



*Araştırma Makalesi • Research Article*

## A Qualitative Research on the Holiday Experiences of Families with a Child with Autism Spectrum Disorder \*

### *Otizm Spektrum Bozukluğu Olan Çocuğa Sahip Ailelerin Tatil Deneyimleri Üzerine Nitel Bir Araştırma*

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#### ÖZ

Otizm Spektrum Bozukluğu (OSB) teşhisi konulmuş çocukların aileleri hem tatilde hem de seyahat esnasında çeşitli zorluklarla karşılaşmaktadırlar. Bu çalışmanın amacı, OSB'ye sahip çocukları olan ailelerin tatil deneyimlerini belirlemek, tatilde yaşadıkları sorunları tespit etmek ve buna uygun pazarlama stratejileri geliştirmek adına ilgili paydaşlara öneriler sunmaktır. Araştırmada yarı yapılandırılmış odak grup görüşme tekniği kullanılmış ve Konya'da yaşayan OSB'li çocuk sahibi 17 aile ile mülakatlar gerçekleştirilmiştir. Araştırma bulguları, OSB tanısı olan çocuklara sahip ailelerin tatilleri esnasında karşılaştığı en önemli sorunların; konaklama işletmelerinin sunduğu hizmetlerin bu tür aileler için erişilebilir olmadığını ve seyahat esnasında yaşanan sorunların ailelerin tatil deneyimlerini olumsuz etkilediğini göstermiştir. Bu durum, OSB teşhisi konulmuş çocukların ve ailelerin topluma kazandırılmasının, toplumun otizm hakkındaki farkındalığının artırılmasının gerekliliğine dikkat çekmektedir.

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#### ABSTRACT

Families of children diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) face various difficulties both on vacation and during travel. This study aims to determine the holiday experiences of families with children diagnosed with ASD, identify the problems they experience throughout the vacation, and provide suggestions to relevant stakeholders to develop related marketing strategies. A semi-structured focus group interview technique was conducted with 17 families in Konya. Research findings show the most critical problems of the families are that the services offered by accommodation businesses are not accessible for them, the hotel staff and other families do not have sufficient awareness of the subject. This situation draws attention to the necessity of providing more accessible holiday options for them.

## 1. Introduction

Autism is a lifelong neurodevelopmental disease based on genetic bases with symptoms such as abnormal brain development, lack of development of social and communicative skills, difficulties in speaking and language

use, repetitive movements, echolalia, and obsessive behaviors, limitations in using imagination and empathy, disruption of daily routines, excessive reactions to some odors, excessive heat and even some colors (Akkök & Uzun, 2018; Özbaran, 2014: 170; Özeren, 2013:58; Autism Speaks, 2013; Lord, Cook, Leventhal & Amaral, 2000).

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According to the report of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDCP), the prevalence of autism in boys is 4.5 times higher than in girls (Aydın and Özgen, 2018). Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is increasing rapidly in the world and in Turkey. 1-2% of the world population has autism spectrum disorder (Aydın & Özgen, 2018). According to the data of the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDCP) in United States, it is predicted that one of every two newborns will have ASD in 2023 (Gökkuşuğu, 2014). ASD has increased by 6-15% every year in the world from 2002 to 2010 (Freund, Cerdán, Hernández, Guix, Iñesta & Castelló, 2019).

Most of studies in literature focus on the problems of families having children with autism spectrum disorder (Kudaibergenova, 2018; Gona, Newton, Rimba, Mapenzi, Kihara, Vijner & Abubakar, 2016; Bashir, Bashir, Lone & Ahmad, 2014; Divan, Vajaratkar, Desai, Strik-Lievers, & Patel 2014; Al Horany, Hassan & Bataineh, 2013; Bek, Gülveren & Şen, 2012; Karpát, 2011; Greeff & Walt, 2010; Çam & Özkan, 2009; Çengelci, 2009; Sharpe & Baker, 2007). As a lifelong disease, even if development is achieved with intensive education and correct attitudes, ASD is a condition that negatively affects families both financially and due to reasons such as burnout, future anxiety, social exclusion, and prejudices (Aslan, Cihan & Altın, 2014).

In addition to contributing to the national economy, tourism is a sector that responds to the psychological needs of individuals such as sightseeing, resting, and discovering new places. According to the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and the Manila Declaration (1980), the right and freedom to travel is valid for all people all over the world (İçöz, 2019). However, studies on tourism activities for autistic individuals are scarce, both in practice and in the literature.

Psychological difficulties and stress have been reported to be much more common in parents of children with autism than in parents of non-disabled children (Fombonne, Simmons, Ford, Meltzer & Goodman, 2003; Hare, Chapman, Fraser, Gore & Burton, 2003) or children with mental retardation or Down syndrome (Donovan, 1988). Increasing divorce rates have also been reported, with 1 in 3 families of children with ASD (Bromley, Hare, Davison & Emerson, 2004). A child with ASD places an additional burden on the family. Challenging and argumentative behaviour can prevent families from attending events together; couples are often unable to spend time alone due to the extreme demands of raising children and the lack of qualified staff to supervise the disabled child when they are away; another major stress factor is the increased cost of living, particularly for parents who are unable to work due to their caring responsibilities (Järbrink, Fombonne & Knapp, 2003). Other factors that impact on the family are the lack of appropriate support services, the lack of acceptance of autistic behaviour by society and sometimes by family members, and low levels of social support (Gray, 2003).

According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, families have the most central and lasting influence on children's lives, their health and well-being that are inextricably linked to parents' physical, emotional and social health,

social experiences and parenting practices (Schor, 2003). Therefore, it is possible that the dysfunction of the families of a child with ASD may have a negative impact on the development of the child with ASD and his or her siblings (Amet, 2013). Against this background the need for holiday time seems to be more necessary for families with children with ASD. The critical issue of respite and need for short breaks for families of children with autism has been raised in this study. In this study, it is aimed to investigate the holiday experiences of families with ASD child and the problems they experience during the holiday. Crucial suggestions will be provided to the related stakeholders in order to develop marketing strategies accordingly.

## 2. Literature Review

While providing or establishing services, tourism enterprises often ignore the accessibility of disabled individuals, who have an important place in the total population. This situation, which can be described as an indirect discrimination, also causes problems for disabled individuals in accessing the services provided (Akdu & Akdu, 2018).

