

## The Future of School Age Children with Autism in Jordan: An Exploration of Parents' Future Visions and Confidences

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### Abstract:

Understanding parents' visions for their children is crucial for providing family-sensitive services. This study examined parents' views on the importance and confidence of future outcomes for children with autism. Parents of 115 children aged between 9-20 years old rated 14 future outcomes extracted from an extensive literature review. Results revealed significant differences between parents' ratings of importance (how important the outcome is) and confidence (how confident they are that the child will attain the outcome in the future). Parents' confidence was lower than their perceived importance of the outcome. Outcomes related to safety, happiness, and acceptance from family and community were given higher ratings. Socioeconomic status, level of support, and communication style significantly influenced parents' ratings. There is an urgent need for more family-focused services that address parents' priorities and goals for their children with autism in Jordan.

**Keywords:** Parents' visions, future outcomes for children with autism, parents of children with autism, future confidence, Jordan.

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## مستقبل طلبة سن المدرسة من ذوي التوحد في الأردن: استكشاف رؤى الوالدين وموثوقيتهم نحو مخرجات المستقبل

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### ملخص:

فهم رؤى الوالدين حول أبنائهم يعد أمراً جوهرياً في تقديم خدمات متمركزة حول الأسرة. تناولت هذه الدراسة فحص رؤى الوالدين نحو أهمية مجموعة من مخرجات المستقبل لأبنائهم ومدى ثقتهم في مقدرة أبنائهم على تحقيقها. قيم والدوا 115 طفلاً من ذوي التوحد أعمارهم (9-20) سنة 14 مخرجاً مستقبلياً تم استخلاصها من مراجعة للأدب ذي العلاقة. أشارت النتائج إلى أن تقديرات الوالدين للأهمية (مدى أهمية المخرج للوالدين) ومدى الثقة (مقدار ثقة الوالدين بمقدرة أبنائهم على تحقيق ذلك المخرج في المستقبل) قد اختلفت بصورة دالة احصائياً. كانت تقديرات مدى الثقة أقل من تقديرات مدى الأهمية. حصلت مخرجات الأمن والسعادة والقبول من قبل الأسرة والمجتمع بأعلى التقديرات. كان لمتغيرات المستوى الاقتصادي، ومستوى الدعم المقدم، ونمط التواصل دلالة احصائية في تقديرات الوالدين. هناك حاجة ملحة للخدمات المتمركزة حول الأسرة والتي تستهدف أولويات الوالدين وأهدافهم نحو أبنائهم من ذوي التوحد في الأردن.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** رؤى الآباء، مخرجات المستقبل للأطفال ذوي التوحد، آباء الأطفال ذوي التوحد، الموثوقية نحو المستقبل، الأردن.

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## **Introduction**

Autism is a neurodevelopmental disorder characterized by impairments in social communication and interaction as well as restricted and repetitive patterns of behavior (DSM-5: American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Autism is identified in approximately one in 36 children in the United States (Maenner et al., 2023). Globally, an estimated 52 million cases exist, with 1-2% diagnosed with autism (Pervin et al., 2022, p. 2). Prevalence varies worldwide, with recent reviews indicating rates of 0.6% globally (Salari et al., 2022). Autism is also prevalent in the Arab world (Alallawi et al., 2020).

The purpose of educational services for students with autism is to support their needs throughout their lifespan. However, as they transition into adulthood, many of their services are notably unavailable (Hoffman & Kirby, 2022). The current outcomes for students with autism suggested critical gaps between planning for these outcomes and whether they actually achieving them (Rispoli et al., 2023). Unfortunately, suboptimal future outcomes for individuals with autism encompassing areas such as employment, post-secondary education, social participation, independent living, and community engagement, have been documented (e.g., Curtiss et al., 2021; Kirby et al., 2020). The reasons for these suboptimal outcomes remain indefinable due to complex and interrelated factors (Chen et al., 2019), necessitating further exploration.

Consequently, examining parental visions for their children's future emerges as a pivotal avenue for researchers to address the complexities and gaps in comprehending issues around children's future outcomes. Parents often take on the responsibility of actively seeking out services, managing them, and assuring their continuity (Chen et al., 2019). The use of parents' visions and expectations for the future of their children not only provides insights into the challenges and concerns, but also holds the potential to enhance parental participation, expediting the identification of service and community gaps sooner (Poon et al., 2013; Sanderson & Bumble, 2023).

