

Article

## Psychological Empowerment Strategies among Mothers of Autistic Children

Inst. Shahla Saadi Salah<sup>1</sup>

1. Mustansiriyah University, College of Basic Education, Department of Special Education

\* Correspondence: [talat.edbs@uomustansiriyah.edu.iq](mailto:talat.edbs@uomustansiriyah.edu.iq)

**Abstract:** The current research aimed to identify psychological empowerment strategies among mothers of autistic children. The current research identified mothers of autistic children in the city of Baghdad whose children with autism are present in the institutes and centers of autism as (Baghdad Autism Center, Al-Nahal Institute for Autism Care, Rami Institute for Autism, and Basma Amal Center for Autism). The number of them is (130) mothers of autistic children for the academic year 2022-2023, for the purpose of verifying the goal of the research, the researcher built a measurement of psychological empowerment strategies. Considering the definition, provided by the researcher for the item "psychological empowerment strategies", four strategies for psychological empowerment were identified, and these strategies are: 1- Proper thinking. 2- Dialogue skills. 3- Emotion control. 4- Decision making. The measurement may consist of (38) items. The researcher also extracted the validity and reliability of the measurement, and after applying the measurement to members of the research sample, the data was analyzed and processed statistically using the statistical program (SPSS). The research reached to the following results: 1- There are no significant differences in the strategy of proper thinking; 2- There are no significant differences in the strategy of dialogue skills; 3- There are no significant differences in the strategy of emotion control; 4- There are no significant differences in the strategy of decision-making.

**Keywords:** psychological empowerment strategies, autism, mothers of autistic children

### 1. Introduction

#### Research problem

Psychological empowerment is one of the modern concepts that raises people to advanced levels.

Basic self-empowerment is about giving the individual freedom to perform, participation, more responsibility, and greater awareness of performance. Psychological empowerment refers to the recognition of the individual's right to freedom and control, and this is something that a person possesses because of his independent will and experience, and what contributes to clarifying the importance of psychological empowerment further is that empowerment gives the individual a more appropriate responsibility to do what he is responsible for. (Randolph & 118): 2002. Sashkin).

And we find that the starting point for making changes that help individuals achieve psychological empowerment is understanding the difference between positive thinking and negative thinking, between a positive tendency towards life and expecting the best, and a negative tendency and expecting that there is no hope in the future. And he should know that all the success that befalls an individual and the tasks he undertakes depends on the extent to which he feels optimistic and encourages a more optimistic point of view.

**Citation:** Salah, I. S. S. Psychological Empowerment Strategies among Mothers of Autistic Children. *Horizon: Journal of Humanity and Artificial Intelligence* 2024, 3(3), 49-63.

Received: 20<sup>th</sup> May 2024

Revised: 27<sup>th</sup> May 2024

Accepted: 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2024

Published: 10<sup>th</sup> June 2024



**Copyright:** © 2024 by the authors. Submitted for open access publication under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>)

Therefore, enabling a positive tendency reinforces the individual's ability to learn, understand and succeed in various concepts and skills and master success, and supports him further with the concept of developing a positive concept of himself, providing him with a bright life in the face of challenges and difficulties with the energy and passion that he already has, without increase or decrease. It also helps him to develop the concept of acceptance and appreciation, and to respect the failures and successes that he experiences as an experience that he can benefit from in later times, and to learn from his failure or success and take a lesson from it so that it becomes a form of feedback that helps him feel psychologically empowered, which in turn needs long-term components of the positivity relationship, confidence, and feelings of self-efficacy. (Dreher, 1995: 55).

Autism spectrum disorder is considered one of the most complex developmental disorders for parents and all members of the family. The reason for this difficulty is the ambiguity of this disorder and the strange behavioral patterns that these children show it, which may coincide with some other disorders, which makes parents constantly confused and difficult for them to understand. The child needs constant monitoring and supervision by the family, especially the mother, which increases the burden on her and increases the sense of responsibility towards their children. Thus, the mother is in a constant state of worry about her children and their future, which sometimes leads her to despair and feel helpless, and in many cases, they begin to blame themselves, mothers of children with autism spectrum disorders suffer from symptoms of depression, in addition to feelings of loneliness, hyperactive effort, and sometimes a feeling of worthlessness, they suffer from a great deal of worried, sadness, and helplessness towards the future, and the mother considers her child's injury a tragedy because she is unable to deal with it because of the social view she faces and the social distance towards her because of her children. Therefore, many mothers suffer from feelings of isolation and exclusion from social activities because of the stigma surrounding the eggs of children with autism spectrum disorder. (Amer, 2008:3).

From the above, the problem of the current research becomes clear by answering the following question: What are the psychological empowerment strategies for mothers of autistic children?

### **The importance of research**

Women's empowerment is the path to achieving equality for women. Psychological empowerment is required for women's self-dependence, unless women become mentally and emotionally strong, they will certainly not be able to overcome the barriers that stand in the way of their empowerment. Psychologically empowered women live according to a different set of basic beliefs that guide their daily decisions and habits. These abilities enable them to carry difficulties at home or at work due to high self-appreciation. Thus, women's psychological empowerment is like a magic pill that nourishes the roots of different possibilities. Psychological development also illuminates women's minds, which helps women think, make decisions, and work for themselves, and serve as an independent, supportive column of society. Women's psychological empowerment includes strategies such as self-respect, flexibility, self-appreciation, decision-making ability, and emotional control, which directly or indirectly affect women's psychological well-being (Singh, 2022:3).

