causes and incest. Hence children with autism and other mental disorders are isolated, rejected and alienated as social outcasts. In Zimbabwe children with autism are given offensive names. According to Choruma [2007] there are many beliefs and perceptions attached to disabilities and disorders including autism. Mental disability is attributed to maternal problems and witchcraft.

## 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 Research Design

Research design ensures that the findings gathered by the study are interpretable and accurate. It is a blue print of the study that focusses on the objectives, methods of data collection and analysis [Babbie, 2004]. The study employed the qualitative research method. According to Neuman [2006] qualitative research describes events, procedures and philosophies as they occur in their natural settings and it is holistic in nature. Qualitative research helped the researcher to understand personal experiences and social reality under the study topic.

### 3.2 Target Population and Sample

The target population of the study consisted of 20 members of the Autism Support network. This is based in Harare the capital city of Zimbabwe with members from all the 10 provinces of the country. 12 members were females and the other 8 members were males. The director of the Autism Support Network and 2 Social Workers from Masvingo Rural and

Harare Urban Districts Department of Child Welfare and Probation Services were the key informants. The target population of the study was very small and it constituted a sample. Purposive sampling was used to choose 3 key informants with qualities and experiences that permit an understanding of the phenomenon under study. This was based on their relevance to the study topic.

### **3.3 Research Instruments**

Data was collected from the parents of children with autism using in-depth interview schedule. This helped the researcher to ask questions at individual level and to be focused. Through the use of the in-depth interview schedules at individual level, the researcher was able to reduce group bias caused by the presence of other participants. The study also used the key informants interview guides to collect more data from the key informants with personal knowledge and experience about autism spectrum. This helped the researcher to gather data that might have been omitted by the participants. Further data was also supplemented by reviewing documents related to the study to yield valid and reliable results.

### **3.4 Validity and Reliability**

The researcher used the relevant qualitative research tools to collect data. These tools include in-depth interview schedules, key informant guides and documentary review. The use of in-depth interviews reduced group bias by creating privacy and collecting data at individual level. Different research tools were used to complement each other in the event that one had limitations. Key informants validated the study by providing personal knowledge and experiences on autism.

### **3.5 Data Analysis**

The researcher used a voice recorder during interviews and then transcribed the recorded data. Thematic content analysis was used to code the responses which helped the researcher to create thematic categories in accordance to the study objectives. The researcher then created some links and relationships between different categories. The study is explanatory in nature therefore thematic content analysis was used to permit the emergence of thick and in-depth explanations.

## **4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **4.1 Special Needs of Children with Autism**

The study established that children with autism have various needs due to their condition. These special needs include psychological, social, physiological and economic needs. This section is therefore intent on bringing to the fore these special needs.

Everyone has a right to good health. The study found that children with autism need good health as the participants revealed that constant therapeutic sessions are very important towards the improvement of the health of children with autism. These sessions assist children with autism to maintain eye contact, improve their social behaviour, interact with others well and to develop good speech. From the in-depth interviews, it was revealed that children with autism need diagnosis, drugs and constant check ups to control and manage their physical and mental health. Regarding this issue the parents indicated that they access the medication from a neighbouring country South Africa and they bear all the costs. There is also a special diet for children with autism that helps to maintain their health. The study discovered that children with autism have a different diet which includes gluten or wheat free foods. The key informants confirmed that children with autism need special and prescribed food because of high levels of lead and mercury in their blood streams. It is deduced from these findings that the absence of therapies, proper medication and diet, put the health of children with autism at risk. Drawing from Maslow's hierarchy of needs, health is a major physiological need necessary for human development. Unlike their counterparts who are considered normal in their functioning range, children with autism need medication periodically rather than episodically.