It is noteworthy that the studies on mental disability within the scope of disabled tourism are limited. In studies on individuals with mental disabilities, autism spectrum disorder has been rarely mentioned. However, ASD, which has different degrees and progresses in various ways in each individual. Besides, it differs from other mentally disabled characteristics in several aspects. The needs of individuals with this disease also vary. Çengelci (2009) emphasizes that, although there are similarities between children with Down syndrome and children with autism, children with autism have differences such as lack of social interaction, disorders in behavior and language, and this may cause more stress on the families with ASD children compared to the families with Down syndrome.

For most people, leisure, travel and recreational activities are important aspects of life as they broaden horizons and encourage the development of new interests. Holidays also provide opportunities for relaxation and contribute significantly to overall emotional and psychological well-being. There are crucial benefits of family holidays, including the fact that parents and children can recharge from the stresses of daily life, that holidays provide an opportunity to strengthen family relationships, and that families indicated that it is particularly important to spend time together away from the problems of daily life (Amet, 2013).

Despite the undeniable benefits, holidays can be challenging for people with ASD and, more importantly, for their families. It is widely recognised that people with ASD are rigid in their learning and often lack 'common sense' in everyday situations (Jordan, 1999). Generalisation problems are common and there is a tendency to have inappropriate reactions to new environments and situations. For these reasons, individuals with ASD tend to prefer or confine themselves to simplified environments where exposure to novelty is limited. Although the thought of being away from home seems tempting and pleasant for most people, this is not necessarily the case for families with ASD, as holidays involve a change of routine and

environment. In addition, many parents of individuals with ASD find that they do not get the help they need when they are on holiday. Furthermore, going out in public with a child with a disability can cause intolerant reactions from passers-by (Ryan, 2005) which can be an additional incentive to go on holiday.

Amet (2013) aimed to determine the holiday experiences of the families having children with an ASD in his research, and he concluded that families in both groups did not take a vacation more than once in a year, and their use of public places such as cafes, hotels, cinemas, restaurants during their holidays was more limited compared to families with normal children. Besides, it was found that the most important problem of these families is the behavioral disorders of their children. These families need support to understand and develop their children's behavior. Improvement of leisure activities, and some financial aids are also needed.

Travelling is one of the most problematic issues for families with disabled children (Wang & Cole, 2014). Such families usually travel differently than the families without any disabled child (Huh & Singh, 2007; Jo, Kosciulek, Huh & Holecek, 2004), due to the adaptations that they have to make to travel together (Kim & Lehto, 2013). Families with disabled children must overcome certain internal barriers before they can actively travel (Packer, Mc Kercher & Yau, 2007). The negative attitudes of the society in which they live on a daily basis can be experienced as a constraint and a motivation for travel by people with disabilities. For some families, negative attitudes in their environment may prevent them from traveling (Darcy & Daruwalla, 1999), while others have chosen to participate in tourist trips to escape a sense of social exclusion (Blichfeldt & Nicolaisen, 2011). Apart from these factors, families with disabilities tend to have similar travel motivations as non-disabled people, such as the need to change environment and to see and live new experiences (Dominguez, Darcy & González, 2015).

Neo and Flaherty (2018) examined the difficulties that travelers with autism face during long-term travels in their study. The study stated that the excessive noise, traffic, and population density to which autistic individuals were exposed during travel and manual controls for security purposes were disturbing for those people. Emphasizing the responsibility of travel businesses towards individuals with autism, the study suggested to arrange a separate waiting room at airports close to the departure points of planes, sterilized from excessive light and noise to facilitate international travel of individuals with autism. It was also suggested that websites consisting of simple symbols and short sentences should be designed for travelers with ASD.

Sedgley, Pritchard, Morgan and Hanna (2017) investigated the effect of caring for a child diagnosed with autism on the perceived benefits offered by the holiday in their study. In this context, they interviewed with the mothers. According to the result of the research, mothers with ASD children stated that they did long researches online and offline before the holidays; they made an effort to get their children psychologically accustomed to the idea of the holiday (such as taking familiar items with them to

maintain the routine); they generally preferred quiet and isolated destinations in low seasons.

İçöz (2019) evaluated children with autism spectrum disorders within the scope of mental and cognitive disabilities in his study and included expert opinions about these children's holiday expectations and needs. In this context, he emphasized that children with autism exhibit behaviors such as shouting, swaying, and attacking, especially when they were alone. Therefore they should be engaged in activities and employing the staff who has knowledge on ASD to ensure the continuity of children's special education during the holidays is essential. Also, it was emphasized that children with ASD experienced nutritional problems due to gluten allergies and leaky bowel problems. For that reason, it was crucial to prepare appropriate menus.

Freund and his colleagues (2019) examined the emotions of families of children with ASD in terms of travel restrictions, and ways of coping with these restrictions. According to the study results, families mostly had a "fear of disturbing others" during their accommodation, and their biggest expectation from accommodation businesses was their sensitivity to ASD issue and employing "autism-friendly staff". Since autism is a hidden disease that is not noticed at first glance, society still stigmatizes and excludes these individuals because they do not have enough information about this disease. This situation affects the holiday intention of families with autism.

More than 500 thousand autistic children in Turkey have common problems as a natural consequence of being human even though they are different. In this context, tourism enterprises should fulfill their responsibilities in terms of social tourism and develop new tourism marketing strategies by making regulations that will enable individuals with autism and their families to participate in tourism activities. The notion of family is essential for the continuity of the society, and several studies show that the rate of divorce is high in parents with autistic children (Coşkun & Akkaş, 2015; Özdemir, Gürel, Töret & Özkubat, 2012; Gau, Chou, Chiang, Lee, Wong, Chou & Wu, 2012; Hartley, Baker, Seltzer, Floyd, Greenberg, Orsmond & Bolt, 2010; Woodgate, Ateah & Secco, 2008; Sobsey, 2004; Floyd & Zmich, 1991; Rothrigue, Morgan & Hanna, 1990). In this context, it has become an obligation for the public to provide psychological support to the family and the educational support to the child. More solid practices that will encourage participation of such people in tourism activities, should be reconsidered within that scope. Insufficient statistics about the participation of disabled individuals in tourism activities make it difficult to diagnose the problems. In the light of this information, one of the main aims of this study is to pioneer studies that examine autistic individuals and their families' problems in tourism sector, especially in Turkey.

### 3. Methodology

The study's primary purpose is to analyze the holiday experiences of families with ASD child during the holiday and to offer suggestions to businesses in order to develop marketing strategies accordingly. The qualitative research method was used in the study. Based on observations and

interviews, the facts are tried to be reached with the inductive method (Arıkan, 2013).

Qualitative research methods are needed to examine the experiences and feelings of children with autism spectrum disorder and their families, who constitute the study sample (Aslan et al., 2014). Expressing the problems experienced by autistic individuals and their families during the tourism activity may also be beneficial in reaching the facts. In this context, it is also noteworthy that qualitative research methods are preferred in most of the studies conducted on individuals with autism spectrum disorder (Aslan et al. 2014; Çopuroğlu & Mengi, 2014; Öztürk, 2011; Lord et al. 2000; Cridland, Jones, Caputi & Magee, 2015).

The study consists of families with autistic children who have special education in rehabilitation centers in Konya city center. There are 43 special education and rehabilitation centers in Konya city center in 2020. The implementation of the study was carried out in Private Mavi Işıklar Rehabilitation Center. Seventy-one students have education in that center in spring semester of 2020, and 37 of these students have autism spectrum disorder.

Since qualitative research is not for generalizing purposes, it is essential to understand it in more depth rather than measure the event or phenomenon being studied. Therefore, it is more beneficial to work with a small sample group suitable for the study than a large sample population. In this context, the purposeful sampling method, which is generally preferred in qualitative research, was used. This sampling method makes it possible to select information-rich situations within the context of the purpose of the study in order to conduct in-depth research (Glesne, 2013; Büyüköztürk, Kılıç, Çakma, Akgün, Karadeniz & Demirel, 2019).

Children's developmental stages are another critical factor that can affect the stress level of parents. The types of problems faced by the families with a child with ASD during childhood or adolescence vary. In this context, an age limit was also applied in the sample selection of the research. The research sample was chosen from the parents of children with ASD between the ages of 4-12. Besides, the families who had taken a vacation for last three years were selected to go further with the interview questions to examine their holiday experiences. On that stage the families who had vacations without their disabled child or the families hadn't taken any vacation at all, were not included. In the study, the families of 17 autistic children were selected based on these criteria to conduct semi-structured interviews face-to-face. Each interview lasted an hour on average, a recording device was used to prevent data loss and the participants' answers were transcribed after the interview. The interviews were recorded with the participants' consent, and it was stated that their names would be kept confidential and the participants were coded as K1, K2... K17.

### 3.1. Data Collection and Analysis

The questions directed to the focus group were obtained as a result of detailed literature review and based on expert opinions and are listed below;

1. Could you give information about yourself and your child?
2. How often do you go on vacation?
3. Which means of transport do you prefer to travel?
4. What are the most common problems you encounter while traveling?
5. What kind of accommodation do you prefer for your holiday? Why?
6. What are the most common problems you encounter during accommodation?
7. What is your favorite / preferred activity to do with your child during the holiday?
8. What are your expectations and suggestions for solving the problems you encounter during your holiday?

The data analysis method used for this study is "thematic analysis", which is a method that involves thematic coding and detecting common patterns and themes in the data (Spencer, Ritchie, Ormston, O'Connor & Barnard, 2014). In thematic analysis, the data is sorted according to different codes, which are classified into different themes that emerge from the codes usually include the ones that are similar to each other. The researcher can either have predefined themes, or he creates themes during the analysis process, or both. One of the key strengths of that analysis method is its flexibility (Braun & Clarke, 2006), which, due to the exploratory nature of the study, is seen as a crucial benefit as it enables the researcher to use the existing themes related to holiday experiences of families with ASD child. It also gives the opportunity to let new topics arise out of the data.

### 3.2. Validity and Reliability

The quality and reliability of the study conducted is assumed more convenient and useful in qualitative research (Golafshani, 2003). The reliability in qualitative researches refers to such factors: the credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The credibility in this study is accepted high as the researchers worked with utmost care during the transcription phase of the interviews so as not to miss out any important underlying meanings. In addition, this study can be applied to contexts other than tourism, such as leisure activities. It may also be useful in understanding other families with disabled people with different specific characteristics, and not just families with ASD children, which indicates that this study is transferable. However, the aim of qualitative research is not to make generalizations (Morrow, 2005) and while some aspects of this study can be applied to other contexts that may be specific to the respondents. Regarding the dependability of it, other researchers interviewing the same participants or working with the same data set are likely to reach similar conclusions.

The results of this study mirror the experiences of the parents interviewed, and the researchers tried to be objective throughout the data collection as well as in the analysis and presentation of the findings. However, all studies are tainted with some degree of subjectivity, for instance, the choice of particular research questions or the interpretation of the results in relation to the researcher's prior knowledge (Morrow, 2005). In order to accurately

represent the holiday experiences and problems of parents with ASD children and to ensure a high degree of confirmation, numerous quotes are given in the results section.

### 3.3. Ethical Issues

Ethical consideration is a matter of utmost importance when the research involves children (Veal, 2011). Though this study was conducted from the parents' perspective, the questions in the interview template mainly related to understand the holiday experiences with their ASD children, as some limitations expected due to children's disabilities when studied. It is rather crucial to consider the complexity and possible sensitivity of the topic while examining these types of issues (Gröschl, 2007). Therefore, the interview model was prepared keeping this in mind and did not contain any personal questions. This was also tested consulting the related experts on ASD and a pilot interview was conducted with the guidance of them to ensure that the interview template was appropriate.

The anonymity of all respondents was guaranteed and pseudonyms were used throughout the interview process. Regarding the audio recordings of the interviews, it was stated in advance that only the researchers would have access to the audio files and they would not share it with the third parties. In the transcripts, all the names have been replaced with codes such as "child with ASD", "mother", "father", etc.

Another important ethical issue taken into account in the study is that the parents (and their children) included in this study are not treated as a homogeneous group. The fact that the respondents are parents of children with ASD does not mean that they are considered as a "problematic group". Rather, they are considered as individuals with their own specific needs, just like everyone else. It is always

important to remember that all people are different and have different needs, demands, and preferences.

## 4. Findings

In this part of the study, the findings obtained from the focus group interviews based on the research questions are shown below.

### 4.1. Findings Regarding Participants

14 of the 17 participants who participated in the study were mothers, and three were fathers, and all children with ASD were male. Parents' ages vary between 30-55. Within the ASD family sample the children were aged between 4 and 12. All of the participants stated that their children had special education for at least two years. Participants' income levels vary between 2500-7000 TL per month.