Autism is one of the disorders of comprehensive growth which is considered one of the most annoying and confusing childhood problems because it includes disorders in aspects of psychological performance during childhood, which may extend to include other age stages, including attention, perception, learning, and language, communication skills, sensory and motor skills, and all that reflects negatively on everyone who deals with these children, including families, teachers, specialists, and their peers (Al-Tamimi and Nasser, 2017: 13-55).

Mothers of autistic children usually face some unique challenges due to the general behaviors that their child exhibits, such as tantrums or misbehavior in public places. The mothers' reactions are unpleasant because of the reactions of others, as caring for a child with autism disorder a difficult process that results in huge pressure on the mother because people's recognition of children with autism disorder is completely different from other disorders because these children suffer from abnormalities that indicate the nature of their disorder, so they give them different names, and the behaviors of these children may sometimes be violent and illogical, which makes mothers of autistic children feel feelings of fear, disgust, discomfort, and sometimes weak self-confidence (Sydeny, 2016:499).

Oladipo (2009) argues that when people are psychologically empowered, there will be a change in attitudes, perception and behaviour, which will certainly lead to a positive change in value tendency, the ability to postpone gratification of one's desires, self-improvement, respect, self-efficacy and self-awareness as well as better mental health which will crowned in a peaceful and developed society (Singh, 2022:3).

There are many psychological obstacles that form an obstacle to women's empowerment. Some of these psychological barriers are dread, insecurity, risks, lack of self-respect, self-confidence, fear of failure etc. In some organizations, the lack of information, the lack of independence in decision-making, and the lack of independence in performing tasks are the greatest obstacle to women's psychological empowerment and role ambiguity, and work pressures are the main contributor as an obstacle to women's psychological empowerment (Singh, 2022: 3).

Menon (2001) believes that empowerment includes three psychological aspects: perceived control over one's environment, perceived competence in accomplishing tasks, in addition to participation in goals and based on these three major psychological aspects, psychological empowerment is a cognitive state characterized by a sense of control and perceived competence. Therefore, empowerment is considered a multifaceted concept that reflects the different dimensions of making an individual psychologically capable, or the extent of the individual's control over his sources of strength. Hence, empowerment is linked to rehabilitation that aims to help an individual who suffers from a physical, mental, or sensory handicap or disability to reach the maximum possible range from performance in the tasks he performs on a personal level, or the tasks he performs as a member of an institution or the community in which he lives." (Kavafi, Salem, 2008, 845).

Psychological empowerment is considered one of the psychological characteristics of individuals, which indicates increased personal strength such as self-efficacy and self-control (Perry, 2013:12). In this case, it can also be viewed as a psychological feeling or psychological experience, and empowerment as a psychological feeling related to... The person realizes his ability to do the things he wants to do and that he has the right to decide important issues in his life. As for empowerment as an experience, it refers to the actual ability of an individual or group to bring about change. In this way, empowerment also refers to the ability to make a decision and implement it through available resources (Patterson, 2013: 43). Some psychologists believe that individuals cannot be empowered unless they empower themselves by themselves, while others believe that the feeling of psychological empowerment can be reinforced and developed among individuals. Therefore, the concept of psychological empowerment is one of the terms of positive psychology that can be developed among individuals in various fields (Mustafa Taha, 2015: 15).

A woman who feels psychologically empowered believes that she can adapt appropriately to the events, pressures, situations, and people she faces. Empowerment as a constructivist concept includes belief in the power inherent within the individual, and power or empowerment from a motivational view refers to the internal need for free will or belief in the individual's self-efficacy, under this concept, power has its own rule within the framework of the defensive position of the active people and has a strategy and technique that strengthens the need for free will or belief in self-competence among people will make them feel more powerful and empowered. otherwise, any strategy that weakens the need for self-affirmation or belief in self-competence among people will increases feelings of lack of strength and empowerment.

Also empowering women at work or at home appears to have a great effect, as it is linked between women's feeling of empowerment and their general feeling of well-being, to achieve this, the government must work to achieve empowerment, which would increase the rates of women's mental health, and then require creating a family environment in which appropriate conditions to achieve mental health for children as well (Abdel Fattah, 2022: 49).

From the above, the importance of the current research becomes clear through:

1. The rarity of previous studies on psychological empowerment among mothers of autistic children, as far as the researcher knows.
2. The importance of a sample of mothers of autistic children in determining their psychological state and the psychological pressures, conflicts, diseases, anxiety, fear, and lack of self-confidence they suffer from, and the effect of this on their psychological empowerment.
3. There is no study that addressed psychological empowerment strategies among mothers of autistic children, to the researcher's knowledge.

### **The research goal**

The current research aims to identify psychological empowerment strategies among mothers of children with autism.

### **Limits of research**

The current research is limited and focus on mothers of autistic children in the city of Baghdad whose autistic children are present in autism institutes and centers (Baghdad Autism Center, Al-Nahal Institute for Autism Care, Rami Institute for Autism, and Basma Amal Center for Autism) for the academic year 2022-2023.

### **Definition of terms**

#### **Psychological empowerment**

Rinehart & Short (1992) defined it as "the individual's beliefs and sense of independence in performing daily work tasks, the ability to suppose professional responsibility, a sense of importance, self-efficacy, influence on users who will benefit, and the ability to make the right decisions" (Abdel Fattah, 2017: 411).

Spreitzer (1995) defines it as "the individual's awareness that his work has meaning and useful, that he possesses the competence and ability necessary to accomplish the tasks, and that he possesses belief in himself and his ability to choose and organize the task that he must accomplish" (Spreitzer, 1995: 1442).

