

An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of The Knowledge, Beliefs, and Coping Practices of South African Mothers Raising Children with Autism

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ABSTRACT The study explored the knowledge, beliefs and coping strategies used by black South African mothers in raising a child with autism. Using a qualitative cross-sectional design, nine mothers of children with autism spectrum disorder or ASD were recruited through snowball sampling. The mothers' experiences were captured through individual semi-structured interviews and analysed through Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). The findings revealed the mothers have a lack of knowledge about ASD. The majority of the mothers believed that autism was part of God's will or caused by spiritual witchcraft. The mothers relied on religious and spirituality to cope with the challenges of raising an autistic child. Spirituality is an important source of resilience that promotes acceptance among mothers' of children with autism. The support of other mothers was also found to be another source of coping. Understanding the mothers' experiences of raising a child with autism is important for the development and provision of psychosocial support.