

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Civilian

An Examination of Specific Child Behavior Problems as Predictors of Parenting Stress Among Families of Children with Pervasive Developmental Disorders

Davis, A. L., & Neece, C. L. (2017). An examination of specific child behavior problems as predictors of parenting stress among families of children with pervasive developmental disorders. *Journal of Mental Health Research in Intellectual Disabilities*, 10(3), 163-177. doi:10.1080/19315864.2016.1276988

SUMMARY: Understanding the behavior problems that are most associated with increased stress in parents of children with special needs may help guide interventions. Parents of children with pervasive developmental disorders (PDD) self-reported the frequency of common child behavior problems and parental stress levels. The most frequently reported child behavior problems and their impact on the parent's stress level were assessed.

KEY FINDINGS:

- The most frequently reported behavior problems were problems related to speech and impulse control.
- Three reported behavior problems were associated with higher parental stress levels: speech problems, the child not answering when people talk to him or her, and temper tantrums.
- Reported speech problems or temper tantrums at any level indicated higher stress for parents than those not reporting those problems at all.

IMPLICATIONS FOR MILITARY PROFESSIONALS:

Military professionals could:

- Facilitate support groups for military parents of children with special needs to provide support for managing stress
- Attend trainings about ways to support military parents in coping with the increased stress associated with child behavior problems

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Enhance education, activities, and curriculum related to coping behaviors and dealing with stress
- Provide workshops to help military parents learn about available support services for managing child behavior problems

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Encourage collaboration among DoD programs and community-based organizations to provide support for military parents of children with special needs experiencing behavior problems
- Continue to support programs for managing stress in military parents of children with special needs

This product is the result of a partnership funded by the Department of Defense between the Office of Military Community and Family Policy and the USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture through a grant/cooperative agreement with The University of Minnesota.



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METHODS

- Parents of children with a developmental disability were recruited from the Mindful Awareness for Parenting Stress project at Loma Linda University, California.
- Self-report questionnaires were sent to parents to assess child behaviors and parenting stress levels.
- The most common behavior problems and their relationship to parenting stress were assessed.

PARTICIPANTS

- Participants included 72 parents (mean age =34.8 years, SD = 7.7 years) and their child with a PDD between the ages of 2.5 and 5 years (M = 3.9 years; SD = 1 year).
- Most parents were female (84%) and most children were male (77%).
- The race/ethnicity of the majority of children was reported as either Latino (46%) or White (27%). The race/ethnicity of parents was not included.

LIMITATIONS

- Only parent-child pairs that reported more than 10 child behavior problems were included in the study; so, the results may not generalize to parents of children with fewer behavior problems.
- The age range of children with PDD included in the study was limited (2.5 to 5 years). Therefore, the behavior problems and their association with parent stress may differ from other child age groups.
- Most parents in the study were mothers; the results may not generalize to fathers.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Explore parenting stress levels when the child with special needs has an average of 10 or fewer reported behaviors
- Examine behaviors that increase parental stress in families with older children with special needs
- Assess the parenting stress levels of fathers of children with special needs

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