### 4.2. Findings Related to the Frequency of Participants Going on Vacation

Table 1 includes the findings of the question "How often do you go on holiday?" to measure the degree of participation in the tourism activity. Parents with ASD children stated that they could not go on vacation very often and could engage in tourism activities generally once a year, in summer and for a short time. As a result of the analysis, the frequency of families having autistic children going on vacation was defined with the themes of "once a year" and "frequent short term holidays", and "rarely". Mostly, families prefer to go on vacation in high season for a short period. A significant proportion of the families have not taken any holiday away from home more than once in a year. Some families rarely go on holidays due to their child's special characteristics.

**Table 1.** Coding the Frequency of Participants Going on Vacation

Question	Direct opinion of the participant	Coding of data	Definition of themes
Question 2: How often do you go on vacation?	<p><b>K1:</b> "We can't go on vacation very often, usually once a year."  <b>K2:</b> "We go on a summer vacation once a year."  <b>K3:</b> "Usually we go on vacation once in the summer, but in winter we go to our village, so we go on vacation more than once a year."  <b>K4:</b> "Before we had our child, we took a vacation at least twice a year, after my son was born, we were able to go on vacation once a year for a very short time."  <b>K11:</b> "We go on vacation for at least a week every summer."  <b>K5:</b> "Generally we cannot go on holiday, I don't know if it can be considered as a holiday, but we go to our village once a year for 2-3 days."  <b>K6:</b> "We usually go to our village once a year."  <b>K7:</b> "Because of my wife's job, my son and I usually go on vacation alone, once a year in the summer, Usually our vacation lasts for a week."  <b>K8:</b> "We are separated with my wife, I have financial difficulties, so we cannot go on vacation often."  <b>K9:</b> "My wife and I are working hard. We try to go on a holiday once a year, but we cannot take a long vacation."  <b>K10:</b> "We definitely go on vacation whenever we find the opportunity."  <b>K12:</b> "We prefer frequent and daily trips."  <b>K13:</b> "We usually go to our village for vacation, we have a house there. We spend time in our house in the village rather than staying with our relatives. "  <b>K14:</b> "We rarely go on vacation."  <b>K15:</b> "We try to go once a year. However, we cannot go every year."  <b>K16:</b> "We can take a short vacation once or twice a year."  <b>K17:</b> "We hesitate to go on vacation. We used to go regularly in the first years of our marriage, but once we have a child, we cannot go too far."</p>	<p><b>-Once a year in high season</b>  <b>-More than once a year but in short periods</b>  <b>-Rarely</b>  <b>-Short-term vacations when appropriate</b>  <b>-Frequent Daily trips</b></p>	<p><b>-Once a year</b>  <b>- Frequent short-term holidays - Rarely</b></p>

#### 4.3. Findings Related to Participants' Vacation Transportation Preferences

"Which means of transport do you prefer to go on your trip with?" The findings regarding the question are given in Table 2. Almost all of the participants stated that they do not prefer public transportation. Families found their own private vehicles more comfortable due to their children's particular situation. In this context, the answers are mostly gathered under the theme of "private transport", whereas few families prefer travelling by public transportation or a relative's private vehicle since they do not have private cars.

**Table 2.** Coding the Participants' Preferences for Transportation Vehicles on Vacation

Question	Direct opinion of the participant	Coding of data	Definition of themes
Question 3: Which means of transportation do you prefer to travel?	<p><b>K1:</b> "We prefer our own car for travels as much as possible."  <b>K2:</b> "We prefer our own car. We could not use any means of transportation such as plane or buses."  <b>K3:</b> "We usually prefer to go out by our private vehicle when we travel. However, we sometimes travel by public transport."  <b>K4:</b> "We prefer our own car for our trips, only once we had to take a 12-hour bus ride."  <b>K11:</b> "We travel by our personal vehicle."  <b>K5:</b> "We drive by our own car."  <b>K6:</b> "We generally use intercity buses in our travels."  <b>K7:</b> "We mostly go on vacation by my father's car or our own vehicle."  <b>K8:</b> "I don't have a private vehicle, we usually have to travel by bus."  <b>K9:</b> "We prefer to go by our own vehicle."  <b>K10:</b> "We prefer our private car or high speed trains."  <b>K12:</b> "It depends on where we will go."  <b>K13:</b> "We travel by our own car."  <b>K14:</b> "We go by my father's private vehicle"  <b>K15:</b> "We usually go by our car. But when my wife has to work, we prefer to travel with our relatives."  <b>K16:</b> "We travel by our own vehicle."  <b>K17:</b> "We have to travel by our own vehicle to make our children feel more comfortable."</p>	<p><b>-Private vehicle</b>  <b>-Bus</b>  <b>-Fast train</b></p>	<p><b>- Private transport</b>  <b>-Public transport</b></p>

#### 4.4. Findings Regarding the Problems that the Participants Encounter during their Travel

In order to understand the problems encountered by families having children with autism while traveling, the answers to the question "What are the most common problems you encounter while traveling?" has been posed to the families with ASD child, and the findings for the question are given in Table 3. Participants expressed that they were disturbed by the people's reaction around to children's movements in cases when they had to use public transportation during the holiday and the inadequacy of public transport stops, especially on long journeys.

Participants suffer from the food sensitivity, that is the inability to access suitable food for the child's nutrition with autism and the inadequacy of recreational facilities when traveling by private vehicle. However, the age of the autistic child, the degree of the disease, and the level of special education they receive, affect the complaints' severity. The problems encountered by the participants during travel are defined under the themes of "exclusion", "travel time", "personal space", "nutritional problems", "the quality in rest areas" and "overactivity of the child."

**Table 3.** Coding the Problems Participants Encounter During Travel

Question	Direct opinion of the participant	Coding of data	Definition of themes
	<p><b>K1:</b> "When we travel by public transport, people's attitudes towards my child make me really angry. They are always complaining about me as if I am not a responsible and careless mother."  <b>K15:</b> "I am very disturbed by the strange looks of the people around."  <b>K16:</b> "Prejudices of other individuals and their inability to empathize."  <b>K2:</b> "We have difficulties in stopping our child movements,</p>		

