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## Separation of Parents Raising Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder

### What is this research about?

The birth of a child with a disability may affect the parents' relationship through the additional emotional and financial strain. The current study examined the occurrence and timing of the separation of parents of children with ASD. The researchers also compared the sociodemographic variables (age, number of children, socio-economic status and professional situation) between parents who stayed together versus parents who separated.

### What did the researchers do?

The researchers collected and used data from three different time points in the participants' lives (5 years old, 8 years old and 15 years old) to create a study that spanned 10 years. The children with ASD ranged in age from 3-7 years old at the beginning of the study, and there were 152 children who participated. The families were recruited through 48 centres that serve children with developmental disorders and their families. The centres proposed certain children that fit the criteria of the study: a diagnosis of autism and to be under the age of 7. The researchers recorded the instances of separation between parents (which includes formal divorce). This is an important part of the study because most studies have only looked at rates of divorce, which

### What you need to know:

The birth of a child with a disability can come as a major shock and upheaval to the lives of parents. However, raising a child with Autism Spectrum Disorder often does not lead to the separation of the parents, as commonly believed. Additionally, the rates of separation do not differ according to the child's life stage (child or adolescent) or their characteristics (autistic symptoms, language ability, etc).

excludes unmarried couples and those who are separated but not officially divorced.

### What did the researchers find?

Seventy-five percent of couples in this study stayed together after 10 years. The separation rate was 25% and the authors state that this is relatively low. Overall, the couples in the study did not separate more during one time period compared to another. Additionally, the rate of separation did not change depending on the characteristics of children (e.g., severity of autistic symptoms, expressive language, person cognition, etc). A limitation of this study is the small sample size, creating the possibility that the sample might not represent the population. Also, the young age of the children at the beginning of the study (around 5 years old) may have led the

researchers to exclude families where the parents separated early.

### How can you use this research?

This research counters a common narrative about raising a child with ASD, with media often reporting a very high divorce rate, sometimes up to 80%. In fact, the current study found an overall rate of 25%. It is important to spread the findings to fight this misconception and to encourage the media to report more accurately on the rate of separation or divorce. These findings can inform future research about family dynamics and ASD.

### About the Researchers

Carolina Baeza-Velasco, Cécile Michelon, Cécile Rattaz, Eric Pernon and Amaria Baghdadli are researchers in the Autism Resources Centre at the University of Montpellier.

### Citation

Baeza-Velasco, C., Michelon, C., Rattaz, C., Pernon, E., & Baghdadli, A. (2013). Separation of parents raising children with Autism Spectrum Disorders. *Journal of Developmental and Physical Disabilities*, 25, 613-624.

### Keywords

Autism Spectrum Disorder, Parents, Separation, Divorce, Timing, Sociodemographic variables

This research summary was written by Jordan Cleland for the Chair in Autism Spectrum Disorders Treatment and Care Research. This research summary, along with other summaries, can be found on our [blog](#) and at [asdmentalhealth.ca/research-summaries](http://asdmentalhealth.ca/research-summaries)

### About the Chair

The Chair in Autism Spectrum Disorders Treatment and Care Research is dedicated to studying ways to improve the mental health and well-being of people with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) and their families in Canada.

The Chair is funded by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research in partnership with Autism Speaks Canada, the Canadian Autism Spectrum Disorders Alliance, Health Canada, NeuroDevNet and the Sinneave Family Foundation. Additional funds from the Spectrum of Hope Autism Foundation and support from York University.

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