In this regard, existing research showed that parents valued a wide range of outcomes in areas that include: (1) employment and financial security (e.g., Flower et al., 2021), (2) independent living (e.g., Kirby et al., 2020), (3) post education (e.g., Ganjeh, 2020), (4) friendships (e.g., Szatmari et al., 2022), (5) personal safety (e.g., Ivey, 2004), (6) family and community acceptance (e.g., Curtiss et al., 2021), (8) good citizenship practices (e.g., Pillay et al., 2022), (9) mobility and autonomy in the

community (e.g., Poon et al., 2013), (10) personal satisfaction and happiness (e.g., Ivey, 2004) and (11) psychological well-being (Henninger & Taylor, 2013).

While this extensive body of research documented that parents' visions mediated and predicted outcomes for the future in areas such as employment, independent living, social participation, and personal safety (Holmes et al., 2018), however, two key findings have emerged. First, several studies have highlighted that parents prioritize outcomes linked to their children's personal satisfaction, safety, and acceptance from both family and community, placing greater importance on these aspects compared to more traditional outcomes like independent living, employment, and post-education opportunities (Sanderson & Bumble, 2023). This shift in parental priorities has been attributed to their adjustment of visions based on their children's functional levels and factors such as available resources, societal stigma, and community awareness (Poon et al., 2013).

Second, several studies have highlighted the existence of disparities in parents' responses (e.g., Blustein et al., 2016) making parents' concerns about the future of their children a recurring theme in literature (Chen et al., 2019). Rispoli et al. (2023) and Sanderson and Bumble (2023) suggested that these disparities can be attributed to various internal and external factors.

For instance, concerning internal factors, studies have primarily concentrated on children's cognitive functioning, communication abilities, and severity level as the most influential factors (e.g., Kirby, 2016). They have found that a lower IQ predicts poorer outcomes, higher severity of symptoms and behavior problems are associated with lower expectations for independent living (Reyes et al., 2021), better social communication skills predict improved social and employment outcomes, and higher adaptive behavior correlates with positive outcomes in daily activities (Levy & Perry, 2011).

Consequently, studies found that higher expectations are associated with parents' characteristics such as family income and higher educational status (Dell'Armo & Tasse, 2019). For example, Roselló (2022) explored child and family variables that predict functional outcomes of adolescents with ASD. Results indicated that parental educational level, social support and parenting distress predicted socialization in adolescents. Kirby (2016) utilized a latent variable approach to examine whether family background and functional performance could predict future outcomes. The provided

evidence that both family background (e.g., household income) and functional performance (e.g., self-care skills) significantly predicted parents' expectations for their children's futures.

Regarding external factors, studies have highlighted various factors influencing parents' visions, including the capacity of service systems to address students' unique transition needs, social pressures, early work experience opportunities, parental awareness of vocational options, availability of support services, inappropriate goal-setting, insufficient parental involvement, and challenges in accessing services (Snell-Rood et al., 2020).

The literature notably underscores the recognition that more can be done to enhance the life outcomes of students with autism (Lord et al., 2022). This accentuates the need for further investigation into how parents envision the future, especially concerning their internal factors, thereby shifting the focus from available services to stated needs.

### **The present study**

The education and prospects of students with autism represent a critical and evolving concern in the global context, with challenges faced by various cultural and regional communities. In Jordan, an estimated 10,000 children diagnosed with autism, based on a projected rate of 1/50 (Alqhazo et al., 2020; Hyassat et al., 2023). The landscape of education for students with autism in Jordan has witnessed both advancements and persisting gaps. Despite efforts to integrate these students into mainstream educational settings (Ministry of Education- MoE, 2020), the provision of services remains fragmented, involving multiple venues and vendor interactions (2014; Benson, 2020).

Unfortunately, parents of students with autism in Jordan encounter significant barriers to accessing quality services, resulting in considerable distress and reduced quality of life (Ahmed et al. 2023; AlKhateeb et al., 2022). Parents in Jordan expressed fears about their children's future, including concerns about their ability to forge a career, complete high school (or two years of college), and live independently (Al-Dababneh et al., 2017).

Notably, existing research on studying parents' visions predominantly derived from Western and highly developed countries. Addressing this gap becomes imperative, as contextual and cultural background play a significant role in shaping caregivers' expectations for the future of their children (Sanderson & Bumble, 2023). This study contributes to the

literature by providing insights from a distinct cultural context, marking it as the pioneering research of its kind in Jordan.

