

Stress and Coping Strategies among Mothers of Children with Autism

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Abstract

The present study aimed to assess the stress and coping strategies of mothers of children with Autism. The objectives were: to assess the stress of mothers of children with Autism and to explore the coping strategies used by the mothers of children with Autism. Non-experimental descriptive method for the study was adopted. 30 subjects who fulfilled the selection criteria were taken. Setting for the study was Prasanna Autistic Centre; Pune. Sampling technique was random sampling technique. After obtaining permission from the concerned authority and informed consent from the samples, the tool was administered. The tool was divided into three sections: Demographic Variable, Parental Stress Scale and COPE Inventory: Data collected were analyzed and interpreted in terms of objectives of the study by using descriptive and inferential statistics. It was found that the majority (96.7%) of mothers had severe level of stress. The most frequently used coping strategies was positive reinterpretation and growth followed by use of emotional social support and then religious coping. Acceptance and active coping were also used by the mothers of children with Autism. Substance use and humor were used least by the mothers of children with Autism.

Key words: Stress; Coping strategies; Autism.

Introduction

Autism was first described in 1943 by Johns Hopkins, Psychiatrist Leo Kanner, and again in 1944 by Austrian Pediatrician Hans Asperger. Autism is one of the five pervasive developmental disorders (PDD), which are characterized by widespread abnormalities of social interactions and communication, and severely restricted interests and highly repetitive behavior.[1] It is a "spectrum disorder". This means that the symptoms and behaviors of autism are present in a variety of combinations and these symptoms and behaviors range from mild to severe. Boys are affected more often than girls and the average male: female ratio is 4:1.[2,3]

Autism causes kids to experience the world differently from the way most other kids do. It's hard for kids with autism to talk with other people and express themselves using words.[4] Parents of children with developmental disabilities, particularly autism spectrum disorders (ASDs), are at risk for high levels of distress.[5] Parents of young children with autism play multiple roles in their children's life. Often they are the first people to recognize a developmental problem, and they must pursue their concern until they receive a satisfactory diagnosis and find or develop appropriate services for their child.

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Need for the Study

Parents experiencing stress often adapt coping strategies in handling stressful situations. (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Having a child with disability often places parents in a stressful condition. Parental stress therefore demands extra effort from parents in dealing with the demands of everyday living in raising their children. (Holroyd & Lazarus, 1982 in Fiedler, Simpson & Clark, 2007). When a child is diagnosed with ASD the parents may experience a tremendous sense of loss. The normal child they believed they were raising is no longer a reality and parents are often at a loss as to what this means for their child and their family. (Norton & Drew, 1994). Coping involves efforts and strategies aimed to manage stress, regardless of how it works. Coping strategies involve efforts to face the stressful situations. (Walsh, 2003). One of the study showed that pre-intervention parental stress levels may be one of the strongest predictors of the success of early intervention programmes. [6]

Associations were also found between coping strategies and parental stress and mental health. Practical implications were considered including reducing reliance on avoidance coping and increasing the use of positive coping strategies. [7]

So, this researcher was interested in assessing the stress of mothers of children with Autism, how mothers responded and reacted to the diagnosis and what are the coping strategies used by the mothers while raising a child with Autism.

Research Methodology

Non-experimental descriptive method for the study. Population was mothers of children with Autism and sample comprised of 30 mothers of children with Autism, selected through random sampling technique. Setting for the study was Prasanna Autistic Centre, Pune. Mother of children diagnosed with Autism and those who were willing to participate in the study were included. The data

collection tool was divided into three: *Sections* I consisted of demographic variables like the age, education, occupation, number of children and number of Autistic children. *Section II* consisted of *Parental Stress Scale* which was a self-report scale that contained 18 items representing pleasure or positive themes of parenthood (emotional benefits, self-enrichment, personal development) and negative components (demands on resources, opportunity costs and restrictions). The *Parental Stress Scale* demonstrated internal reliability (0.83) and test-retest reliability (0.81). *Section III* had *COPE inventory with Subscales*: Positive reinterpretation and growth, mental disengagement, focus on and venting of emotions, use of instrumental social support, active coping, denial, religious coping, humor, behavioral disengagement, restraint, use of emotional social support, substance use, acceptance, suppression of competing activities, and planning. It had internal consistency reliabilities of 0.45-0.92, and test-retest reliabilities of 0.42-0.89.

After obtaining permission from the concerned authority and informed consent from the samples, the investigator administered the tool.

Major Findings

Frequency and percentage distribution of mothers of children with Autism, by their demographic variables is given in table I and figure I.

On the basis of frequency and percentage wise distribution of mothers of children with Autism by their stress level, it was found that the majority (96.7%) of mothers had severe level of stress and only (3.3 %) mothers had moderate level of stress (Figure 2). The most frequently used coping strategies was positive reinterpretation and growth followed by use of emotional social support and then religious coping (Figure 3). It was found that acceptance and active coping were less used coping strategies by the mothers of children with Autism, while substance use and humor were

Table 1: Frequency and Percentage Distribution of Mothers of Children with Autism by their Demographic Variables n= 30

Demographic variable	Freq	%
Age		
%		
18-25 years	3	10.0 %
26-30 years	3	10.0 %
31-35 years	13	43.3 %
More than 35 years	11	36.7 %
Education		
%		
Diploma	2	6.7 %
Degree	25	83.3 %
Post graduation & above	3	10.0 %
Occupation		
House wife	17	56.7 %
Service	13	43.3 %
Number of children		
1	12	40.0 %
2	18	60.0 %
No. of autistic children		
1	29	96.7 %
2	1	3.3 %

poorly used coping strategies used by the mothers of children with Autism (Figure 4).

Fig 1: Distribution of Subjects According to their Age

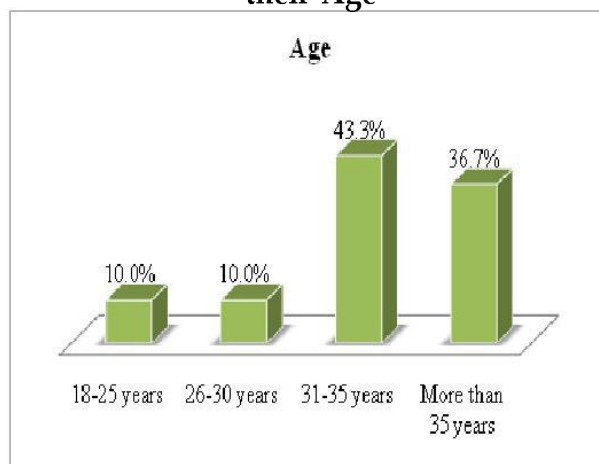


Fig 2: Frequency percentage distribution of Mothers of Children with Autism, as per their Stress Level

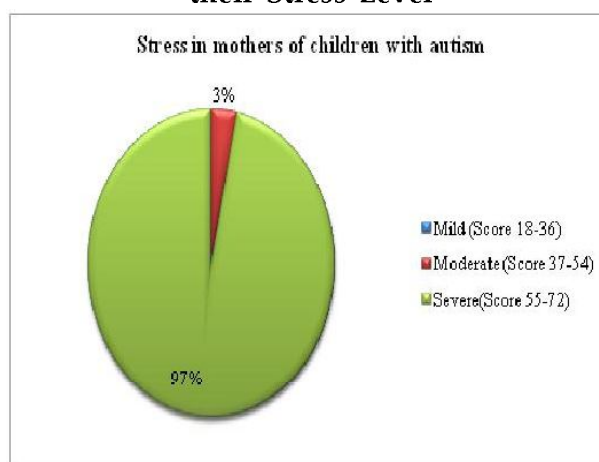


Fig 3: Most Frequently Used Coping Strategies Adopted by Mothers of Children with Autism was Positive Reinterpretation and Growth

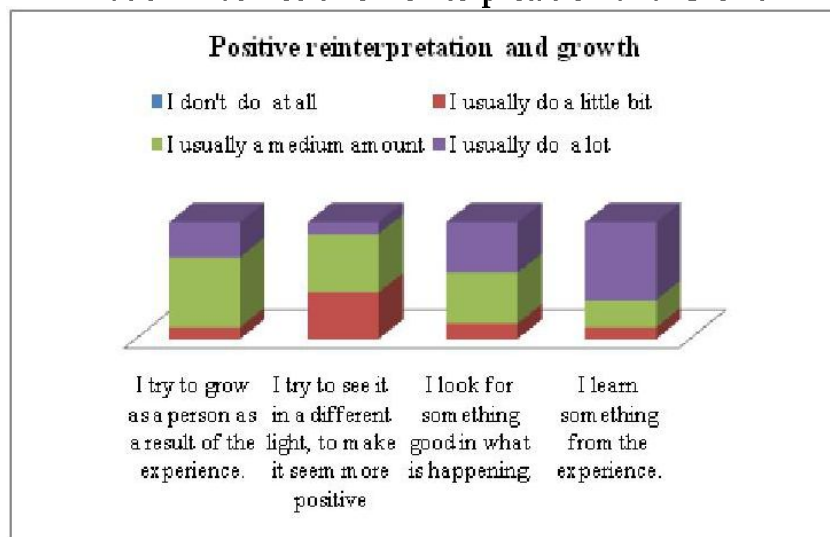
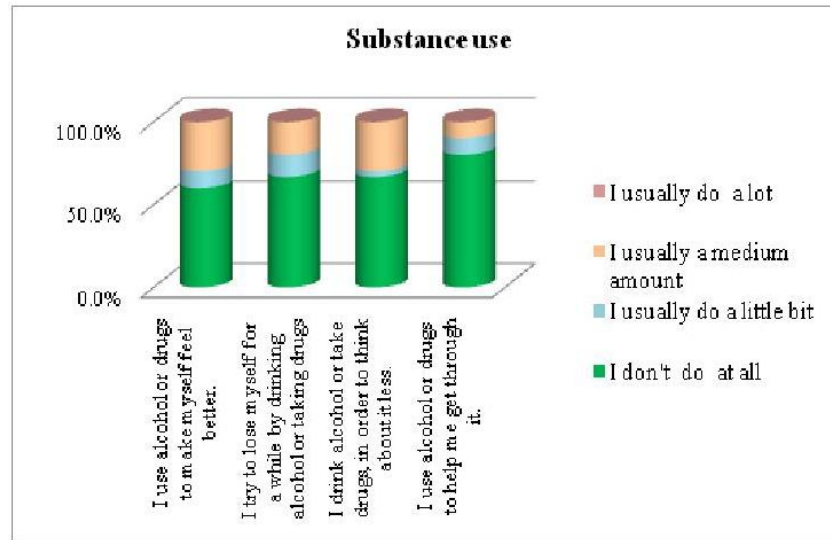


Fig 4: Rarely Used Coping Strategies Adopted by Mothers of Children with Autism was Substance Use



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