Special education and supervision were found by the study as other special needs of children with autism. The study established that it is very hard for children with autism to learn in the mainstream classes with their peers who are considered to function within the normal range. It is hard for children with autism to access mainstream education because of their poor psychomotor skills, unusual behaviour, delayed speech and differences with their neuro-typical peers. The study revealed that there is need of an individualised educational programme to assess improvement on individual basis. Their teachers should use the Treatment and Education of Autistic and related Communication for Handicapped Children (TEACCH) approach in which picture icon-based language, augmentative devices and sign languages are used. This

indicated that children with autism need kind and special trained teachers because they take a longer time to understand concepts. In addition, parents indicated that children with autism need trained supervisors or caregivers with an appreciation of autism spectrum. The study findings showed that some skills, empathy and knowledge are required among the caregivers to monitor and control the behaviour of children with autism. Children with autism can throw tantrums, run away from home or school anytime which increase their vulnerability and insecurity hence they need full time and strict supervision.

Drawing from Maslow's hierarchy of needs, love and belonging are very important for anyone to reach self-actualisation. The study discovered that children with autism need love and social inclusion to unlock their potential. Love and social inclusion of children with autism are special needs because they promote good physical, emotional and mental wellbeing among them. The key informants also supported that children with autism need love and social inclusion from their parents, teachers and the community at large. As argued by the social model of disability, social exclusion exacerbates disability. Therefore, children with autism as important members of the family, deserve social inclusion. Unlike other needs, love and social inclusion do not require money but a positive attitude from the family and the community. To this effect parents of children with autism and their communities should meet this need from the family to the community level.

#### ***4.2 Social Challenges Faced by Parents of Children with Autism***

According to the study results, parents of children with autism face a plethora of social challenges because of the condition of their children in societies full of negative beliefs and perceptions about autism spectrum. Stigma and discrimination were found to be the main social challenges faced by these parents. The participants indicated that they are not involved in major community events because their fellow community members associate and blame them for the conditions of their children hence viewed as not important to be involved in the community decision making processes. Most parents found it difficult to attend public gatherings like church services with their children with autism because they make a lot of noise and sometimes they throw tantrums at people. When this happens some of the community members are not considerate. The study also revealed that it is even hard for parents to travel with their children with autism in public transport because of a discriminatory society. The Zimbabwean society holds negative beliefs and perceptions about autism. They view autism from the religious model of disability. To this end, autism is associated with witchcraft and rituals hence their parents are accused for causing the disorder to their children to get rich. This had increased the stigmatisation and discrimination of the parents by the society in a bid to make them suffer and face the consequences of their evil deeds. Through this negative attitudinal valuation, children with autism are viewed as less human and their parents form poor relationships with the extended family and other members of the society. These findings gave the researcher an impression that most of the Zimbabwean communities lack knowledge about autism and they stigmatise and discriminate both children with autism and their parents. It is deduced that the society stifled the capacity of parents to effectively raise their children with autism.

The diagnosis of autism in the family has strained many marriages. The study findings revealed that many marital problems were caused by men. Although all parents of children with autism face many challenges, female parents suffer more. In most cases women are blamed for the birth of a child with autism and their husbands run away and desert the family. Men were found to be in denial and they take a longer time to accept a child with autism. To this effect there are many divorces caused by the birth of a child with autism. The study further revealed that having a child with autism strains the marital affairs and causes divorce because autism is associated with shame. Naturally, many families regard children as blessings. However, children with autism are not treated the same as they are regarded as curses rather blessings. Since the family is cemented by children, this had caused many single parent headed families raising their children with autism spectrum. In this regard, a child with autism is not good for many families in Zimbabwe. Hence autism spectrum to many means a detestable state of being where a bearer is a symbol of bad omen and a source of ridicule and shame to the family. Such a state of affairs has dire implications when it comes to marital affairs and family relationships.

Many parents cannot communicate effectively with their children with autism spectrum. The study indicated that autism spectrum is characterised by deficits in verbal communication and delayed speech. A lot of parents find it hard to know the feeling or desires of their children with autism because they cannot communicate verbally. The parents revealed that when their children want something they just either pull them or throw tantrums to get their attention. However, the parents usually respond wrongly because it is hard for them to know what their children exactly want. When their children

are not feeling well they can just see it but cannot know the problem unless they visit a doctor. Communication problem is one of the obstacles that hinders parents from knowing the desires, aspirations and life goals of their children with autism. It is hard for these parents to mentor and to determine the choices of their children because of communication barrier.