<p>Question 4:  <b>What are the most common problems you encounter while traveling?</b></p>	<p>especially on long journeys. He is too active."  <b>K3:</b> "Since we had problems with toilet training when my child was young, even if we had a private vehicle, this was always a problem."  <b>K5:</b> "The crowd and the length of travel time."  <b>K8:</b> "I have difficulty in keeping my child steady and calm on long journeys."  <b>K13:</b> "I have hard times when the journey is long; my son is bored and always wants to get out of the car."  <b>K17:</b> "We have to take breaks often, sometimes we have to take very long breaks."  <b>K10:</b> "Our journeys are short so we do not encounter any problems."  <b>K12:</b> "Not being able to take a break whenever we want on bus trips makes our travel complicated."  <b>K11:</b> "Crowded recreational facilities on motorways are not convenient for families like us, because there are so many people and it is difficult to move quickly."  <b>K4:</b> "Even if we travel with our own private vehicle, we often take breaks because my son cannot stay indoors for a long time and he gets angry. Besides, I cannot find suitable food for my child at the rest areas, it is difficult to carry food with me due to the risk of spoilage on long journeys, especially since the weather is very hot in summer."  <b>K6:</b> "Since my child is 12 years old and his autism is not very severe, we did not encounter many problems on the road."  <b>K14:</b> "Since my son is too young, we have difficulty in keeping him busy during the journey."  <b>K9:</b> "Recreational facilities are far from serving individuals with autism."  <b>K7:</b> "Believe me, when my child was younger, I did not want to go on the road because he was constantly on the move and he was constantly crying. As he got older and got special education, we overcame these problems a little or we learned to live with these problems."</p>	<p><b>-Negative reactions of individuals</b>  <b>-Long journey</b>  <b>-Number of breaks</b>  <b>-Personal space is restricted</b>  <b>- Nutrition problems</b>  <b>- The degree of the illness</b>  <b>-Inadequate facilities in rest areas</b>  <b>-Difficulty in keeping the child steady and calm</b></p> <p><b>-Exclusion</b>  <b>-Travel time</b>  <b>-Personal space</b>  <b>-Food sensitivity</b>  <b>-The quality in rest areas</b>  <b>- Overactivity of the child</b></p>
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4.5. Findings Regarding the Accommodation Selection of the Participants

"What kind of accommodation do you prefer for your holiday? Why is that?" The findings of the question are given in Table 4. Participants stated that they preferred destinations that were in touch with nature and away from noise and crowds during their holiday with their children. The participants also expressed both the cost of having an autistic child and the difficulties of staying in

accommodation facilities. They stated that they usually spent their holidays renting a summer house or staying in friends' or relatives' houses. In this context, the preferences of the participants regarding their accommodation types are defined under the themes of "holiday parks", "camping", "farmstays", "boutique accommodation", "secondary house", "accessible accommodation", "safe accommodation" and "accommodation with health services".

Table 4. Coding of Participants' Accommodation Choices

Question	Direct opinion of the participant	Coding of data	Definition of themes
<p>Question 5:  <b>What type of accommodation do you</b></p>	<p><b>K1:</b> "The child may feel uncomfortable with sounds and objects that are normal to you and these may cause negative disturbances on our child, so we prefer quiet places."  <b>K2:</b> "Since my father is retired from the directorate for highways, we generally prefer its vacation camps. It is full-board and there are more activities for children."  <b>K3:</b> "My child is not severely autistic, so even though I cannot say anything specific, we generally have communication problems. We have trouble in understanding his wishes because he is an introvert - this also affects our choice of accommodation. For that reason we prefer quieter and calm places far from the crowd."  <b>K15:</b> "We prefer quiet and calm places in the nature. We never go to crowded big hotels."  <b>K10:</b> "We prefer quiet places away from city centers."  <b>K12:</b> "We prefer boutique hotels close to the beach."  <b>K11:</b> "We try to stay in all kinds of accommodation facilities to break the prejudices of our child. We believe that we have the right to stay in any kind of accommodation places."  <b>K4:</b> "We usually prefer daily or weekly rental houses or relatives' houses, which are in the middle of the nature, because our children have nutritional</p>	<p><b>-Countryside</b>  <b>-Silent places</b>  <b>-Places in nature</b>  <b>-Camping</b>  <b>-Far from the crowd</b>  <b>-Boutique hotel</b></p>	<p><b>-Holiday parks</b>  <b>-Camping</b>  <b>-Farmstays</b>  <b>-Secondary House</b>  <b>-Boutique accommodation</b></p>

<p><b>prefer for your holiday? Why?</b></p>	<p>problems, the kitchen should always be available for us and we can prepare and cook our own food that is appropriate for my child. It is also difficult for us to stay in hotels due to the fear of disturbing the people around and we have sleep problems in crowded places.”</p> <p><b>K9:</b> “We usually go to our own summer house.”</p> <p><b>K5:</b> We have a summer house in the village, we usually prefer it. Our income level is not good enough to stay in hotels, and this is not possible since we spend much money on our child’s education.”</p> <p><b>K13:</b> “We stay at our private home in the country side. We are comfortable there because it has a large garden.</p> <p><b>K6:</b> “We prefer the houses of our relatives and friends on holiday.”</p> <p><b>K7:</b> “We usually go to my sister’s house in Antalya on holiday but we rarely go on a holiday resort as well.”</p> <p><b>K8:</b> “We prefer to stay at our relatives’ house due to both our financial situation and the difficulties of staying at the hotel with the child who has a particular case.”</p> <p><b>K14:</b> “Facilities with playgrounds, ball games, and big gardens are among our preferences. It is also essential for us that the holiday place should be close to city center to access healthcare easily.</p> <p><b>K17:</b> “We prefer holiday centers that have health personnel in the facility with safe playgrounds for our children.”</p> <p><b>K16:</b> “There is a summer apartment that we always go to. We generally prefer to stay there because we are used to it and are comfortable.”</p>	<p><b>-Self-catering summer house</b>  <b>-Relatives’ house</b>  <b>-Private property</b>  <b>-The places with safe play ground</b>  <b>-Places offer health service</b></p>	<p><b>- Accessible accommodation</b>  <b>-Safe accommodation</b>  <b>-Accommodation with health services</b></p>
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#### 4.6. Findings Regarding the Problems Faced by Participants During Accommodation

"What are the most common problems you encounter during accommodation?" The findings obtained from the question are given in Table 5. Most of the participants stated that they had problems such as nutrition, sleep, hyperactivity, and sensitivity to sounds caused by the general nature of autism. Besides the lack of empathy, intolerance of other guests staying in the accommodation facility, lack of expert on ASD in the facilities the fact that the rooms and other parts of the accommodation facilities

are not arranged for the autistic child are among the other responses. In this context, the problems experienced by the participants during accommodation are defined under the themes of "exclusion", "nutrition", "sleep problems", "physical conditions of the accommodation facility", "safety problem", "sound sensitivity", "communication problem", "lack of education", "lack of professional assistance on ASD".