Brancato (2000) defines it as "an individual's beliefs about his abilities to carry out a job well, which is a means of encouraging the individual to make decisions, enriching experience and his sense of self-determination, and independence in influencing results, and that he is less afraid and has the ability to control and lead his external environment." It makes them more creative by trying what is new" (Abdel Fattah, 2017: 411).

The researcher relied on this definition (Spreitzer 1995) because she adopted the theory.

### **The Strategies for psychological empowerment**

The researcher defines strategies of psychological empowerment as (a group of procedures used by mothers of autistic children to help them gain psychological empowerment, including proper thinking, dialogue skills, emotion control, decision making).

While the procedural definition is the score that mothers of autistic children obtained on each of the psychological empowerment strategies on the measurement prepared in the current research.

## Autism

Kanner (1943) defines it as “a disorder that emerges from birth and affects communication with others and language and is characterized by routine and resistance to change” (Theeb, 2004, 1).

As defined by the American Diagnostic Psychiatric Society (DSM-V) it is: “a developmental disability characterized by being chronic and intense, appearing in the first three years of life, and which is the result of a neurological disorder that negatively affects brain functions” (A.P.A., 2000).

The researcher relied on the definition of the American Psychiatric Association (DSM-V).

## Mothers of autistic children

The researcher defines mothers of autistic children as (mothers who have a child with autism spectrum disorder who is getting treatment in one of the governmental centers and institutes for autism and who suffers from weakness in his abilities and difficulty in social interaction and communication with others, she also faces a lot of pressures and challenges because of her child’s behavior).

## An overview of psychological empowerment

The concept of empowerment is a recent concept, as it had no previous versions, and it began to appear in the 1990s, when the term psychological empowerment appeared in the work of Spreitzer (1995). Empowerment means feeling capable of influencing others and feeling effective, which gives the individual the freedom to determine his fate independently and determine his life path freely and without restrictions.

Psychological empowerment is defined here as the extent to which an individual can employ and develop his abilities, preparations, and possibilities that make him able to control and make appropriate decisions in different life situations. Psychological empowerment also includes three aspects: the psychology of control in the individual’s environment and perceived competence in achieving tasks, in addition to understanding the goal and based on these three main psychological aspects, psychological empowerment is a cognitive case characterized by a feeling of control, competence, and meditation. The importance of psychological empowerment is highlighted through support the efficiency and motivation of individuals, which in turn extends to the completion of the tasks assigned to them. Therefore, the process of psychological empowerment seeks to develop working individuals who can lead themselves through independence in thinking (Hammad and others., 2014: 45).

The concept of psychological empowerment is a multidimensional concept that includes motivation, self-efficacy, and a sense of responsibility, it creates in the person a feeling of control over his social environment and reinforces his ability to make his own decisions to become an effective member of society in general and his life in particular. (Hasan, 2021: 41). Psychological empowerment cannot be dealt with far away from the individual and analytical level, and it cannot be separated from the social and political factors and contexts in which the individual lives. It is not a subject private to the individual alone, but rather relates to the individual and how he should understand the social and political environment where he lives, how he learns to control the factors surrounding him, and how he is affected and influenced by others and factors. Therefore, it is wrong to explain psychological empowerment as an individual tendency or phenomenon possessed by some individuals and not others (Mustafa and Taha, 2015: 22).

Psychological empowerment, from the point of view of Tingland (2008): is the level of ability that an individual possesses to control his life, and this can be noted through six main indicators:

- Health: is the ability to control conditions that affect the mental and physical health of the person.

- Housing: This includes choosing the place and type of residence.
- Work: This includes obtaining qualifications, choosing, and obtaining work, and thus getting enough income to achieve a good standard of living.
- Close relationships: Includes options for establishing a family and forming social relationships.
- Free time: in terms of its quantity, content, and how to benefit from it.
- Values: related to the values an individual believes in, and how to apply them in life (Tengland, 2008: 80).

### Theories that dealt with psychological empowerment

#### Spreitzer 's theory

This theory sees psychological empowerment as consisting of three points:

Firstly: Psychological empowerment is a personal phenomenon through which individuals take responsibility for doing their work. It is a group of psychological conditions that demonstrate the way an individual realizes his duties and the extent of his belief in his role in the institution or society, which gives individuals self-confidence and makes them desire to succeed at work, in an institution, or at home. Empowerment means that individuals should understand their duties before they are told what to do in a complete way. It is a person's ability to make decisions independently and use available resources to achieve the necessary goals.

This theory believes that empowerment is not basically a personality characteristic that can be generalized through situations, but rather a collection of perceptions shaped by the environment. Therefore, empowerment reflects what people feel from continuing instability state in their perceptions of themselves in relation to their environment.

Spreitzer (1995) believes that whenever the individual's control increases and become more controller in all activities of his life, this indicates a high level of psychological empowerment, and whenever the individual's control decreases in his life activities, this indicates the level of psychological empowerment become lower. In addition, Tangland's vision explains that the indicators of psychological empowerment appear in all activities of human life, of which work represents only one field.

Secondly: Empowerment is constantly changing, as people can be viewed as less or more empowered, that is, all people have psychological empowerment to varying degrees, and are either fully empowered or not fully empowered.

