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Sangeeta Singhvi
Research Scholar, Department
of Education, Mahatma Jyoti
Rao Phule University, Jaipur,
Rajasthan, India

Corresponding Author:
Sangeeta Singhvi
Research Scholar, Department
of Education, Mahatma Jyoti
Rao Phule University, Jaipur,
Rajasthan, India

Stress among parents of autistic and ADHD children

Sangeeta Singhvi

Abstract

In the present study, Stress among Parents of Autistic & ADHD Children were compared. It was hypothesized that parents with autistic children will have higher stress as compared to parents with ADHD children on all the dimensions of life stress scale. Hindi adaptation of Life Stress Scale (Coleman, 1970) of Gunthey & Jain (2013) was used on a sample of 80 parents of Autistic Children & 80 parents of ADHD Children of Jodhpur. Results indicated significant difference between both the groups on all the dimensions. It thus proved the hypothesis also.

Keywords: Stress, parents, autism, ADHD

Introduction

Americans with Disabilities Act (1990) defines “Autism as a developmental significantly affecting verbal and non-verbal communication and social interaction, generally evident before age 3, which adversely affects a child’s educational performance. Other characteristics often associated with autism are: engagement in repetitive activities and stereotype movements, resistance to environmental change or changes in daily routines and unusual responses to sensory experiences. The term does not apply if a child’s educational achievement is badly affected primarily because the child is emotionally disturbed.

Parenting efficacy and the household context were poor with low efficacy and high chaos among mothers of ADHD adolescents and significantly greater than in the Autism alone group. Parents of ADHD children were of the view that their child will be labeled as a “bad kid” and they as “bad parents” (DosReis *et al.*, 2010) ^[1], and that parents of youth with autism often feel blamed for their child’s disorder and negatively judged for their parenting (Salleh *et al.*, 2020) ^[6].

In regard to parenting efficacy, mothers from the Autism alone group revealed higher levels of parenting efficacy than those of the ADHD alone group. Although not significant, the autism group was also higher than the Autism + ADHD group. This pattern is distinct from that identified among school aged children, which found that parents of children with ADHD had higher parenting efficacy than an ADHD + autism group (Green *et al.*, 2016) ^[2], suggested developmentally-based changes in parenting efficacy. It may be due to the fact that parents continue to struggle to successfully manage behaviors that are commonly associated with ADHD in their child (e.g., impulsivity, hyperactivity, disorganization) and experience a decreased sense of efficacy over time and into adolescence. Besides this, it may be that parenting efficacy is less strained with regard to autism-related behaviors (e.g., social challenges and restricted/repetitive behaviors) compared to ADHD-related behaviors. It is reported that perceiving children’s behaviors as uncontrollable or unintentional can be protective against depletions in parenting efficacy (Ohan *et al.*, 2000) ^[5]; parents consider ADHD-related behaviors to be more planned than symptoms associated with autism, especially in adolescence.

In the present investigation, stress in parents of children with autism is studied as compared to parents of children with ADHD. The objectives were to find out the stress level of parents with autistic child and parents with ADHD child. The following statement is framed for present problem-“Stress among Parents of Autistic & ADHD Children”.

It was hypothesized that parents with autistic child will have higher stress as compared to parents with ADHD child on the dimensions of life stress scale like family/social, mental/physical, economic/education.

Research Design

It is a non-experimental type of research. Therefore, a field approach is taken for such a

problem. Level of stress was the independent variable and parents of children with Autism & ADHD were dependent variables.

Sample

The researcher first obtained approval from the TEPSE & HEPSN Centre of Jodhpur City to conduct the study on parents of children with Autism & ADHD were dependent variables. Parents who agreed to participate in the study were approached. Parents were given instructions for their input. Thanks were given by the researcher to each parent individually after completing the task. 80biological parents

of children with autistic children age 12 and under were selected. Similarly 80 biological parents of children with ADHD aged 12 and under were taken from other agencies working with these types of children. For both the groups, parent’s age ranged from age 27 to 47 years with a mean of 37.60, SD 6.32.

Test

Life Stress Scale (Coleman, 1970) [3] - Revised Hindi adaptation of Gunthey & Jain (2013) [3] was used.

Results & Discussion

Table 1: M & SD of parents of autistic children and parents of ADHD children on life stress scale

Stress scale (Sub scales)	Parents with ADHD children (N=80)		Parents with autistic children (N=80)		't'
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Family / Social	16.13	3.25	21.43	4.07	5.82
Mental / Physical	13.63	3.33	17.53	4.26	3.93
Economic	17.50	5.02	19.42	3.72	2.51
Educational	18.81	4.79	21.23	4.87	2.42

Present findings and data analysis have shown that Parents with autistic child have higher score on family, mental, economic and educational stress. It shows social stress is stress that stems from one's relationships with others and from the social environment in general. The appraisal theory of emotion states that, stress arises when a person evaluates a situation as personally relevant and perceives that he or she does not have the resources to cope or handle the specific situation. However, social stressors as "circumstances of daily social roles that are generally considered problematic or undesirable". Social stressors are "a class of characteristics, situations, episodes, or behaviors that are related to psychological or physical stress and that are somehow social in nature. Other symptoms are: headaches, backaches, ulcers, increased blood pressure, depression and anxiety. Extended periods of stress can affect physical, mental, and emotional health, compounding the difficulties that many low- and moderate-income communities face during troubled economic period. Persistent, sad, anxious, or "empty" mood, feelings of hopelessness, pessimism, feelings of guilt, worthlessness, helplessness, loss of interest or pleasure in hobbies and activities are also reported. Hillary *et al.* (2022) [4] findings demonstrated differences in all three domains of family functioning across the diagnostic groups. Mothers of adolescents in the Autism + ADHD group endorsed greater stress than mothers of adolescents in the Autism alone group.

Conclusion

It can be concluded that parents of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) have high stress levels and an increased risk for psychological problems like depression and anxiety, likely due to the daily stressors associated with parenting a child with ASD as compared to parenting a child with ADHD. However, little is known about stress contributors among parents who have very young children with ASD. It is observed that due to social stigma, comparison with other children activities, perception of child emotional less activities not recognize mother as mother financial problems, no support from FM.

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