

AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDERS CHILD LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION SKILLS AND ITS IMPACT ON PARENTAL EMOTIONS AND STRESS

Amela Ibrahimagić^{1*}, Nedim Patković² & Ralf Herwig³

¹Faculty of Education and Rehabilitation, University of Tuzla, Bosnia and Herzegovina, amela.ibrahimagic@untz.ba

²Public institution Center for children and adults with special needs Zenica Dobož Canton, Zenica, Bosnia and Herzegovina

³Laboratories PD Dr. R. Herwig, Munich, Germany

*correspondence author

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Dear editor,

We would like to inform you about our study created with the intention to meet the needs of "autism" families, as well as to bridge the gap between different scientists and professionals working in this field. It is well known fact, that autism spectrum disorders (ASD) occurrence has become frequent throughout the years. Its prevalence increased dramatically over the last two decades. From 5.8 per 10 000 to 14.9 per 10 000 (Fombonne 2003) in the beginning of the 21st century, recent reports demonstrate a prevalence of 100 per 10 000 (Zeidan et al. 2022). Parents of children with ASD experience are additionally and supplementary facing challenges that are often exemplified through increased anxiety, depression, higher divorce rate and so forth. In contrast to other couples, the parents of children with ASD score are exposed to higher stress levels than other parent groups (Bonis 2016). Professionals, who are dealing with ASD persons and their parents, as well as all their family members, should be especially aware of the above-mentioned. Specialists, as well as the parents, should be provided with newest answers, additional support, and knowledge to optimize their help. Complex issues like ASD is, cannot be tackled by a single professional or an exclusive or unique type of treatment. Medical doctors, speech and language pathologists, psychologists, special educators, and other professionals need to act trans-disciplinarily in the complexity of ASD treatment. The aim of our study was to examine emotions and stress sources, its frequency and predictability in ASD children's parents, in relation to communication and language skills of their children. The study consists of 80 participants of ASD children's parents. It was conducted using an especially developed (and verified) questionnaire for this kind of research. Four groups of variables were analyzed: (1) parental stress; (2) parental emotions, (2) child's communication; and (4) child's language variables. Statistical analysis included basic statistical parameters with further multiple regression analysis. Parents most frequent ways of communicating with their ASD children are: (1) allowing to cuddle; (2) recognizing familiar faces and

(3) drawing attention if the kid/parent needs help or wants an item. The most common language forms of ASD children are: following simple instructions; understanding connected words/phrases; pronouncing single words; looking at somebody when called by name. Regarding their emotions, ASD children's parents expressed the greatest agreement with the following statements: "My child is more demanding than most other children"; "It seems to me that my child is very sensitive and easily upset"; "My child can't do much of what he's expected to know to do", and "I often lack energy" (Ibrahimagić et al. 2021). The most common sources of self-reported parental stress are: caring for the child's future; difficulties of the child with speech, language, and communication; difficulties of the child in establishing contact with peers and other persons; and inappropriate behavior of the child (anger, aggression, stereotypical behaviors...). Multiple regression analysis demonstrates that the child's communication and its language skills are a significant and valid predictor for parental emotions and stress. Furthermore, result clearly demonstrate that teaching ASD child's skills (like showing gestures; looking, answering, and turning when called by name; making it known when he/she needs help or wants an object; answering simple 'yes/no' questions; and establishing contact with peers,) will have a desirable impact on decreasing parental stress frequency. In conclusion, we would like to underline, that parental emotions and stress sources are highly related to their child's communication and language skills. Creating and conducting a team approach in dealing with complex issues, that ASD often brings along, can be highly beneficial for the family as a whole. Holistic treatment of physicians, speech and language therapist, psychotherapists, special educators and other 'skilled professionals' is crucial in creating and maintaining stability in ASD persons family life.

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