**Title:** Service and Intervention Impacts on Parenting Stress in Low-income and Minority Families of Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder

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**Introduction:** Parents of children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) report high levels of parenting stress (e.g., Dabrowska & Pisula, 2010). Early Intervention (EI) provides services to children ages birth to three years and has the potential to support parental capacity. The process of determining a diagnosis for young children is often overwhelming for parents and little research has explored the importance of EI for parents during this time. Furthermore, little research has investigated the impacts of interventions such as EI on parents from racial and ethnic minority backgrounds or with low socioeconomic status. The present study addressed these gaps by (1) exploring the relation between parenting stress and child adaptive functioning and enrollment in EI, and (2) determining whether enrollment in EI modified the relation between parenting stress and child adaptive functioning.

**Method:** Data were collected from 212 parents/guardians of children, aged 15-27 months, identified as high-risk for ASD, across 14 urban pediatric clinics. The sample consisted of 32.2% Hispanic and 57.1% non-White parents/guardians; 40.6% of the parents/guardians were born outside of the US. The sample was largely low-income (81.1% receiving public insurance, 63.7% enrolled in WIC, and 57.5% enrolled in Food Stamps) and 40.6% were receiving EI services. Parenting stress was measured by the Parenting Stress Index-Short Form (PSI-SF; Dardas & Ahmad, 2014); EI enrollment was determined by a “yes”/“no” answer from parents/guardians; adaptive behavior was measured with the Adaptive Behavior Assessment System, Second Edition (ABAS-II; Rust & Wallace, 2004).

**Result:** Analyses indicated a mean PSI-SF score of 87.4 (SD = 25.1) in this sample (clinically significant cut-score = 85). Regression analyses indicated that child level of adaptive functioning was negatively correlated with parenting stress (β = -0.82, p < .001). Furthermore, the relationship between lower adaptive functioning and higher parenting stress was stronger when children were not enrolled in EI (β = 0.93, p < .001).

**Discussion:** Understanding the experiences of traditionally underserved families of children at high-risk for ASD is a priority for the clinical and research community (Siu & USPSTF, 2016). We found a similar or slightly lower average stress score compared to prior studies of stress levels of parents of children with confirmed ASD diagnoses (e.g., Kiami & Goodgold, 2017; Feinberg et al., 2014), although comparisons between the groups in such studies must be made with caution. The current study offers perspectives on the experiences of parents whose children are identified with high risk for ASD by being the first to describe parental stress and the impact of EI services in a large cohort of families primarily from racial and ethnic minority and low-income backgrounds. Future research directions and practical implications will be discussed.

**References/Citations:**


Page 1 of 2