Thirdly: Empowerment is not a comprehensive construct that can be generalized to different life situations and roles, but rather it is specific to the individual's field as well. This theory believes that there are two factors that precede the condition of psychological empowerment, which are self- appreciation and the individual's position of control because it is what shapes how individuals see themselves in relation to their work environments. This theory also assumes that the context of the environment can influence on sense of an individual in empowerment and self-respect, which is defined as a general feeling of self- appreciation associated with empowerment and is probably to be distributed among individuals those with high self-respect include a sense of self-worth and a sense of competence, and through self-appreciation for individuals who consider themselves have a value resources with talents deserve contributing, they are probably to take an active approach to their own selves, but on the other hand, Individuals who have a low feeling of self- appreciation are improbably to take this feel. The theory also indicates that information and rewards are of great importance in facilitating reach to a state of psychological empowerment among individuals, as information about duties can be important for empowerment because it helps to create a sense of meaning and importance and reinforce the individual's ability to make decisions and influence them in a way that is well consistent with the goals of the organization or society and his message. Regarding performance-related information, individuals need to understand how well they are performing to make and influence decisions to maintain performance and improve basic performance

information in the future to reinforce a sense of competence and the belief that teams are an important part of society (Lahlouh Belkhiri, 2022: 33-34).

### **Pattern (1990) Thomes & Velthouse**

Thomes & Velthouse built the cognitive-psychological empowerment pattern and defined empowerment as an increase in motivation for internal tasks, which includes the general conditions of the individual that are directly related to the task he performs, which in turn produces satisfaction and motivation, they pointed out that empowerment must start from the self.

System of belief includes how person can see the outside world and self-concept, which encourages purposeful behaviors and connects them to the goals of empowerment approaches applied in society.

Researchers have identified four psychological dimensions of empowerment, which represent the basis for psychological empowerment, as follows:

Firstly: Sensory-cognitive influence refers to the extent of awareness that a person can make a difference in achieving goals or completing missions, and this in role leads to creating the required effect in the individual's environment. This influence is evaluated through the belief that an individual has affected the work of others as well as the decisions taken, and this influence can have multiple effects at different levels. (Abu Asaad, 2017: 155-156).

Secondly: Competence means to what degree an individual can perform these activities with high skill. Competent individuals feel that they find the duties they perform and know well that they can perform those duties well. Competence is an individual's sense of achievement in performing the activities and tasks he has chosen in skillfully way, and feeling of competence includes a feeling of good performance and quality in performing duties.

Thirdly: Giving a meaning to the effort: It means giving attention to the value of work or missions as judged through the standards and ideas of individual. Giving meaning to work involves comparing between requirements role of work and beliefs. The individual, for example, believes that the tasks he performs have value. Giving meaning to work means that a person feels that he has the chance to participate in the noble cause. A sense of meaning in work represents the belief that a person is following a path deserves effort and time, and that a person is performing a valuable message.

Finally: Choice includes the responsibility that leads to a person's behaviors, as the individual feels that he chooses duties that are useful to him, and he does it in the way that seems appropriate. This sense of choice gives the person a sense of freedom in their choice and makes them believe that they can use their personal judgment and behave in accordance with his understanding of the duty which he does (Abu Asaad, 2017: 155-156).

### **Previous studies/Studies that dealt with psychological empowerment**

#### **Arabic Studies**

Al-Azzawi's study (2022) The study aimed to construct a measure of psychological empowerment, and to know the level of empowerment according to the variables of gender and experience. The study was conducted on a sample male and female teachers at secondary school, and the measure consists of (35) items, divided into four dimensions: (meaning, competence, independence, freedom of choice, and effect), and was answered according to the rating measure consists of five degrees. The factors of validity and reliability were extracted, and the results showed that secondary school teachers have well psychological empowerment, and that male teachers recorded higher levels of psychological empowerment than female teachers, and the experience variable had the greatest impact in recording a higher level of psychological empowerment (Al-Azzawi, 2022: 323-354).

#### Amer study (2022)

- The study aims to identify the extent of psychological empowerment among kindergarten female teachers.
- Are there statistically significant differences in the extent of psychological empowerment according to the variable of years of service?
- Are there statistically significant differences in the extent of psychological empowerment among kindergarten female teachers (whether they are married or not)?

The current research was based on kindergarten female teachers belonged to the Directorate of Baghdad Education in the Karkh and Rusafa areas for the academic year (2021-2022), and the sample included (400) teachers who were selected in a simple and random way. To achieve the research objectives, the researcher prepared a measurement to evaluate psychological empowerment consisting of (30) items covering the four areas (meaning, competence, freedom of choice, and effect), then the measurement was presented to experts in the field of kindergartens, educational and psychological sciences, and the researcher used validity indicators, including face and construct validity. The stability of the measurement was calculated using two methods to retest. After re-testing, it was found that the percentage of agreement was 0.85 and the Cronbach's alpha was 0.78. After applying the measurement to the sample, by using a statistics program (SPSS) the data was analyzed and treated statistically.

The research resulted in the following findings:

- Kindergarten female teachers enjoy psychological empowerment.
- There are statistically significant differences in psychological empowerment according to vary the years of service.
- There are no differences in psychological empowerment between married and unmarried kindergarten female teachers, based on the results, the researcher put forward several recommendations and proposals (Amer, 2022: 3-18).

#### Foreign Studies

Okyere study (2016) The study aimed to identify the four dimensions of psychological empowerment (meaning, competence, choice, and effect), in a sample contains six businesswomen from rural in Amharia-Otenebe, a village in region of the Greater Accra Rural in Ghana. The findings indicate that those rural women involved in entrepreneurial activities find their job more important and meaningful, it has also been reported that women have a remarkable level of competence to manage their businesses. In addition, the results showed that women enjoy a greater level of independence and freedom in managing their businesses. Moreover, these women enjoy control and the great effect on what happens in their work. The findings provide initial evidence that rural women engaged in entrepreneurial activities feel highly psychologically empowered (Okyireh, 2016:138-141).

Bozkul and Unsal study (2024) This study aims to develop and examine the effectiveness of a collective counseling program based on feminist therapy to empower women and reduce internal sex discrimination. The program was designed based on the point of view the awareness groups that have a fundamental place in women's movements. A semi-experimental design with a control group was used for pre-test and post-test. The study participants were 26 young women, with an average age of  $22.50 \pm 1.10$ . The tools of data collection included the internal sexism measurement, the women's psychological empowerment measurement, and the personal information form. Analysis of variation was used to analyze the data. Results indicated a decrease in levels of internalized sexism and an increase in levels of psychological strength between participants. These findings are important for both mental health and gender studies and may contribute to future practices and research on psychological and educational interventions to reduce sexism among women (Binaz&Unsal,2024:77-87).



### Studies that dealt with mothers of children with autism

Al-Sahmah Study (2020) "The current study aimed to identify the nature of the relationship between self-compassion and patterns of emotional attachment and to discover the possibility of predicting self-compassion through patterns of emotional attachment. The study sample consisted of (360) fathers and mothers of children with autism spectrum disorder in the city of Riyadh. The researcher applied the following tools to them: the Self-Compassion measurement prepared by Neff (2003) and translated by Abdul Rahman and others (2015), and the Yarmouk measurement for adult attachment Styles prepared by Abu Ghazal and Jaradat (2009). The results of the study indicated the following: 1) The existence of a positive correlational relationship, statistically significant between the positive dimensions of self-compassion (compassion for the self, common humanity, mental alertness) and between secure attachment and anxious attachment, and the presence of a statistically significant negative correlation between mental alertness and avoidant attachment, and the absence of a statistically significant correlation between compassion and common humanity and avoidant attachment. There is a statistically significant negative correlation between the negative dimensions of self-compassion (self-judgment, isolation, and excessive empathy) and secure attachment, and there is a statistically significant positive correlation between the negative dimensions of self-compassion and anxious and avoidant attachment. There is also a positive correlation a statistically significant relationship between the total score of self-compassion and secure attachment, and there is a statistically significant negative correlation between the total score of self-compassion and anxious attachment and avoidant attachment. 2) The attachment style (secure, avoidant) contributes to predicting self-compassion, the attachment style (anxious, avoidant) contributes to predicting self-judgment, isolation, and excessive empathy, and the attachment style (secure, anxious) contributes to predicting common humanity and mental alertness, as well as Attachment styles (secure, anxious, and avoidant) contribute to predicting the overall degree of self-compassion. The results were discussed considering the theoretical framework and previous studies." (Al-Sahmah, 2020: 99-138).

Al-Araj Study (2021) "This study aimed to identify the level of social stigma and its relationship to worry about the future and social isolation between mothers of children with autism spectrum disorder in Ramallah and Al-Bireh Governorate. To achieve the objectives of the study, the descriptive, correlational approach was used, and three measures were used for the study: The social stigma measure and the future worry measure, and the social isolation measure was applied to a sample that included (101) mothers of children with autism spectrum disorder in Ramallah and Al-Bireh Governorate. The results showed that the level of social stigma was middle. The results also indicated that there were no statistically significant differences in social stigma according to the variables: the child's sex, the child's age, the mother's educational level, and social status, while the level of social stigma was middle. The differences were statistically significant in social stigma according to the variable of place of staying in favor of (the camp), and the results showed that the level of worry about the future was high. The results also indicated that there were no statistically significant differences in worry about the future according to the variables: the sex of the child, the age of the child, and the educational level of the mother and social status, while the level of worry about the future was middle. The differences were statistically significant in social isolation according to the child's age variable and in favor of (less than 7 years). The results showed a statistically significant correlation between social stigma and future worry between mothers of children with autism spectrum disorder, and the relationship was positive. That is, when the degree of social stigma was high, the level of worry about the future became high. It was also shown that there is a statistically significant relationship between worry about the future and social isolation of mothers, and the relationship was positive, meaning that the greater the degree of worry about the future, the greater the level of social isolation." (Al-Araj, 2021: 116).

## 2. Materials and Methods

### The research community

The research community consisted of mothers of autistic children registered in government institutes for the academic year 2022-2023 in the city of Baghdad, and their total number was (2331), with (1787) males and (544) females.

### The research sample

The number of individuals in the research sample was (130) mothers of autistic children. Four institutes and centers were chosen, and several mothers of autistic students were randomly selected from each institute. Table 1 shows this.

**Table 1.** Number of mothers of children with autism, distributed by institute

Sequence	Name of the institute or center	the total
.1	Baghdad Autism Center	33
.2	Al-Nahal Institute for Autism Care	35
.3	Rami Institute for Autism	36
.4	Basma Amal Center for Autism	26
the total		130

### Search tool

Psychological empowerment strategies measure: The process of constructing the measure went through a series of the following stages:

1. Identify psychological empowerment strategies: to determine psychological empowerment strategies, the researcher placed a definition of psychological empowerment strategies, and considering the definition, four strategies for psychological empowerment were identified. These strategies are: - 1- proper thinking, which includes paragraphs (1-10) 2- Dialogue skills, which includes paragraphs (11-20). 3- Emotional control, which includes paragraphs (21-30). 4- Decision making, which includes paragraphs (31-38).
2. Formulating paragraphs: the items for the Psychological Empowerment Strategies measure were formulated and the items were distributed according to the areas of the measure, with (10) items for each strategy, and the number of items on the measure was (40) items, noting that the items are answered by mothers.