The aim of this research is to quantitatively explore parents' visions and confidence regarding specific future adult outcomes for their school-age children with autism in Jordan. Specifically, the study aimed to answer the following questions:

1. How do parents of school-age children with autism in Jordan visualize 14 specific future outcomes for their children?
2. How confident are parents in their children's ability to attain these visualized outcomes?
3. How do parents' demographic variables (gender, age, educational level, and socioeconomic status) and children's variables (gender, age, level of support, communication method, and number of years in educational settings) influence parents' ratings?

## **Methods**

### **Participants**

A convenient sample of parents of 115 children enrolled in seven autism-focused institutions in the city of Amman participated in this study. These seven centers serve a total of 223 students with autism in self-contained educational settings. Three of these centers provide partial inclusion for some of their students for a range of two to three days per week in cooperative regular schools. Participated parents were predominantly younger than 45 years ( $M = 480$  months,  $SD = 9.61$ ; range 23-72 years), with 71% being mothers all married, and held an undergraduate degree (58.3%;  $n = 67$ ). Additionally, 52.2% classified themselves as belonging to the middle socioeconomic class. None of the parents reported having more than one child with autism in the family.

In terms of children, they were mostly boys (70.4%) and ranged in age between 9-20 years ( $M = 163.32$  months,  $SD = 2.65$ ). Due to restricted access to their institutional records, the specification of their level of support and communication methods relied on parents' reports. Consequently, almost half of the children (49.6%) were believed to require substantial support (level 2), with 67% demonstrating the ability to communicate using words or other means of communication (e.g., pictures, signs). Moreover, half of them (47.6%) had been in educational settings for more than five years (see Table 1 for more details).

**Table1. Participants demographics**

Variable	N (%)
Parents' Characteristics	
<i>Gender</i>	
Mother	82 (71.3)
Father	33 (28.7)
<i>Age (range 23-72 years)</i>	
36 and below	42 (36.5)
37-44	38 (33)
45 and above	35 (30.4)
<i>Educational Level</i>	
High school and below	25 (21.7)
Undergraduate degree	67 (58.3)
Graduate degree	23 (20.0)
<i>Socioeconomic Status*</i>	
Lower class	26 (22.6)
Middle class	60 (52.2)
Upper class	29 (25.2)
Characteristics of Children	
<i>Gender</i>	
Male	81 (70.4)
Female	34 (29.6)
<i>Age range (years)</i>	
10 and below	19 (16.5)
11-14	53 (46.1)
15 and above	43 (37.4)
<i>Level of Support**</i>	
Level 1 (requiring support)	24 (20.9)
Level 2 (substantial support)	57 (49.6)
Level 3 (very substantial support)	34 (29.6)
<i>Communication Method*</i>	
Communicate using words (requiring support)	32 (27.8)
Communicate by other means (e.g., pictures, sign language)	45 (39.1)
No communication	38 (33)
<i>Number of years in educational settings</i>	
Less than 3 years	11 (9.6)
3-5 years	47 (40.9)
More than 5 years	57 (49.6)
Total	115 (100)

\*classification made based on parents' judgments.

\*\* classification mentioned in students' institutional records and reported by the parents.

## **Instrument**

A quantitative research design using a self-developed survey was employed in this study. The survey developed based on a literature review of related studies. The survey included two parts. Part (1) gathered demographics about the parents and the children. Part (2) included 14 outcome-areas frequently reported in the literature (e.g., Chen et al., 2019; Ivey, 2004; Levy & Perry, 2011; Orsmond et al., 2024; Poon et al., 2013; Rao, 2024; Walsh et al., 2021). Subsequently, parents in this part were asked to rate how important these outcomes for the future of their children on a five-point Likert scale (1 = not at all important - 5 = extremely important), and how confident they are about their children's ability to attain them in the future (1 = highly unconfident - 5 = highly confident).

To validate the survey, a panel of seven experts specialized in the fields of special education and educational measurement independently rated the survey for clarity, understandability, and appropriateness. All experts' comments supported the survey's suitability for use in the study. In addition, internal coefficient correlations for the survey, after a pilot testing with 20 parents excluded from the study sample, revealed a correlation value of .996 (for outcome importance ratings) and .994 for (for outcome confidence ratings) with the total score, and a correlation value of .981 between both ratings, with all values significant at level of (0.01).