**Table 5.** Coding the Problems Participants Encounter in Accommodation Facilities

Question	Direct opinion of the participant	Coding of data	Definition of themes
<p>Question 6:  <b>What are the most common problems you encounter during accommodation?</b></p>	<p><b>K1:</b> "Generally, I prefer the places where we can be alone, I don't prefer to spend time in holiday resorts where several people around since I am disturbed by their strange looks."</p> <p><b>K2:</b> "My child is obsessed with round objects, trying to spin such objects all the time and people do not understand this. Our biggest problem is that people think our child is a normal child and they are not tolerated to the behaviours of our child, and I cannot say anything to them in such occasions."</p> <p><b>K11:</b> "The obsessive movements of my child are not tolerated and misjudged by the others."</p> <p><b>K8:</b> "We stayed in a hotel only once with my son and we encountered peer bullying."</p> <p><b>K13:</b> "Other children at the holiday resort are making fun of my son and they are making strange jokes."</p> <p><b>K10:</b> "Crowded holiday resorts with loud noise increase the stress level of my child."</p> <p><b>K12:</b> "Our son has epilepsy as well as autism and he has difficulty in falling asleep."</p> <p><b>K3:</b> "The noise of the crowd, especially the voices in the cafeteria dining areas, loud and unfamiliar voices affect our child. We have a serious problem in that regard."</p> <p><b>K4:</b> “We have problems, especially in hotels where the mealtime is set because we have trouble falling asleep and usually sleep in the morning, so we always miss breakfast. Our child has a gluten allergy, and we need to stay away from processed foods and sugar. The products in open buffets are not suitable for us, these are the most common problems we encounter. Apart from that, the design of the rooms in the accommodation facilities is not safe for an autistic child, I can say the same thing for playgrounds and entertainment venues.”</p> <p><b>K5:</b> “He doesn't want to stay too long in the place we are used to stay on holiday. He misses his room, house, toys, and gets restless throughout the holiday.”</p> <p><b>K6:</b> "Since we go to relatives' houses, the people there know about my son's situation, so we do not encounter any problems.”</p>	<p><b>-Strange looks</b>  <b>-Not crowded places</b>  <b>-Negative judgments</b>  <b>-Peer bullying</b>  <b>-Gluten allergy</b>  <b>-Insomnia</b>  <b>-Hyperactivity</b>  <b>-Sound problems</b>  <b>- Continuation of the education</b>  <b>-The design of the rooms</b>  <b>-Safety problem in rooms and playgrounds</b>  <b>-Communication problem with staff</b>  <b>-Lack of child development</b></p>	<p><b>-Nutrition</b>  <b>-Sleep problems</b>  <b>-Physical conditions of the accommodation facility</b>  <b>-Safety problem</b>  <b>-Sound sensitivity</b>  <b>-Communication problem</b>  <b>-Lack of education</b>  <b>-Lack of professional assistance on ASD</b></p>



**K7:** "He has had sleep problems since he was born, and he is hyperactive and that cause serious problems for us during the holiday. **expert**  
**K9:** "We rarely go on holiday in a touristic resort, and the biggest problem we encounter is the noise."  
**K15:** "Pools are not suitable for the use of individuals with special conditions like our children."  
**K16:** "Communication problem with hotel staff"  
**K13:** "The absence of child development specialists in the hotel so that the education of our child is interrupted and this causes him to forget what he learned in special education quickly. Due to this situation, we cannot spend more than a few days on vacation."  
**K17:** "The facility does not have an instructor or expert staff on autism."

#### 4.7. Findings Regarding the Activities of Participants on Vacation

Directed to the participants, "What is your favorite/preferred activity to do with your child during the holiday?" The findings regarding the question are given in Table 6. Participants stated that they like swimming with their children in the sea and the pool and some children

love playing with animals and music provided that it is not loud. Based on the answers, we can define the activities that the participants like to do on vacation with their autistic children under the themes of "pool activities", "sea-sand", and "alternative tourism activities" such as nature trips, horse riding, cycling, and "dancing."

**Table 6.** Coding of Activities of Participants on Vacation

Question	Direct opinion of the participant	Coding of data	Definition of themes
Question 7: What activity do you like / prefer to do with your child during the vacation?	<p><b>K1:</b> "I like seeing he has fun with his father or other relatives in the sea."  <b>K2:</b> "He loves water and the sea, and seeing him happy in the water makes me happy."  <b>K3:</b> "My favorite activity with my child is the pool activities, the watery slides, but at first he approaches this with hesitation, especially on the first day of the holiday and this happens every time so I have to take care of him completely."  <b>K12:</b> "He likes swimming."  <b>K4:</b> "My child loves music and I like watching him dancing and we dance together with him, provided that the music is not too loud. We are happy to watch him riding a horse as well. He loves horses very much."  <b>K5:</b> "He loves swimming when we go to our summer house in the village."  <b>K6:</b> "It is fun for both of us to include him in daily work."  <b>K7:</b> "He loves water so he loves to swim."  <b>K8:</b> "My son likes to play in the sand, which relaxes him."  <b>K16:</b> "He enjoys playing with the sand by the sea, making castle and various animals with his father."  <b>K9:</b> "We try to participate in all kinds of activities in order to make him cross his boundaries."  <b>K10:</b> "We like to rent and ride a bike as a family on vacation."  <b>K11:</b> "Even though we try to participate in all kinds of activities, we have difficulty in attracting the attention of the child for a certain period of time."  <b>K13:</b> "He likes to run after cats and rabbits in the garden."  <b>K15:</b> "We are taking our cat on vacation. He doesn't want to leave him at home He mostly takes care of our cat on vacation and he spends his time with the cat."  <b>K14:</b> "We love nature activities; we mostly spend time in indoor and outdoor playgrounds."  <b>K17:</b> "My son likes to walk outdoors; we run and play a lot outside in the nature. I think these activities are important for mental and physical development of my child."</p>	<p><b>-Sea and sand</b>  <b>-Swimming and playing in the pool</b>  <b>-Riding a horse</b>  <b>-Dancing</b>  <b>-Cycling</b>  <b>-Playing with pets</b>  <b>-Nature activities</b></p>	<p><b>-Pool activities</b>  <b>-Sea and sand</b>  <b>-Alternative tourism activities (nature trips, horse riding, cycling etc.)</b>  <b>-Dancing</b></p>

#### 4.8. Findings Related to the Expectations of Participants for the Solutions of Problems They Encounter on Vacation

"What are your expectations and suggestions for solving the problems you encounter during the holiday?" The findings obtained from the question are given in Table 7. Participants think that the social exclusion they experience

during vacation is due to the lack of knowledge of the society and accommodation businesses' employees and awareness about ASD. They would like other people and staff to be more welcoming and interacting with their child

as they would with any other child and they want more understanding from others regarding their child's behaviour and disability. Also, they expressed that families with autistic child should be provided with opportunities to rest on holiday, and they need professional assistance to help their ASD child take part in the activities during vacation.