There is a serious lack of related social skills that are needed in taking care of children with autism in Zimbabwe. The study found out that many parents lack skills on how to raise their children with autism. Many social skills like social needs identification, behaviour modification, toilet training and speech development skills are required among the parents of children with autism. However, the majority of parents do not possess these skills and raising their children with autism is associated with stressful events. Lack of social skills had forced some parents to hire specialists with skills to assist them. Thereby reducing emotional attachment with their children and creating poor child-parent relationship because children spend more time with hired specialists than with their parents.

#### ***4.3 Economic Challenges Encountered***

There are many economic challenges associated with raising a child with autism in Zimbabwe. This is worsened by the unfavourable economic situation in the country. This section therefore intent on bringing to the fore these challenges found out by the study.

Accessing social services like health and education is the major economic challenge faced by parents in raising their children with autism. The study found out that it is very difficult for the parents to educate their children with autism because of the current unsupportive education structures. Most of the children stay at home while their counterparts go to school. This is because the education of children with autism is very expensive and they cannot access mainstream schools. The study established that there are no integrated educational programmes, special facilities, and trained staff members to cater for the provision of suitable education among children with autism. In this case, parents are forced to send their children to private schools because they are rejected from many mainstream schools due to their condition. The educational atmosphere is not friendly for children with autism. To this effect it is the parents' responsibility to find better ways to educate their children. Hermeneutically, children with autism are regarded as useless children with no right to education. From a policy angle, the government of Zimbabwe is putting little attention on the establishment and improvement of conducive and favourable facilities towards the provision of quality education to children with autism. The provision of education among these children is equated by policy makers and other education related ministries to wastage of resources feeding a dead body. This is judged from the mental differences with their neurotypical peers hence their parents bear all the costs to educate their children. Other than education, parents are also facing challenges to access health services. Parents cannot afford diagnosis, drugs and check ups and their children with autism usually stay without medication. Regardless of the existence of the Mental Health Policy, the government had offered nothing much to improve the access of medication by children with autism in Zimbabwe. This leaves the whole burden of costs to the parents for them to access social services.

According to the study findings, the average cost of raising a child with autism is approximately \$1000 - \$1 800 per month. This shows that there is extra financial cost in raising a child with autism in Zimbabwe as compared to raising the one who is considered normal. The diet and the education of children with autism is very expensive. These children learn in special private schools with higher fees, their food is imported at higher rates, their medical check-ups and therapies are done abroad in South Africa. High financial costs are incurred in raising a child with autism. In the interviews, the parents revealed that they hire specialists like Child Development Practitioners, Occupational Therapists, Counsellors and clinical Psychologists to help their children. In most cases these practitioners are paid hourly at high costs. Due to lack of resources parents are receiving little support from the government. Many families of children with autism in Zimbabwe are having extra financial costs in the parameters of limited resources. This had resulted in serious financial stress among these families. From a Social Darwinism Perspective, the government is using lack of resources as a scape goat of its failure to support children with autism. The reality is that children with autism are viewed as unnecessary problem to the government so they should be naturally selected and only those who are considered to be functioning within the normal range can survive. (death of the weak and survival of the fittest through natural selection).

These findings squarely demonstrate that it is financially burdensome for the parents to meet the needs of their children with autism. This had worsened the financial situation among their families. In this regard poverty and disability are closely linked in a vicious circle. The person with a disability is not the only one who suffers, but whole family. The disability-family-poverty link goes a long way in explaining that anything that affects an individual has a trickle-down effect to the whole family.

