

Resources as Predictors of Mental Health and Marital Quality among Parents of Children with Autism

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Abstract

Backgrounds: The present study aimed to develop and validate a conceptual model explaining the mental health and marital quality of parents raising a child with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). The proposed model includes four core components: parental stress, parental resources, parental mental health and marital quality, and the child's autism-related symptoms. Our main hypothesis is that the resources (sense of coherence, locus of control and social support), will be negatively correlated with parental stress. The more social support parents have, and the greater their sense of coherence and internal locus of control, the less pressure they will report in parenting their autistic child. The intensity of the stress will be also negatively correlated with parental mental health and quality of marriage. Consequently, parental mental health and quality of marriage will be positively correlated with the child improvement.

Methods: Participants were 176 parents of children aged 6–16 years who had been diagnosed with ASD. Parents completed a battery of standardized questionnaires assessing parental stress, personal resources, mental health, marital quality, and the severity of the child's autism symptoms.

Results: Path analysis showed that sense of coherence, internal locus of control, social support and quality of marriage increase the ability to cope with the stress of parenting an autistic child.

Conclusions: It seems that the explanations of the results of this research emphasize the concept of control. A strong sense of control may facilitate use of active coping and support-seeking methods, encourage persistence and promote domain-specific satisfaction and affect.

Keywords

Mental health, Quality of marriage, Stress, Resources, Autism, Parents.