Based on the responses of the participants, the expectations of families with autistic children for the solution of the problems they encounter on vacation are gathered under these themes: "promotion of autism and awareness", "autism-friendly accommodation areas", "professional assistance", and "appropriate activities for ASD child".

**Table 7.** The Coding of Participants' Expectations for the Problems They Encounter on Vacation

Question	Direct opinion of the participant	Coding of data	Definition of themes
<p>Question 8:  <b>What are your expectations and suggestions for solving the problems you encounter during your holiday?</b></p>	<p><b>K1:</b> "Small notes can be posted in a few places in the accommodation facilities that explain autism and give information about how to behave properly to these people."  <b>K2:</b> "We would like the people to be more sensitive to our situation. We expect the managers to be more aware on ASD They may not host autistic child in their resorts that often but they have to be more welcoming and understanding about this special syndrome and they even can organize some activities for such kids and their parents."  <b>K3:</b> "There are many people in the accommodation facilities that disturb people's views and judgments about our children who do not know that this is a disease. People should be informed."  <b>K4:</b> "Actually, vacation does not mean resting for a family with a child with autism. Something can be done to help families like us to rest and to be beneficial for the child. In terms of nutrition, hotels should specially regulate the nutrition of customers with autism. It would be nice if we ate in a different place or at a different time at meal time because my son has difficulty explaining that some smaller foods are forbidden to him."  <b>K14:</b> "Many disabled children have to consume gluten-free foods, caffeine-free foods and additive-free products. It would be great to organize the menus considering these."  <b>K17:</b> "Young or newly graduated students with knowledge on the ASD subject can be employed in the resorts to meet the needs of disabled children and support their families."  <b>K5:</b> "Every child with autism is very different from each other, their interests are different, so I cannot say that the solution, in general, is the following, but if I talk about my child, he has social communication problems. He has difficulties in adapting to the society, the crowd and the noise makes him uncomfortable. The society should be informed about these problems. For such children's education, continuing education is the only thing they need to have during the holiday. Therefore, education should continue during the holiday."  <b>K6:</b> "I wish my child could socialize more and be given the opportunity for this."  <b>K7:</b> "Activities for normal children can disturb me on. There must be people who are specially trained for autism, and they should help us on holiday so that we can rest and our child can be socialized with other children as well."  <b>K8:</b> "Special care units can be created for children with autism to rest their parents on vacation."  <b>K11:</b> "It would be nice if there were more knowledgable staff in holiday resorts. They can both relax us when they spend quality time with our child."  <b>K9:</b> "Families should inform the employee at the reception that their children have autism, and the employees should give service by considering this special situation."  <b>K10:</b> "Autism is a kind of difference, and I think it is not known enough bu hotel staff and other people."  <b>K12:</b> "The sound isolation of the rooms in hotel could be designed better so that other people will not get disturbed when the child does not sleep at night."  <b>K15:</b> "Subjecting the employees in the hotels to a basic training on communicating with disabled individuals and with ASD children is a good solution. We need to increase awareness on this issue."  <b>K13:</b> "If the government prepares special holiday programs for families with autism, and our children are dealt with by trained employees who occasionally trained within the framework of certain programs, we will not encounter such situations like being excluded and not interacting with other similar families."</p>	<p><b>-Social sensitivity</b>  <b>- Awareness in the society</b>  <b>- Information notes</b>  <b>Regulations on autism</b>  <b>-Activities for children with autism</b>  <b>- Special diet and areas for children with autism</b>  <b>-Giving opportunites for families to rest</b>  <b>- Special education during the holiday</b>  <b>-Special holiday opportunities for such families</b></p>	<p><b>-Raising awareness on ASD</b>  <b>- Autism friendly accommodation places</b>  <b>- Professional assistance</b>  <b>-Appropriare activities for ASD children</b></p>

**5. Conclusion and Sugesstions**

It is noteworthy that there are many studies on ASD in Turkish literature. However, the subject is not handled

specifically in terms of tourism, and autism is rarely mentioned in tourism-related studies especially in Turkey. In this context, it has become necessary to address the holiday needs of children with autism and their families, whose number has been increasing steadily. In this respect, it is thought that the study will contribute to the literature and provide a basis for future researches.

Many families with autism in the world cannot benefit from holiday opportunities because they cannot find suitable facilities for them or because they prefer to stay in quiet and calm places due to their special condition (İçöz, 2019). However, it is a natural human right of all families and no one should be discriminated based on their disability to go on vacation and participate in tourism activities. Their disadvantages should not prevent this right. Improving these rights is the duty of the staff and the managers in the tourism industry. In the study, families with children with autism state that they can not go on vacation very often, and they usually participate in tourism activities once a year, mainly in summer and for a short time. They also state that they have to travel mostly with their own vehicles and could not benefit from public transportation like other individuals.

The inability to provide services appropriate and accessible to disabled children and their families are all in the responsibility of the hotel staff and manager. People with disabilities cannot feel restricted in their travel patterns and not even excluded from tourism travel, due to their child's impairments and this should be guaranteed by the government.

In foreign literature, some studies address autism spectrum disorder with different aspects of tourism such as travel, accommodation, gastronomy, and recreation (Freund et al. 2019; Neo & Flaherty, 2018; McKercher & Darcy, 2018; Sedgley et al. 2017; Stuhl & Porter, 2015; Amet, 2013; Hamed, 2013). When these studies are examined, it is seen that their findings support the results of this study.

Amet (2013) emphasize that families having children with autism do not feel comfortable in crowded areas such as hotels, restaurants, and cafes during their holidays. Similar to that result families in our study also state that they have to prefer secondary residences or relatives-friends' houses instead of accommodation facilities, and if they prefer accommodation facilities, they choose secondary residences or ecological and agro-tourism facilities that are economical, quiet intertwined with nature and not crowded. Again, the safety of the facilities and health services are among the other important factors in their selection.

The families participating in the study express the most important problems they encounter in accommodation facilities as child mobility, exclusion, lack of trained personnel, communication problems, inadequate physical conditions of accommodation facilities, nutritional sensitivity, irregular sleep hours, sleep problems, and fear of disturbing the environment. Similar to that result Hamed (2013) conclude that people with autism may have difficulties during travel due to the changes in their routines. Communication problems that arise due to the inability to speak and due to language disorders. Sleep disorders also caused by the nature of autism, and seizures

seen in many individuals with autism. Statements in the study are also supporting these findings.