3. The Analysis of Statistical paragraphs:

Calculating discriminatory power: for the purpose of verifying the discriminating power of the paragraphs, a random sample of (210) mothers of children with autism were selected, and the arrangement of scores which obtained by the sample in descending order, that is, from the highest score to the lowest score. After that, the upper and lower 27% of the scores were chosen to represent the two extreme groups, the two groups included (112) mothers of autistic children, the researcher used the t-test for two independent samples to test the differences between the upper group and the lower group, for each item in the measure, the T value was considered an indicator for distinguishing each item by comparing it to the tabular value. All items were distinct at a level of significance (0.05) and with a degree of freedom (110), as the tabular value reached (1.960) except for two items (37, 39) and Table 2 explains that.

**Table 2.** T-values for the items of the Psychological Empowerment Strategies Scale using the two extreme samples method

Se q u	Upper group 27%		Lower group 27%		t- value	Conn otatio n level	Se q u	Upper group 27%		Lower group 27%		t- value	Conn otatio n
	Mean	s	Mean	s				Mean	level	Mean	s		
1	3.7500	.43693	2.6607	.69483	9.931	Mark	21	3.4107	.49642	2.1429	.81861	9.910	Mark
2	3.7321	.55567	2.8036	.64441	8.166	Mark	22	3.3929	.49281	2.2143	.86790	8.837	Mark
3	3.7321	.44685	2.5179	.80884	9.834	Mark	23	3.3750	.48850	2.1964	.88255	8.743	Mark
4	3.7321	.44685	2.6786	.74118	9.110	Mark	24	3.3571	.48349	2.1607	.91008	8.688	Mark
5	3.7143	.45584	2.5893	.78107	9.309	Mark	25	3.3393	.47775	2.1636	.91820	8.440	Mark
6	3.6786	.47125	2.5893	.70780	9.586	Mark	26	3.3214	.47125	2.2857	.98561	7.094	Mark
7	3.6429	.48349	2.6250	.70227	8.934	Mark	27	3.3036	.46396	2.2857	.98561	6.992	Mark
8	3.6071	.49281	2.3929	.70527	10.561	Mark	28	3.1964	.40089	2.0714	.96967	8.023	Mark
9	3.6071	.65167	2.7321	.67396	6.984	Mark	29	3.1607	.37059	2.0000	1.00905	8.080	Mark
10	3.5893	.65441	2.6964	.68542	7.051	Mark	30	3.1250	.33371	1.8929	.92792	9.350	Mark
11	3.5893	.49642	2.3571	.69879	10.757	Mark	31	3.1071	.31209	2.1964	.90292	7.134	Mark
12	3.5714	.70986	2.7679	.66033	6.203	Mark	32	3.1786	.71623	2.8929	.67900	2.166	Mark
13	3.5536	.50162	2.2679	.61765	12.092	Mark	33	3.0714	.68376	2.7679	.66033	2.390	Mark
14	3.5357	.50324	2.3214	.69038	10.636	Mark	34	3.0714	.25987	1.6786	.99283	10.156	Mark
15	3.5000	.50452	2.3393	.69483	10.115	Mark	35	3.0536	.22721	1.5536	.89279	12.185	Mark
16	3.4821	.50420	2.3750	.70227	9.583	Mark	36	2.9643	.46571	1.8750	.66230	10.068	Mark
17	3.4643	.50324	2.3750	.70227	9.435	Mark	37	2.8214	.47125	2.7321	.55567	0.917	Mark
18	3.4464	.50162	2.3750	.70227	9.290	Mark	38	2.9464	.35263	1.4107	.78107	13.410	Mark
19	3.4464	.82945	2.7857	.65267	4.685	Mark	39	2.9107	.39436	2.8750	.63425	0.358	Mark
20	3.4286	.49935	2.2857	.67995	10.138	Mark	40	2.9821	.30097	1.4821	.83101	12.700	Mark

The relationship of the paragraph to the total: the discrimination factor was used for the items of the Psychological Empowerment Strategies measure using the Pearson correlation equation between the individuals' scores on each item and their total scores on the measure for (210) questionnaires, which are the same questionnaires that were exposed to analysis using the two extreme samples method. It was found that all correlation factors were distinct when compared to the tabular correlation factor values, except two paragraphs (37, 39), and Table 3 shows this.

**Table 3.** The correlation value between each item of the Psychological Empowerment Strategies Scale and the total

Sequ	r value	Sequ	r value	Sequ	r value	Sequ	r value	Sequ	r value
1	0.75	9	0.89	17	0.48	25	0.67	33	0.49
2	0.70	10	0.97	18	0.75	26	0.49	34	0.70
3	0.39	11	0.96	19	0.59	27	0.61	35	0.76
4	0.47	12	0.78	20	0.66	28	0.50	36	0.47

5	0.82	13	0.57	21	0.40	29	0.54	37	0.09
6	0.42	14	0.98	22	0.52	30	0.61	38	0.64
7	0.34	15	0.78	23	0.47	31	0.76	39	0.04
8	0.88	16	0.56	24	0.84	32	0.80	40	0.67

### Validity of the scale

After the items of the measure were formulated in its initial form, and after putting the instructions and alternatives, and for the purpose of identifying the obvious validity of the measurement, the researcher presented it (Appendix / 1) to a group of experts specialized in psychology. After the researcher explained to them the purpose of the study and presented the theoretical definition of the study variable and the items related to the measure, asking them to express their comments and opinions regarding the measurement. All items were accepted after getting an agreement rate of 80%, and thus all items were maintained.

### Stability of the tool

Re-testing: The measure was applied to (60) mothers of children with autism, and the measure was re-applied after two weeks, as it is noted that the period between the two tests should not be long, as the period between the first and second tests should range between (10-20 days). The value of the correlation coefficient was (0.81).

