

Abstract Title:-

Exploring Parental Experiences and Perceptions of the M-CHAT R/F Tool for Early Autism Spectrum Disorder Screening in Toddlers Aged 16–30 Months

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Abstract:

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a neurodevelopmental disorder in which early identification plays a vital role in improving long-term developmental outcomes and quality of life. The Modified Checklist for Autism in Toddlers–Revised with Follow-Up (M-CHAT-R/F) is a widely used screening tool for toddlers aged 16–30 months. However, barriers such as language differences, health literacy, and cultural perceptions may influence parental understanding, emotional response, and follow-up behavior—especially in multicultural contexts such as the United Arab Emirates. This study aimed to explore parents’ experiences, perceptions, and decision-making when completing the M-CHAT-R/F.

Methods

A qualitative design was used through semi-structured individual interviews with parents of toddlers aged 16–30 months who had previously completed the M-CHAT-R/F. Purposive sampling recruited 15 participants, with data saturation guiding the final number. Interviews were transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis to identify patterns related to parental engagement, perceived challenges, facilitators, and responses to screening results.

Results

Four key themes emerged:

- Parents’ emotional experiences during screening (uncertainty, worry, hope, and optimism).
- Parents’ perceived role as observers and advocates for their child’s development.
- The challenges and successes in identifying subtle early autism signs.
- The impact of health literacy and the quality of communication with healthcare providers on understanding and acceptance of the screening process.

Conclusion

Findings highlight the need to strengthen ASD screening implementation by improving communication strategies, providing culturally sensitive support materials, and enhancing parental guidance after screening. Supporting parental understanding and engagement is critical for improving follow-up compliance and enabling early intervention in diverse healthcare settings like the UAE.

Keywords:

M-CHAT • Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) • Parental Perceptions • Screening • Early Intervention

Learning Objectives

By the end of this session, participants will be able to:

- Explain the role of the **M-CHAT-R/F** in early ASD screening for toddlers aged 16–30 months.
- Identify key parental experiences and emotional responses during ASD screening in multicultural settings.
- Recognize common barriers affecting parental engagement, including health literacy, culture, and communication gaps.
- Apply practical recommendations to improve parental support and follow-up compliance after screening results.

Short Professional Biography:

Nancy Abusamra is a Senior Staff Nurse and Nurse Educator with 16 years of experience in nursing education, specializing in professional training and healthcare workforce development. She has contributed significantly to designing and delivering high-impact educational programs that strengthen nursing competency and enhance standards of patient care. Nancy is currently pursuing a Master's degree in Pediatric Specialty at Mohammed Bin Rashid University of Medicine and Health Sciences (MBRU), with a strong research and clinical focus on neurodevelopmental disorders, particularly Autism Spectrum Disorder. Her work in the neurodevelopment clinic has strengthened her expertise in early identification, intervention strategies, and family-centered support for children with developmental needs.