#### ***4.4 Coping Strategies Adopted by Parents of Children with Autism***

The study discovered that parents in Zimbabwe adopt different coping strategies to deal with the challenges that they encounter every day in raising their children with autism. These strategies are both adaptive and maladaptive in nature. Participant indicated that sometimes they get little assistance from the state through the Ministry of Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare. Although the help of the state is appreciated, it is not sufficient for the proper upkeep of their children with autism. Therefore, other than the state the parents also get much assistance from the not for profit organisations. In this case all the participants revealed that they are members of Autism Support Network. Through Autism Support Network and other related partner organisations, parents receive trainings from Occupational therapists and other mental health professionals. These trainings equip the parents with social skills and basic knowledge of raising their children with autism. Parents are also supported with day care centres, psychomotor development toys, and autism related information. All these services reduce the burden and bring comfort to the parents. Participants also revealed that they cope through Parents of Autistic Children Support Groups. They explained that they meet periodically to share their life experiences and generate ideas to solve and manage complex issues. Through the use of social media, they create platforms to share urgent issues that need immediate attention. These social media and support groups help them to interact, mix and encourage each other the best ways of taking care of their children. At their meetings they invite autism experts to give them some words of advice. Support groups help parents to feel a sense of belonging and to receive emotional and psycho-social support.

Most of the parents go to church as a coping strategy of having a child with autism. The study gathered that parents believe in anointing oils and holy waters from Pentecostal churches, ministries and those in the apostolic sect. This belief gives some parents hope and faith in God. Parents used faith in God as an adaptive strategy in which they believe that through prayers a new world will exist in the lives of their children with autism. Some parents indicated that when their children are hyperactive and displaying unusual behaviour they put anointing oil on the foreheads of their children and then spray the holy water in the house. Sometimes they also give their children holy water to drink or bath their bodies. After that their children calm immediately. During stressing moments parents also apply the anointing oil on their faces and find comfort in God. Other church members join the parents in prayers and assist them in times of need as fellow brethren. These sentiments point out that parents of children with autism do not need material resources only but they also need supplementary spiritual support to cope with the challenges that they face in raising their children with autism.

However, according to the study findings parents also adopt maladaptive coping strategies like denial. Some parents find it hard to accept the condition of their children. They had not yet accepted the diagnosis of autism on their children. The denial is characterised by their avoidance of the children. In this case they keep a distant away from their children as a way of coping. Some of the parents spend a lot of time away from home either at work or with their friends and leave their children with their house assistants. Male parents adopt the denial coping strategy more than their female counterparts. The study found out that men normally run away from their families after the birth of a child with autism. This is a result of denial and fear of shame and discrimination associated with autism by the extended family and society. This maladaptive coping strategy had affected the parents as they use projections and blame their hired assistants or employed caregivers for not taking care of their children properly. As parents they had already failed and lost touch with reality hence the only option for them is denial which results in avoidance and abandonment.

This is a reflection that some parents are withered in the hot sun of reality. The choice of the coping strategies vary depending on the nature and the severity of the challenges which they meet. In the case of adopting maladaptive coping strategies, parents need support for them to accept reality and move on by adopting the adaptive coping strategies. The parents' coping strategies should save the best interest of their children with autism. This goes a long way in explaining that the family especially the parents' reaction and attitude are of paramount importance in the wellbeing of children with autism.

### **5. CONCLUSION**

The study indicated that parents are facing a lot of socio-economic challenges in taking care of their children in Zimbabwe. The discovered challenges have a great negative effect in the physical, social and emotional development of children with autism. It is very expensive to raise a child with autism in Zimbabwe. There is no equal access to medication and education for children with autism in the country. The domestic laws and policies of Zimbabwe are not fully implemented to cater for the welfare of children with autism. The study also showed that sometimes the parents are not capable to provide for their children with autism. There is lack of autism awareness in the Zimbabwean societies which result in stigma and discrimination of both children with autism and their parents.