Half division: In this method, paragraphs are divided into two halves. Each part consists of (19) paragraphs, the division was based on singles and evens paragraphs, after calculating the Pearson correlation factor between the two halves of the test, it was found to be (0.75), and since the extracted correlation factor was for half of the test, it was arranged using the Spearman-Brown equation, after that the reliability factor of the measure using this method was (0.86), and this value is considered acceptable compared to previous studies.

Correcting the measure: The researcher put a graded measure to answer the paragraphs, which is (it applies to it a lot, it applies to it sometimes, it applies to it a little, it does not apply to it). The weights of the alternatives were (4, 1, 2, 3), and the highest possible score on the measure was (152). The lowest possible score is (38) and the average theoretical score is (95).

Final application: After verifying the validity of the current research tool attached (1) and applying it to the selected research sample consisting of (130) mothers of autistic children. The researcher was careful to distribute the measure questionnaires under her supervision, and after the researcher made sure that the sample understood the measure instructions, she asked them to read them carefully and answer by choosing one of the alternatives freely, because their answers will not be seen by anyone except the researcher and that their answers will contribute to helping the researcher and scientific research.

Statistical Means: The researcher used the following statistical means:

1. One-sample T-test.
2. T-test for two independent samples.
3. Pearson's correlation factor.
4. Spearman-Brown equation.

### 3. Results and Discussion

Identify psychological empowerment strategies among mothers of autistic children.

The arithmetic means for the sample of mothers of autistic children and their number (130) on the strategy of avoiding stressful situations was (24.9385), which is less than the hypothesized mean for the tool, which was (25). It was found that the T value calculated after using the one-sample t-test was (0.185), which is not significant at the connotation

level (0.05) and degree of freedom (129), which indicates that mothers of children with autism have a lower ability to think properly, and Table 4 shows this.

**Table 4.** The t-test for the significance of the differences between the average scores of psychological empowerment strategies and the hypothesized average for the sample

Psychological Empowerment Strategies	Number	Arithmetic Mean	Standard Deviation	Hypothetic Mean	Calculated T-Value	Tabular T-Value	Significance Level	Degree of Freedom
Sound thinking	130	24,9385	3.78441	25	0.185	1.660	0.05	129
Dialogue skills	130	24,2538	4.88045	25	1,743	1.660	0.05	129
Emotion control	130	23.9154	6.86643	25	1.801	1.660	0.05	129
Make decision	130	19.9000	2.77545	20	0.411	1.660	0.05	129

And the arithmetic mean for the sample of mothers of autistic children (130) on the dialogue skills strategy is (24.2538) and it was found that the T value calculated after using the t-test for one sample is (1.743), which is not statistically significant at the connotation level (0.05) and the degree of freedom (129), which indicates that mothers of autistic children have decreased in dialogue skills, and Table 4 shows this.

The arithmetic mean for the sample of mothers of autistic children (130) on the emotion control strategy was (23.9154) and it was found that the T value calculated after using the t-test for one sample was (1.801), which is not statistically significant at the connotation level (0.05) and degree of freedom (129), which indicates that mothers of autistic children have a lower ability to control emotions, and Table (4) shows this.

The arithmetic mean for the sample of mothers of autistic children (130) on the decision-making strategy was (19.9000), and it was found that the T value calculated after using the t-test for one sample is (0.411), which is not statistically significant at the connotation level (0.05) and degree freedom (129), which indicates that mothers.

The results in Table 4 showed that there is no statistically significant difference in the sound thinking strategy among mothers of autistic children, and there is also no statistically significant difference in the dialogue skills strategy, the emotion control strategy, and the decision-making strategy among mothers of autistic children.

This result can be explained by the feeling of the mothers of autistic children of the burden of the roles required of them and the psychological pressures to which they are exposed, and this may sometimes make them feel a decreased ability to face the requirements of their children and the requirements of their autistic child.

Sprietzer (1995) believes that whenever the individual's control increases and become more controller in all activities of his life, this indicates a high level of psychological empowerment, and whenever the individual's control decreases in his life activities, this indicates the level of psychological empowerment become lower. In addition, Tangland's vision explains indicators of psychological empowerment appear in all activities of human life, of which work represents only one field.

#### 4. Conclusion

Through the results of the current study, which were presented and discussed, the following conclusions can be get:

1. The decreased ability to think properly in mothers of autistic children may be due to the weakness of their energy to think properly due to the psychological pressures that the mother is exposed to because of her child with autism disorder.

2. Since the ability to think properly decreases among mothers of children with autism, it is natural that their ability to make decisions decreases, in addition to the lack of dialogue skills.
3. The decreased ability of mothers of autistic children to control emotions is due to the painful experiences that the mother is exposed to because of her child with autism disorder, which puts her in a state of constant anger and tension. When the mother faces psychological pressure, she may lose control of her feelings and it is difficult for her to control them.

## 5. Recommendation

Based on the results of the research, the researcher recommends the following:

1. Urging mothers to accept their children with autism spectrum disorder and not be ashamed of his behavior in front of others.
2. Increasing attention and care by government institutions towards mothers of children with autism, in particular and those with other disabilities in general and providing them with psychological care because their feelings and emotions change due to the difficulties that the mother faces with her child with autism or disability.
3. Exposing mothers to training and guidance sessions on educational methods for dealing with a child with autism in a way that does not put psychological pressure on them.

