

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Civilian

The Impact of Maternal, Child, and Family Characteristics on the Daily Well-Being and Parenting Experiences of Mothers of Children With Autism Spectrum Disorder

Pruitt, M. M., Willis, K., & Timmons, L. (2016). The impact of maternal, child, and family characteristics on the daily well-being and parenting experiences of mothers of children with autism spectrum disorder. *Autism*, 20(8), 973-985. doi:10.1177/1362361315620409

SUMMARY: Parents of children with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) encounter unique stressors and challenges in everyday life. In this study, researchers investigated parent, child, and family characteristics as predictors of daily parent-child interactions and maternal emotions. Parent, child, and family characteristics predicted parent-child interactions, while child and parent characteristics predicted maternal emotions.

KEY FINDINGS:

- In families that had greater family cohesion, mothers reported more positive parent-child interactions.
- Frustrating parent-child interactions were more frequent in families characterized by greater rigidity.
- Mothers who reported more symptoms of depression also reported more frustrating parent-child interactions and experiences of negative emotions and fewer experiences of positive emotions.
- Greater child ASD symptom severity predicted higher levels of positive emotions for mothers.

IMPLICATIONS FOR MILITARY PROFESSIONALS:

Military professionals could:

- Talk with military-affiliated parents of children with special needs to find out what type of support is most helpful for them
- Include children from military families who have special needs in a variety of activities, both with their parents and on their own

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Offer workshops for parents of children with special needs to enhance communication skills in order to increase family cohesion
- Develop activities for military families with children with special needs that provide an opportunity for positive parent-child interactions

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Continue to support the development of programs to strengthen military families that include individuals with special needs
- Encourage programs to focus on helping military families develop cohesion and flexibility

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.



Putting Research to Work for Military Families



METHODS

- Participants were recruited through local organizations serving individuals with ASD and through national blogs focused on ASD.
- Mothers completed initial measures of maternal depressive symptoms, child ASD symptom severity, and family functioning as well as daily measures of parent emotions and parent-child interactions for two weeks.
- Data were analyzed to determine the ways in which scores on initial measures predicted daily parent emotions and parent-child interactions.

PARTICIPANTS

- Participants were 83 mothers of a child with ASD.
- The average age of the children was 7.82 years (SD=2.59 years).
- Mothers identified as White (90%), Latina (6%), Black (1%), Native American (1%), Asian American (1%), or another race/ethnicity (1%).

LIMITATIONS

- Latina mothers were less likely to complete the daily measurements than White mothers, so the experience of Latina mothers is underrepresented in the results.
- The study only included mothers of children with ASD. It is unknown how these factors relate to each other for fathers of children with ASD.
- Because mothers were asked to report about parent-child interactions every day, they may have paid more attention and acted differently within those interactions than they normally would, which may have influenced results.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Examine the experience of fathers of children with ASD
- Utilize different methods that encourage equal representation of parents of different races/ethnicities
- Investigate the effect of asking parents about parent-child interactions every day for a period of time

ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



For more information about the Assessing Research that Works rating scale visit:
<https://reachmilitaryfamilies.umn.edu/content/assessing-research-that-works>