To establish reliability indicators, Cronbach alpha was calculated after a pilot testing. The results showed a value of 0.86 (for outcome importance ratings), 0.78 (for outcome confidence ratings), and 0.91 for overall reliability.

## **Ethical Considerations**

This research complies with all the relevant national regulations, institutional policies and in accordance the tenets of the Helsinki Declaration, and has been approved by the authors' institutional review board or equivalent committee. Parents who agreed to participate signed an informed consent form confirming their voluntary participation in the study before data collection began. Anonymized data were entered into SPSS for statistical analysis. All data were stored in secure files on the researchers' computer with a password and restricted access. All hard copies of the completed survey were kept in a locked filing cabinet.

## **Data Collection**

A total of 189 sealed packages were sent to eligible parents.

Eligibility criteria included: (1) having a child with autism aged between 6 and 20 years, (2) having been educated in an educational setting for at least 1 year, and (3) having at least one living parent. Sealed packages were placed in the children's bags, each containing a copy of the survey and participant information sheet. The participant information sheet explained the study's objectives and procedures to the parents, assuring them that all collected data would be used solely for research purposes. Parents who agreed were requested to return the completed survey and consent forms within two weeks. A friendly reminder letter was sent to parents who had not returned the surveys within the specified timeframe. Eventually, only 115 surveys were returned, filled out, and voluntarily signed by parents, meeting the inclusion criteria for the study. This resulted in a response rate of 60.8%.

### **Data analysis**

Data analysis was implemented using (IBM SPSS-25.0). The study used descriptive statistics (e.g., frequencies, means, standard deviations, and percentages), as well as independent samples *t*-test, paired *t*-test, and One-way ANOVA. A *p*-value of 0.05 was retained as a statistical significance level for the analysis.

### **Results**

#### **Parents ratings of outcomes importance and confidences**

Table 2 presents the means and standard deviations of parents' ratings regarding the importance of the 14 outcomes. The overall mean of all ratings was 3.49 (SD = .823), suggesting that most parents consider these outcomes as "very important," according to the options on the Likert scale. The most imperative outcome identified by parents for their children was the "Be secure and safe" (M = 4.12, SD = .938). Following this outcome, other important outcomes included "Be happy" (M = 3.98, SD = 1.17), "Be accepted by the family" (M = 3.97, SD = 1.18), and "Be accepted by the community" (M = 3.82, SD = .960).

On the contrary, the least important outcome, as presented in parents' ratings, was "Get married and become a parent," (M = 2.32, SD = .823). This was followed by "Provide care for parents when they get old" (M = 3.08, SD = 1.50), "Be a good citizenship" (M = 3.15, SD = 1.06), and "Autonomize in the community" (M = 3.37 SD = 1.15).

**Table 2. Parents' ratings of how important are the future outcomes ordered in descending order**

Statement	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Be secure and safe	4.12	.938
Be happy	3.98	1.17
Be accepted by the family	3.97	1.18
Be accepted by the community members	3.82	.960
Be independent and live independently	3.67	1.30
Have a Job	3.56	1.23
Enjoy leisure time	3.50	1.02
Have friendships	3.49	1.17
Continue his/her education	3.46	1.03
Perform religious practices	3.42	.917
Autonomize in the community	3.37	1.15
Be a good citizenship	3.15	1.06
Provide care for parents when they get old	3.08	1.50
Get married and becoming a parent	2.32	1.30
Total	3.49	.823

Consequently, Table 3 presents the means and standard deviations of parents' ratings regarding how confident they were in their children's ability to attain the outcomes they considered important in the future. The overall mean of all ratings was 2.85 ( $SD = .737$ ), indicating that most parent ratings were inclined toward being "unconfident," (according to the options on the Likert scale) in their children's ability to attain the outcomes they rated as important.

In terms of each outcome, parents were most confident that their children would attain the outcome of "Be happy," ( $M = 3.30$ ,  $SD = 1.03$ ). This was followed by outcomes of "Be secure and safe" with a mean of 3.25 ( $M = 3.25$ ,  $SD = 1.09$ ), "Be accepted by the family" ( $M = 3.23$ ,  $SD = 1.14$ ), and "Enjoy leisure time" ( $M = 3.13$ ,  $SD = 1.14$ ). On the other hand, parents were least confident that their children would be able to attain the outcome of "Get married and become a parent," ( $M = 2.50$ ,  $SD = 1.10$ ). This was followed by "Provide care for parents" ( $M = 2.50$ ,  $SD = 1.14$ ), "Have a Job" ( $M = 2.51$ ,  $SD = 1.03$ ), and "Perform religious practices" with a mean of 2.64 ( $M = 2.64$ ,  $SD = 1.10$ ).