It was also observed that families having children with autism avoid public transportation for similar reasons, especially for long distances in the study. Neo and Flaherty (2018) also found that families with ASD child, face several difficulties during travel such as overcrowd, loud noise, waiting in long queues, heavy traffic, and increased waiting time due to delays in vehicles. Studies in the literature have shown that internal limitations and the severity of the disease affect travel to accessible accommodation and tourism facilities. It is seen that the number of families who travel with a child diagnosed with ASD will increase if accommodation becomes more accessible for them. As a result of the interviews conducted in the present study, it is also observed that families with children with autism avoid public transportation when traveling for similar reasons, especially over long distances.

Another crucial result of that study is that families having children with autism face social exclusion not only during holiday but also in all areas of life. According to the general opinion formed as a result of interviews, the main reason for this is the incomplete or insufficient knowledge of autism. Again, in another study in which similar results are obtained, families having a child with autism state that they avoid vacation because they have "fear of disturbing others" during travel and accommodation. It has been emphasized that these families have expectations for more professional staff who have knowledge about autism in the accommodation facilities (Freund et al. 2019). Similarly, in the present study, many participants state that the staff and guests working in tourism enterprises do not have sufficient knowledge about autism. Therefore, they feel excluded and they emphasize the need to raise awareness of the society about autism.

Many children with autism have insufficient speech skills, which increases their stress levels and causes them to exhibit more aggressive actions. Besides, individuals with autism have difficulty in understanding long and complex sentences. It is imperative to employ staff or employees who have been trained on this subject to ensure that the activities carried out during the holiday are easily explained to the child. Several digital applications can be developed to cover all activities and events during the holiday. The facilities in the resting areas should be improved to support those families to spend more quality time with their autistic child.

In accommodation businesses, the nutritional information of the guests with autism should be obtained in advance, and a special diet in the menu should be created for them. This application will enable the business to create the right image as well as to increase its competitiveness in the sector. Activities such as Equine Assisted Therapy (EAT), is a treatment that includes activities with horses, dogs, cats and dolphins and EAT should be included in holiday parks and camp-like environment in order to promote physical and emotional growth including special education suitable for children with autism. Besides, EAT can help the individual with autism build confidence, self-efficiency, communication, trust, perspective, social skills, impulse control, and learn boundaries (Equine Assisted Therapy,

2021). According to the relevant legislation, accommodation businesses with more than 80 rooms must have a disabled room. However, according to the results obtained from the research, disabled rooms are insufficient to meet the needs of individuals with autism. In this context, separate rooms should be created in accommodation facilities for individuals with autism that contain soft nature sounds, have better sound insulation, less light, and do not have angular items that can cause children to harm themselves.

As a result of the focus group interviews, it was also absolute fact that families having children with autism could not allocate enough money for themselves and for their holiday. Financial limitations of those families are quite common. They spend most of their income to the child's particular needs. In this context, investors should be encouraged to construct "autism villages" designed only for children with autism and their families and this should be supported by the government. The study emphasizes that the high rate of disintegration of families with ASD children is also an important issue to deal with.

It is essential that healthcare professionals, associations, tourism enterprises, and relevant stakeholders jointly address to improve the quality of leisure opportunities for families with children diagnosed with ASD (Sedgley et al. 2017). Similarly, creating inclusive models for accessible tourism opportunities in cooperation with tourism stakeholders may also attract the attention of other sector stakeholders who contribute to the tourism experience of such families (Michopoulou et al. 2015). The necessity of legal regulations to make tourism accessible to everyone by going beyond developmental disorders, physical and sensory barriers can be considered as a positive step to be taken by the government (Connell & Page, 2019).

The difficulties of families with ASD child is rather remarkable. After all, it is a "hidden disorder" because it cannot be easily identified at first sight. Besides, the cooperation of institutions and professionals in the field is crucial to draw attention to behavioral problems and social awareness associated with ASD, which is still unknown and stigmatized by a significant portion of society. As long as this situation is not fully understood by society, it will be more challenging to change these attitudes.

As stated throughout the study, children with ASD suffer from the unique characteristics of discomfort, such as social and communication difficulties, difficulties in learning and processing information. Families with children with ASD want not only to stay in hotels but also to enjoy tourism experiences with minimal restrictions. To make this possible, accommodation operators need to understand the ASD fully, and more researchers must examine families' holiday experiences in depth and propose appropriate strategies and activities to help this group to improve their tourism experiences.

As the conclusion of this study it could be said that holiday planning is a major psychological and logistic challenge for families with children with ASD. When families go on holiday, the quality of the holiday is low and such families go on holiday less than the general population. Given the importance of vacations for the emotional and psychological well-being of the ASD child and his or her

family, crucial steps should be taken to facilitate vacationing for such families. Financial constraints and exclusion of the child with ASD are also another important challenge.

Consistent with previous research on the subject, this study has contributed to the literature on the needs of specific market segments (families traveling with children diagnosed with ASD) (Burnett & Baker, 2001; Darcy, 2010; Darcy, Cameron & Pegg, 2010; Figueredo, Usébio & Kastenholtz, 2012; Michopoulou, Darcy, Ambrose & Buhalis, 2015). The results are valuable in providing insight to hospitality managers in initiatives related to improving access to services, security, and customer satisfaction.

Local and national holiday programmes should be developed to address the problems identified in this study. Simple solutions, such as reduced waiting times for that particular group at the airports, bus stations and in all recreational settings should be promoted. Parents should be informed of these possibilities and encouraged to ask questions about them. Similarly, indoor and outdoor centres in some tourist accommodation establishments decided by the relevant authorities could be supported by 'autism-friendly' staff who can engage a child in on-demand activities like any other child. Public funds could be made available to train and pay such staff so that they can be included in the support needed. Some cafes and restaurants could also participate in an "autism friendly" programme and welcome families with autism. Reducing sensory overload such as animations for kids at a lower volume or changing the lighting and layout of the hotels could also be of great benefit not only to people with autism, but also to the wider population. Finally, families of children with ASD should receive a financial support for their vacations so that they can afford better holidays opportunities. Since financial constraints are often cited as a factor negatively affecting holiday experiences for families with ASD, it would also be helpful for government agencies to further recognise the pervasiveness of disability in ASD.

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