

Stress levels sky high for families of neurodiverse kids

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New Curtin University-led research has found caregivers of neurodivergent children are more likely to experience clinically significant levels of stress, poor mental health, financial hardship, and

negative relationships.

The research, published in the *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, explored the health and well-being of caregivers of children living with neurological conditions such as [autism spectrum disorder](#), attention deficit/ hyperactive disorder (ADHD), [cerebral palsy](#), and learning disabilities, and whether current support services were sufficient to meet their needs.

Lead researcher Dr. Ben Milbourn, from the Curtin School of Allied Health, said children diagnosed with neurodevelopmental conditions often require significant levels of support from their caregivers and meeting their emotional, physical, social and learning needs can be challenging.

"Our study asked 66 caregivers across Australia, the majority of whom were caring for children living with autism and ADHD, what their biggest challenges and concerns were," Dr. Milbourn said.

"We found that almost 80% of caregivers experienced poor well-being, high levels of stress and poor mental health. More than 22% of caregivers also experienced negative stigma from their local community, increasing the feeling of social isolation.

"Financial stresses were also a major contributor to caregivers' poor mental health and well-being, with the study finding that caregivers faced significant obstacles in terms of career success and progression and were often required to make personal sacrifices which impacted their personal identity."

Dr. Milbourn said the study found there was an array of unmet needs for caregivers of neurodivergent children, including [support groups](#), education and training, and financial aid and assistance.

"We need to ensure significant time and effort is placed into developing more accessible services and increasing caregiver understanding and education to improve their well-being and quality of life. Ensuring workplaces and employers are flexible and understanding of the needs of caregivers will help them maintain jobs and reduce financial pressures," Dr. Milbourn said.

"Obtaining an accurate and timely diagnosis, while also minimizing long waitlists, will help to improve the mental health and well-being of caregivers. It is also critical for caregivers to be given more detailed information from [health professionals](#) about their child's diagnosis, reason for behaviors, and strategies to best support their child.

"Future caregiver interventions and support services should specifically focus on protecting caregivers from existing stigma, while also educating the [general public](#) about what stigma is, how caregivers experience it, and how the general public is contributing to this."

More information: Emily D'Arcy et al, The Well-being and Support Needs of Australian Caregivers of Neurodiverse Children, *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders* (2023). [DOI: 10.1007/s10803-023-05910-1](#)

Provided by Curtin University

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