**Table 3. Parents ratings of confidences of children's ability to attain the future outcomes ordered in descending order**

Statement	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Be happy	3.30	1.03
Be secure and safe	3.25	1.09
Be accepted by the family	3.23	1.14
Enjoy leisure time	3.13	1.14

Statement	M	SD
Be accepted by the community	3.11	1.21
Have friendships	2.83	1.07
Be independent and live independently	2.80	1.04
Autonomize in the community	2.75	1.22
Be a good citizenship	2.83	.837
Continue his/her education	2.71	.925
Performing religious practices	2.64	1.10
Have a Job	2.51	1.03
Provide care for parents when they get old	2.50	1.14
Get married and become a parent	2.50	1.10
Total	2.85	.737

Finally, a paired *t* test (see Table 4) was used to determine whether the differences between the parents' ratings of outcomes importance and confidences could be significantly different using comparisons based on individual items and overall levels. Results showed a statistically significant decrease in the overall mean of parents' ratings between the importance ( $M = 3.49$ ,  $SD = .823$ ) and confidences ( $M = 2.85$ ,  $SD = .737$ ),  $t(114) = 6.724$ ,  $p < 0.0005$ ), suggesting that parents were less confident in their children's ability to attain what they rated as important outcomes for the future. In addition, the results indicated that, with the exception of one statement, "Get married and become a parent" parents gave statistically significantly higher ratings for the importance compared to confidences for all of the other outcomes.

**Table 4. Results of Paired-Sample t- test of parents' ratings for outcomes importance and confidences**

Pair	Mean difference	Std.error of mean difference	95% confidence interval of the differences		<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	Sig. (2-tailed)
			Lower	Upper			
*I1 & C1	.739	.157	.428	1.051	4.700	114	.0005
I2 & C2	.704	.125	.457	.951	5.647	114	.0005
I3 & C3	.626	.163	.304	.948	3.849	114	.0005
I4 & C4	.374	.124	.129	.619	3.020	114	.003
I5 & C5	-.174	.126	-.424	.076	-1.37	114	.171
I6 & C6	.748	.108	.533	.962	6.907	114	.0005
I7 & C7	.870	.151	.570	1.169	5.758	114	.0005
I8 & C8	1.043	.151	.744	1.343	6.912	114	.0005
I9 & C9	.870	.121	.630	1.109	7.203	114	.0005
I10 & C10	.774	.110	.556	.991	7.047	114	.0005
I11 & C11	.678	.126	.428	.928	5.371	114	.0005
I12 & C12	.409	.098	.215	.603	4.172	114	.0005
I13 & C13	.583	.111	.362	.803	5.242	114	.0005

Pair	Mean difference	Std.error of mean difference	95% confidence interval of the differences		<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	Sig. (2-tailed)
			Lower	Upper			
I14 & C14	.661	.149	.365	.956	4.430	114	.0005
IT & CT	.636	.094	.448	.823	6.724	114	.0005

\* “I” represents statements concerned with Importance and “C” represents statements concerned with Confidences

### Factors influencing parents’ ratings

In examining the factors that may influence parents’ ratings of outcomes importance and confidences, results related to parents’ characteristics revealed that parents’ ratings of outcomes importance statistically differed only based on their socioeconomic class ( $F(2,112) = 4.909, p = .009$ ). The Scheffe post hoc test showed that the mean rating for “Upper-class” parents ( $M = 3.80, SD = .647$ ) was significantly higher than that of other groups. The same variable was the only variable that significantly influenced parents’ ratings of outcomes confidence ( $F(2,112) = 3.829, p = .025$ ) with the Scheffe post hoc test revealing that the mean rating for parents in the “Upper- class” ( $M = 3.02, SD = .718$ ) was significantly higher than that of the other groups.

Moreover, concerning children’s variables, the results discovered a statistically significant difference in parents’ ratings attributed to children’s level of support,  $F(2, 112) = 10.465, p = 0.0005$ , with results of the Scheffe post hoc test revealing that the “Level 3 of support/very substantial support” group ( $M = 2.42, SD = .576$ ) was statistically significantly lower than other groups. Concurrently, the results revealed a statistically significant difference in parents’ ratings attributed to children’s communication method,  $F(2, 112) = 6.494, p = 0.002$ , with results of the Scheffe post hoc test showing that the children in the “No communication” group ( $M = 2.52, SD = .633$ ) were statistically significantly lower than other groups.

### Discussion

In this study, our goal was to discover how parents value the importance of particular potential future outcomes for their children and how confident they are in their children’s ability to attain these outcomes in light of their internal factors related to their characteristics. Three important results obtained in this study.

First, parents in this study rated outcomes associated with their children’s happiness, safety, and acceptance from both family and community higher than other outcomes such as independent living,

employment, post education, and relationships). Second, disparities were evident in parents' responses, with parents in this study assigning higher importance ratings to future outcomes while expressing less confidence in their children's ability to attain these outcomes. Third, parents' and children's individual characteristics were found to influence parents' ratings of outcome importance and confidence levels. All these three findings are consistent with other studies (e.g., Chen et al., 2019; Ivey, 2004; Poon et al., 2013; Reyes et al., 2021)

In this context, results related to parents' prioritizations of outcomes related to safety, happiness, and family acceptance were somewhat expected when viewed within the Jordanian cultural context. The Jordanian culture is shaped by religion and traditions. It considers the family as the fundamental social unit (Al-Hassan et al., 2021). This type of family structure, in which siblings and relatives are involved in the rearing of children, has been seen as a foundation of long-term support and security (Sosnowy et al., 2018). Actually, families' assets related to inter-family social relationships results in fewer concerns among parents about their children's future (Sanderson & Bumble, 2023).

Accordingly, this type of family structure in Jordan directed parents' to belief that family members will continue providing ongoing support to their children even after their death, thus, they accentuated the importance of their children having these outcomes in the future. In addition, perhaps the formal or informal communication and agreements between parents and other family members (e.g., older siblings, aunts, and uncles) made them confident that other family members (e.g., siblings) will carry on their role in the future and continue providing support (e.g., financial, living arrangement with one of the siblings), whether they agreed upon that, mandated by the law, or it will naturally occur. Therefore, outcomes related to children's safety, happiness, and acceptance overshadowed other outcomes.

Another plausible explanation for this prioritization lies in the difficulties parents face with community awareness, stigma, and a lack of knowledge about autism in Jordan. As noted by Abuhamdah et al. (2023), the Jordanian population's limited awareness and knowledge about autism may result in delayed identification and inadequate intervention, thus leading to suboptimal outcomes. Consequently, parents in our study focused on outcomes that would enhance their children's happiness and safety rather than those that would change the community's perception, such as attaining independence, higher education, or marriage. Making

parents focus on family systems more than the community of service delivery systems.

To support that, parents in this study placed lower importance on outcomes related to securing a job, being independent, pursuing higher education, developing friendships with others, and performing citizenship and religion practices. This is expected when the challenges parents face in accessing quality services for their children in Jordan is documented. Studies in Jordan indicated that service provisions for children with autism are insufficient, fragmented, and impose a high financial burden on parents (e.g., Masri et al. 2023). Therefore, parents in this study were less confident that currently offered services would improve their children's functioning levels and thereby increase their chances of attaining outcomes without relying on family support. What further support this explanation is the prevailing unemployment rates supported by data from the Department of Statistics report (DoS. 2021)

Moreover, mean ratings of outcomes importance were higher than the ones for outcomes confidences (Table 4), supporting the notion of disparities between the two ratings. This means that parents in this study placed higher ratings on the importance of the outcomes, however, they were less confident in their children's ability to attain them. These disparities were in line with findings from other studies, including those by Finke et al. (2019), Chen et al. (2019), and Poon et al. (2013). It is possible that parents' lack of knowledge about their children's actual limitations and strengths contributed to their lower confidences in their children's future. Perhaps parents in this study were less confident that current children's functional performance would improve their children's level of functioning, thereby enhancing their chances to achieve better outcomes in the future. This is valid when considering that parents in Jordan encounter significant barriers in accessing quality services that are mostly fragmented and involve multiple venues and vendor interactions (AL Jabery et al., 2014).