## 6. Suggestion

The researcher suggests the following:

1. Conducting studies aimed at identifying the relationship between psychological empowerment strategies and methods of dealing with stress among mothers of autistic children.
2. Conduct a study to identify the reasons for the decrease in psychological empowerment strategies among mothers of autistic children.
3. Conducting a study aimed at preparing a counseling program aimed at modifying psychological empowerment strategies for mothers of autistic children.
4. Conducting a study aimed at revealing psychological empowerment strategies among mothers of people with other disabilities (Down Syndrome, learning difficulties).

## REFERENCES

- [1] P. A., *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 4th ed. Washington DC: American Psychiatric Association, 2000.
- [2] A. F. L. Abdel Fattah, "The direct and indirect effects of psychological empowerment, self-compassion, and academic perseverance among students in the first and second grades in the general secondary stage," *Faculty of Education, Assiut University*, vol. 34, no. 12, p. 1, 2018.
- [3] A. K. Abdel Fattah, "The psychological empowerment of women in patriarchal culture," *Int. J. Women's Children's Stud.*, vol. 2, no. 4, 2022.
- [4] A. A. L. Abu Asaad, "The effectiveness of a counseling program based on psychological empowerment in improving life satisfaction and hope among middle school students with broken families in Karak Governorate," *J. Educ. Sci. Stud.*, Jordan, vol. 44, pp. 149-164, 2017.
- [5] J. M. A. Al-Araj, "Social stigma and its relationship to future anxiety and social isolation among mothers of children with autism spectrum disorder in Ramallah and Al-Bireh Governorate," *Master's Thesis*, Al-Quds Open University, 2022.

- [6] R. I. Al-Azzawi, "Measuring the psychological empowerment of secondary school teachers," *J. Educ. Psychol. Sci.*, vol. 2, no. 6, pp. 323-354, 2022.
- [7] M. A. R. Al-Sahma, "Patterns of emotional attachment as a predictor of self-compassion among parents of children with autism spectrum disorder," *Arab J. Disabil. Gifted Sci.*, vol. 4, no. 10, pp. 99-138, 2020.
- [8] R. S. Al-Tamimi and A. S. Nasser, "Abnormal birthmarks in autistic children," *Yearb. Childhood Motherhood Res. Center*, vol. 11, 2017.
- [9] F. A. Amer, "Psychological Empowerment among Kindergarten Teachers," *Al-Fath J. Educ. Psychol. Res.*, vol. 27, no. 3, 2022.
- [10] T. Amer, *The Autistic Child*, 1st ed. Jordan: Dar Al-Yarouzi, 2008.
- [11] B. Bozkur and Ü. Yetim, "The effect of Feminist Therapy-Based Group Counseling program on women's psychological empowerment and internalized sexism," *Arch. Women's Ment. Health*, vol. 27, pp. 77-87, 2024.
- [12] H. Dreher, *The Immune power personality*. USA: Aduutton Book, 1995.
- [13] J. Hassan, "The predictive value of psychological empowerment in self-regulation among a sample of secondary school students," *Doctoral Dissertation*, Faculty of Education, Helwan University, 2021.
- [14] D. Z. Lahlouhi and H. Belkhiri, "Job satisfaction and psychological empowerment, relationship and impact," *Master's Thesis*, Faculty of Economic and Commercial Sciences, Algeria, 2022.
- [15] M. M. Mustafa and M. A. Taha, "Self-advocacy and female students' perceptions of fair classes as variables predictive of the psychological empowerment of female university students," *J. Faculty Educ., Al-Azhar Univ.*, vol. 162, no. 2, pp. 1-82, 2015.
- [16] M. A. A. Okyireh and K. N. Simpeh, "Exploring the Nature of Psychological Empowerment of Women Entrepreneurs in a Rural Setting in Greater Accra, Ghana," *J. Bus. Manag. Sci.*, vol. 4, no. 6, pp. 138-141, 2016.
- [17] L. B. Patterson, "Fostering strengths in incarcerated youth: the development of a measure of psychological empowerment in Oregon youth authority correctional facilities," *Master's Thesis*, Portland State University, 2013.
- [18] A. H. Perry, "Effect of demographic factors on empowerment attributions of parents of children with autistic spectrum disorders," *Doctoral Dissertation*, The University of Alabama, 2013.
- [19] W. A. Randolph and M. Sashkin, "Can organizational empowerment work in multinational settings?," *Acad. Manag. Exec.*, vol. 16, no. 1, pp. 102-115, 2002.
- [20] S. M. Salem and A. A. Cavafy, "Sixth International Conference (Rehabilitation of People with Special Needs), (Monitoring Reality and Orienting the Future)," *Inst. Educ. Stud.*, Egypt, pp. 844-865, July 16-17, 2008.
- [21] R. Singh, "Psychological Empowerment of Women: A Root to All The Development," *Innov. Res. Concept*, vol. 7, no. 9, 2022.
- [22] G. M. Spreitzer, "Psychological Empowerment in the Workplace: Dimensions, Measurement, and Validation," *Acad. Manag. J.*, vol. 38, no. 5, pp. 1442-1465, 1995.
- [23] S. H. Kinnear, "Understanding the Experience of Stigma for Parents of Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder and the Role Stigma Plays in Families Lives," *J. Autism Dev. Disord.*, pp. 492-953, 2016.
- [24] P.-A. Tengland, "Empowerment: A Conceptual Discussion," *Health Care Anal.*, vol. 16, pp. 77-96, 2008.
- [25] S. R. M. Theeb, "Designing a training program to develop communication and social skills and self-independence among autistic children and measuring its effectiveness," *Doctoral Dissertation*, University of Jordan, College of Graduate Studies, 2004.