## 6. RECOMMENDATIONS

- The study recommended that more autism related awareness and researches should be conducted to improve the autism knowledge.
- The government should improve the laws to include children with autism and their parents in decision making processes on issues that affect them.
- The tertiary institutions in the country should offer autism specific education to provide more knowledge and to equip skills among the caregivers and teachers of children with autism.
- The government in conjunction of other not for profit organisations must establish special facilities to ensure the good provision of education to children with autism.
- Social services like education and medication should be subsidised and accessible by children with autism to create equality and inclusivity.
- All support groups of parents of children with autism must be formalised. During their activities, specialists should be employed to help these parents with skills of how to manage stress and to cope with the conditions of their children without denial.

## REFERENCES

- [1] American Psychiatry Association (2000) *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: DSM-IV-TR (4<sup>th</sup> Edition)*. Washington DC: American Psychiatry Association.
- [2] Babbie. E. (2004) *The Practice of Social Research (10 Edition)*. London: Wadsworth/Tomson.
- [3] Bailey. A, Boltin. E. and Gottesman. P. (2005) *Autism as a strongly Genetic Disorder: Evidence From a British Twin Study*: Psychological Medicine, Vol 5, No 25, pp 63-78.
- [4] Blanner. A. T. (2011) *Psychometric Properties of the Beck Depression Inventory: Twenty-five Years of Evaluation*: Clinical Psychology Review, Vol 8, No 6, pp 77-100.
- [5] Bowen. M. (1960) *The family Systems Theory*. New York: Random House.
- [6] Centre for Disease Control (2009) *Prevalence of Autism Spectrum Disorders and Developmental Disabilities Monitoring Network, Six Sites, United States. Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report: Surveillance Summaries*, Vol 56, No 1, pp 1-11.
- [7] Centre for Diseases Control (2012) *New Data on Autism Spectrum Disorders. Morbidity and Mortality: Annual Report*, Vol 7, No 14, pp 56-73.
- [8] Choruma. T. (2007) *The Forgotten Tribe: People With Disabilities in Zimbabwe*. London: Progressio.
- [9] Fischer. I. (2003) *Infantile Autism in Nigeria*. British Medical Journal, Vol 4, No 5, pp 122-127.
- [10] Lainhart. J. E. (2008) *Psychiatric Problems in Individuals with Autism, their Primary Caregivers and Siblings*: International Review of Psychiatry, Vol 4, No 11, pp 278-298.
- [11] Mancil. R. G. (2009) *Parental Stress and Autism: Are There Useful Coping Strategies?* Education and Training in Developmental Disabilities, Vol 4, No 44, pp 523-537.
- [12] Matson. J. L. Mahan. S. and LoVullo. S. V. (2009) *Parent Training: A Review of Methods for Children with Developmental Disabilities*: Research in Developmental Disabilities, Vol 3, No, 30, pp 961-968.
- [13] Neuman. L.W. (2006) *Social Work Research Methods, Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*. Cape Town: Pearson.
- [14] Passer. C, Benson. P. and Karlof. K. (2009) *Anger, Stress Proliferation and Depressed Mood among Parents of Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder: A Longitudinal Replication*: Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, Vol 4, No 39, pp 350-362.



- [15] Sanua. V. D. (2004) *Is Infantile Autism a Universal Phenomenon? An Open Question*: International Journal of Social Psychiatry, Vol 30, No 3, pp 163-177.
- [16] Schopler. E. (2009) *Autism Perceptions in Africa*: African Journal of Autism and Developmental Disabilities, Vol 29, No , pp3-21.
- [17] UNICEF Zimbabwe (2013) *Living Conditions among Persons with disability: The Zimbabwe National Disability Survey Report* accessed on 24 July 2018 at [www.unicef.org>zimbabwe](http://www.unicef.org>zimbabwe)
- [18] Wing. L. (2012) *Autistic Spectrum Disorders: No Evidence For or Against An Increase in Prevalence*: British Medical Journal, Vol 31, No 27, pp 327-335.
- [19] World Health Organisation (2002) *The International Classification of Impairment, Disability and Handicaps*. Geneva: World Health Organisation.
- [20] Zimbabwe Mail (2012) *The News Reporter*. Harare: Zimbabwe.