In addition, these disparities could be linked to the interaction between parents' and children's characteristics and their responses. In this regard, results of this study showed that parents in the upper socioeconomic class significantly differed in their ratings concerning outcomes importance. Additionally, results revealed that children's current level of functioning (i.e., level of support/severity and communication ability) influenced parents' ratings of outcomes confidences. These results

are consistent with other studies (e.g., Kirby, 2016; Reyes et al., 2021; Roselló et al., 2022; Sanderson & Bumble, 2023).

A reasonable explanation for this result lies in the significant financial burden placed on parents and linked to therapeutic interventions. In this context, Masri et al (2023) documented that monthly expenses of autism therapeutic sessions could account for a significant amount between a quarter and a third of the entire monthly income of the family in Jordan. It is sensible to assume that parents with higher incomes would be able to provide their children with more comprehensive services, than other parents might do (Raouafi et al., 2018). Thus, this increased availability of therapeutic interventions could potentially lead to an improvement in their children's current and future functional performance, which would promote the achievement of better outcomes in the future compared to their counterparts from other socioeconomic classes.

Consequently, the higher confidence levels observed among parents of children requiring lower levels of support (level 1 of support) and those with higher communication abilities underscore the significant influence of children's functioning level on parental responses. As noted by Blustein et al. (2016), a child's current functioning plays a pivotal role in shaping parents' visions for their children's future. In this study, due to challenges in accessing quality services in Jordan, perhaps parents of children with lower levels of functioning were less optimistic about the potential of current services to enhance their children's functioning levels. Consequently, they expressed less confidence in their children's ability to achieve their envisioned outcomes. Conversely, parents of children with higher levels of functioning were more optimistic about their children's potential to attain their envisioned outcomes. As highlighted by Reyes et al. (2021), parents of youths with autism were less inclined to plan for the transition to adulthood if their child required more assistance with functional self-care skills and exhibited more problematic behaviors.

Taken together, it appears plausible that parents in Jordan lack guidance or a clear "*roadmap*" on how to plan and prepare their children for the future. The absence of such guidance, as discussed by Chen et al. (2019), may influence parents' prioritization of outcomes over confidence levels. Perhaps this compels them to adjust their visions to align with present circumstances and adopt a more contextualized approach.

## **Conclusion**

This study provided insights into the perspectives of parents with school-age children diagnosed with autism regarding the importance and confidence of 14 future outcomes. A significant difference was found between the importance and confidence ratings, revealing that parents have reduced confidence in their children's abilities to achieve the outcomes deemed important. However, parents prioritized their children's happiness, safety, and acceptance within the family and community over other outcomes such as post-school education, employment, and independent living. Interestingly, parents expressed high confidence in these same outcomes, believing that their children would attain them in the future. Lastly, parents' socioeconomic status, as well as children's level of functioning and communication style were the only crucial factors that affected parents' ratings.

## **Limitations and Future Directions**

Results of the current study have several limitations. First, the data were collected at one time-point only and do not allow for inferences of causality. It might be expected that parents' visions might change over time, especially when they interact more with their children's gradual progress. A second limitation of this study is our reliance on parents' judgments to determine children's severity levels and communication methods. While this approach offers valuable insights, it may lack the comprehensive accuracy of clinical assessments. Future studies should consider mitigating this limitation by incorporating additional assessment methods (e.g., behavioral observations or using teachers' evaluations). A third limitation of this study pertains to the survey employed. The results obtained in this study merit further investigation using qualitative techniques to gain an in-depth understanding of parental visions, confidences, and the factors that influence them.

## **Implications**

The findings of this study have important implications for various stakeholders involved in planning and delivering services for students with autism. First, service providers can enhance their interactions with families by developing educational programs that are tailored to address the specific outcomes identified by parents in this study. A collaborative approach to goal-setting and involving parents in the planning process can help achieve this.

Second, recognizing that parents in Jordan may require a "roadmap"

to navigate and balance their future visions with the current state of available services is crucial. This suggests a need for clear guidance and resources that can assist parents in making informed decisions about their children's future trajectories. Third, the study advocates for adopting comprehensive planning approaches, such as person-centered planning or family-centered planning. Incorporating these frameworks into planning processes can enhance the effectiveness of the provided interventions and support systems. Family-centered planning, particularly, recognizes the critical role of families in the planning process and seeks to involve them as active partners.

Lastly, the study calls for further research, especially qualitative studies, to research deeper into the details of how parents envision their children's futures. Exploring how external factors influence parental decisions and identifying training priorities for both parents and service providers.

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