Title: Examining Child, Parent, and School Correlates of Stress among Parents of Children with Intellectual and/or Developmental Disabilities (IDD)

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Introduction: Among parents of children with IDD, certain child (e.g., presence of autism spectrum disorder [ASD]) characteristics relate to parent stress. Also, some parent characteristics (e.g., optimism and self-mastery) buffer parent stress (Wang et al., 2004). However, we know very little about the relation between school-related characteristics and parent stress. To date, one study examined maternal stress and school characteristics (i.e., family-school partnerships, advocacy, and satisfaction with services) finding a non-linear, negative relation (Burke & Hodapp, 2014). However, their study did not include characteristics such as empowerment and special education knowledge—traits that are critical to access services (Trainor, 2010). In this study, our research question was: Among families of children with IDD, how do child, parent, and school characteristics relate to parent stress?

Method: Data were collected via a web-based survey from 69 parents of children with IDD. On average, participants were 45.55 years of age (SD = 6.83); their children were 10.97 years of age, on average (SD = 5.25). Within the survey, in addition to child age, family income, and race/ethnicity, participants completed the following independent variable measures: Family Empowerment (Koren et al., 1991); Family-School Partnership (Summers et al., 2005); Special Education Knowledge (Burke et al., 2016); Self-Mastery (Pearlin & Schooler, 1978); and Optimism (LOT-R, Robinson-Whelen et al., 1997). The dependent variable was the Parenting Stress Index (Abidin, 1990). All scales demonstrated reliability and data were normally distributed. Analyses included correlations and a hierarchical linear regression. Specifically, block one included child characteristics: presence of ASD, household income, child age, and race; block two included parent characteristics: self-mastery and optimism; and block three included school characteristics: empowerment; family-school partnership and special education knowledge.

Result: There was a negative correlation between empowerment and stress ($r = -.29, p = .02$). Also, there was a negative correlation between optimism and stress ($r = -.29, p = .04$) and a negative correlation between self-mastery and stress ($r = -.42, p = .002$). Regarding the regression, block one was not significant; block two was significant ($R^2 = .38, p < .01$); and Block 3 was significant ($R^2 = .47, p = .04$). Within the final regression model, income ($p = .04$), self-mastery ($p < .01$), optimism ($p = .06$), empowerment ($p = .05$), and family-school partnership ($p = .04$) were negatively related to stress.

Discussion: Research and practice should consider interventions targeting school characteristics and parent stress.

References/Citations: