Title: How Negative Family Implications and Anxiety Influence Parenting Sense of Competence of Mothers with Children with ASD

Authors: Emi Gomez, Deborah Rafferty, Naomi Ekas

*Texas Christian University

Introduction: The impact of having a child with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is perceived by some parents as having a negative effect on the family as a whole and parents have reported experiencing higher rates of stress, depression, and anxiety compared to parents of typically developing children (Keen et al. 2009; Resendez & Scarpa, 2011). Mothers of children with ASD also report feeling lower levels of competence compared to parents without a child with a developmental disability (Katkic et al., 2017). However, the link between sense of competence in parenting a child with ASD and degree of negative family impact has not been explored. The purpose of this study is to explore the relationship between mothers’ reported negative family implications and how this affects perception of their parenting competence through anxiety.

Method: Mothers of children between the ages of 2 and 17 with a diagnosis of ASD completed an online survey (n = 114). Mothers were on average 38.48 (SD = 6.34) years old. They completed the State Trait Anxiety Inventory, the Family Implications of Child Disability scale, and the Parenting Sense of Competence scale.

Results: A mediation model was run using Preacher and Hayes’ PROCESS Macro (2014) to examine the relationship between negative implications on the family of having a child with a disability and parenting sense of competence, with trait anxiety as the mediator. There was a significant relationship between negative implications on the family and state anxiety, b = .59 (SE = .13), t = 4.48, p ≤ .01. There was also a significant relationship between the mediator and the predictor variable, with increased trait anxiety predicting decreased parenting sense of competence, b = -.51 (SE = .09), t = -5.70, p ≤ .01. While controlling for anxiety, negative family implications of having a child with a disability was associated with lower levels of parenting sense of competence, b = -.28 (SE = .14), t = -2.08, p = .04. Additional analyses using Preacher and Hayes’ (2008) bootstrapping procedure examined whether trait anxiety mediated the relationship between family implications and parenting sense of competence. The 95% confidence interval of the indirect effect was statistically significant (-.51 to -.15).

Discussion: Overall, having a child with a disability that is perceived as negatively impacting the family is associated with higher levels of maternal anxiety, which in turn predicts less sense of competence as a parent. It may be beneficial for mothers to learn techniques to cope with their anxiety in order to help increase their sense of competence as a parent. It would also be beneficial to work with both the mother and child to decrease the negative family implications of having a child with ASD, as anxiety did not fully mediate the relationship. Mindfulness interventions have been shown to reduce stress and anxiety in parents of children with ASD, but future research is needed to examine if these interventions can also decrease mother’s report of negative family implications of having a child with ASD (Da Paz & Wallander, 2017).
References/Citations:


