

Stress in 1-Parent and 2-Parent Households with Children with Autism

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Background

Previous research on parenting stress shows:

- Parents of children with ASD experience greater stress than parents of children with other DD
- Level of stress varies by the amount of formal and informal support and the child's functioning
- Single mothers of children with special needs experience more stress than married mothers.

The association of social support, marital status and stress in families of children with ASD has not been examined.

Objective

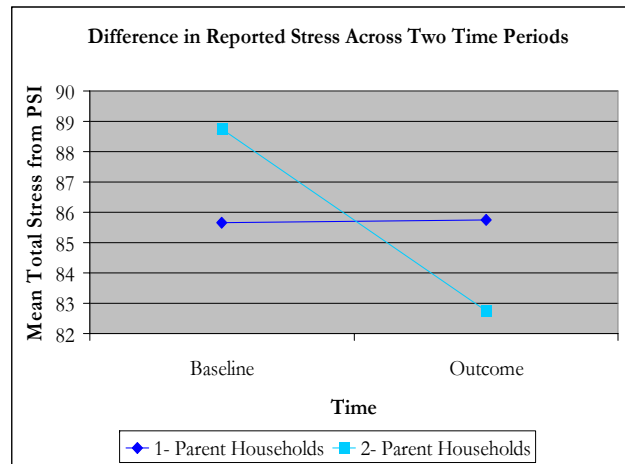
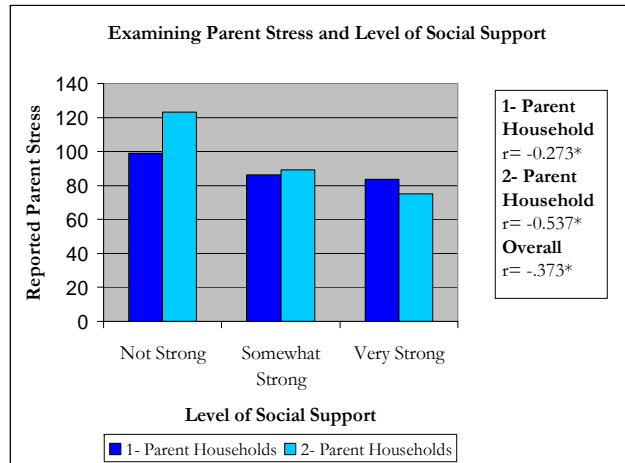
To examine the association between marital status and stress among parents of children with autism, controlling for social support, socio-economic status, and level of child impairment.

Methods

- The sample comprised 140 students participating in an intervention study in 39 kindergarten-through-second-grade autism support classrooms.
- Data were collected at the beginning and end of the school year.
- Measures included: Parenting Stress Index (PSI), Social Support Questionnaire, socio-demographic information, Autism Diagnostic Observation Schedule (ADOS) and the Adaptive Behavior Assessment System- II (ABAS-II).

Results

Sample Characteristics		
	1-Parent n=80	2- Parent n=60
Type of Social Support		
Family	90.7%	84.5%
Friends	66.6%	65.5%
Neighbors	21.3%	22.4%
Community/Religious Groups	18.7%	24.1%
School Community	36.0%	43.1%
Other	4.0%	5.0%
Level of Support		
Not Strong	14.9%	6.9%
Somewhat Strong	39.2%	46.6%
Very Strong	45.9%	46.6%
Do you feel supported?		
Yes	79.7%	87.9%
No	20.3%	12.1%
Ethnicity/Race **		
Black/African American	68.4%	25.0%
Caucasian/White	16.5%	46.7%
Asian/ Pacific Islander	1.3%	11.7%
Hispanic/ Latino	8.9%	11.7%
Other	5.1%	5.0%
Sex *		
Male	80.0%	93.3%
Female	20.0%	6.7%
Household Income **		
Under \$20,000	60.6%	13.8%
\$20,000- \$40,000	22.5%	29.3%
\$40,000-\$60,00	9.9%	22.4%
Over \$60,000	7.0%	34.5%
PSI- Baseline (mean)		
Parental Distress	28.21	30.42
P-CDI *	23.92	27.11
Difficult Child	32.63	31.98
Total Stress	84.75	89.51
PSI- Outcome (mean)		
Parental Distress	28.78	27.08
P-CDI	24.03	25.10
Difficult Child	32.23	30.04
Total Stress	84.88	82.88
ABAS (mean)		
GAC- Baseline	65.70	67.29
GAC- Outcome	67.21	71.35
ADOS (mean)		
Symptom Severity- Baseline	6.66	7.00
Symptom Severity- Outcome	5.87	6.35
* p-value ≤ .05 ** p-value ≤ .01		



Summary

- Compared with 2-parent households, 1-parent households:
 - reported no difference in type or strength of social support
 - were more likely to have income less than \$20,000
 - were more likely to be African American
 - reported lower stress in the parent-child dysfunctional interaction subscale of the parenting stress index at baseline
 - reported no difference in child functioning or symptom severity
- Social support and stress were more highly correlated among 2-parent households than 1-parent households
- During the intervention period, 2-parent households reported a greater reduction in stress ($p < .05$).

Implications

- No difference in reported stress may be due to 1) bias in reporting or 2) differences in support quality or changes in support over time not captured by our measure
- General social support may play a less important role in alleviating stress among 1-parent households, and suggests the need for other types of interventions to reduce stress
- The greater reduction in stress among 2-parent households begs the question of:
 - Whether reduced stress is associated with improved child functioning, AND
 - Whether improved functioning differentially affects stress levels in 1 and 2-parent households