Child Behavioural Problems Are Related To Family Function Through Parent Mental Health

What is this research about?

Family functioning is defined as how well families communicate, navigate daily life and form positive relationships. Families with a child with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) tend to report lower levels of family functioning than families without ASD. At the same time, for families with ASD, the parent’s support and involvement is needed for many therapies for their children. It follows that supporting the family is important to allow the child to thrive. This study examines how child behaviour problems affect family function in families with preschool children with ASD.

What did the researcher do?

The researchers surveyed 97 parents of preschool-aged children with ASD about their child’s behavioural problems, their own stress, depressive symptoms and fatigue using established subscales. The survey was administered online through various ASD-related support groups in Australia. They also asked about their family functioning using a scale measuring things such as strain on relationships, participation in recreational activities, and flexibility and connectedness. Then the researchers looked to see which parent characteristics linked child behaviour and family function.

What did the researcher find?

The researchers found that more child behavioural problems was related to more parent depressive symptoms, stress, and fatigue. However, stress and fatigue levels did not impact family function. Only mental health (more depressive symptoms) in the parent was related to lower family function. The researchers concluded that child behaviour problems are related to parent mental health, which then is linked to family function. The researchers note that their sample had single parents, and those with lower education, as well as a lack of fathers.

How can you use this research?

It is important to acknowledge the needs of the family while helping the child. Supporting parent mental health and well-being may in turn help manage a child’s behavioural problems and enhance overall family function. Types of support include parent social support, exercise, and self-care.

What you need to know:

Family function is related to behavioural problems in preschool children with ASD through parent depressive symptoms. Supporting parent mental health and the family unit in turn may help parents to manage child behaviour.
About the Researchers

Rachel Jellett and Catherine E. Wood are at the Faculty of Health, Arts and Design, Swinburne University of Technology.

Rebecca Giallo and Monique Seymour are part of the Healthy Mothers Healthy Families Research Group, Murdoch Children’s Research Institute in Melbourne, Australia.

Citation


Keywords

Family Function, Preschool, Parent, Mental Health, Behavioural Problems

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 support was provided by York University.

For more information, visit the Chair in Autism Spectrum Disorders Treatment and Care Research website at asdmentalhealth.ca.

Partners

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 2.5 Canada License.