

Hartley Lab Newsletter

Martial Quality and Autism: Study Update

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Study Update	1	We want to thank you and your family for participating in the <i>Marital Quality and Autism study</i> . This important research would not be possible without your generous support.
Findings: Parents' Beliefs	1	The purpose of this newsletter is to update you on some early findings from the study and to tell you what we will be doing in the future. At the end of the newsletter, you will also find information on local
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autism-related events.

Autism spectrum disorders (referred to as 'autism' in this newsletter) are lifelong neurodevelopmental disorders that currently affect 1 in 88 children in the United States.

The goal of our study is to learn about the lives of families who have a son or daughter with autism. We would like to better understand how children and adolescents with autism

affect parents' daily experiences and marital relationship. We are also interested in understanding how parents' well-being and marital relationship impacts the child or adolescent with autism.

To date, 79 families of children and adolescents with autism have participated in the study. The average age of the son or daughter with autism is 11 years, and ranges from 4 to 22 years.

Findings: Parents' Beliefs about Their Son or Daughter's Behavior Problems

Implications:

- Interventions that increase parents' awareness that behavior problems can be triggered by things in the environment and can be controlled may help reduce parenting stress and make parents more open to try behavior modification strategies.
- Fathers may benefit most from such interventions.

Children and adolescents with autism often display behavior problems such as disruptive behavior, inattention, hyperactivity, and anxious or depressed mood. Our research suggests that the impact of these behavior problems on parents depends on parents' beliefs.

We found that fathers were more likely than mothers to believe that their son or daughter's behavior problem was caused by an internal and

stable characteristic of the child or adolescent (e.g., their autism). Fathers were also more likely than mothers to believe that their son or daughter with autism could not control the behavior problem.

We also found that if the son or daughter also had an intellectual disability and/or more severe behavior problems, parents were more likely to believe that their son or daughter was unable to control the behavior problem.

Parents' beliefs were found to be related to their level of parenting stress. After controlling for differences in the child/adolescent's behavior problems and intellectual disability, beliefs that behavior problems were due to internal and stable characteristics in the child or adolescent and beliefs that the behavior problem cannot be controlled by the child or adolescent were related to higher levels of parenting stress.

Experiences of Families

Below are comments from mothers and fathers of children and adolescents in the study. These comments reflect some of the tremendous rewards and triumphs, challenges and struggles, parent-child relationship, and hopes and concerns for the future that were expressed by families in this study.

These comments also highlight the diversity in family experiences. Given this diversity, some of the comments may reflect your own family's experiences, while other comments may be very different from your experience.

Rewards and Triumphs

"It's a pleasure to talk with him and he has a wonderful attitude. If there was a pill to change an autistic boy into a normal boy, I wouldn't make that change. No, I wouldn't think that for a moment."

-Mother

"One of the things I'm proudest of my son is his intellectual ability and his willingness to share that with other people."

-Father

"The most impressive thing about him is the effort he puts forth in trying to overcome fears, to overcome difficulties. Just trying to overcome absolutely everything and continue to persevere. I really admire that in him."

-Mother

"I give him a lot of credit for everything he has accomplished. When his first words came and he was years past other kids I was just as excited if not more."

-Mother

Challenges and Struggles

"I think for him when it comes to the autism, it's more of the social stuff that gets in the way."

-Mother

"She loves routine, so as much routine she can have in her day the better. When there's not a lot of routine, that's when life gets hard."

-Father

"The thing I struggle with is at times I don't know if his testing of me is his misunderstanding of social interaction or he's just manipulating me, because I know everyone tries to get away with what they can as a teenager."

-Father

"He is not selfish in the sense that he's self-aware, but he is selfish in the sense that his world revolves around him. He has no real comprehension of another's needs."

-Mother

Parent-Child Relationship

"I have no problem operating within his world of what he likes and what his interests are and I think we have a very good relationship with one another."

-Father

"When she's happy, the whole world is happy. Unfortunately, there's times when she's not so happy."

-Father

"I feel like so much of our relationship at least in terms of my feelings towards him has been really strained. It's definitely been a lot harder with him than I ever thought it would be. It was not what I was expecting, but there have been a lot of rewards in it too."

-Mother

"I don't want to push him too hard but at the same time I don't want to push him not hard enough."

-Father

Hopes and Concern for the Future

"I think we do spend a lot of time worrying about him when we are gone or when we get too old to care for him."
-Mother

"I am concerned about what kind of relationship we're going to have."
-Father

"My concern for him though is with his social skills, or his lack thereof, what kind of life he's going to lead after he leaves us."
-Father

"I look forward to seeing him do more things independently and building his own life. In terms of what I would like for him, it is to be an independent person and to find what makes him happy."
-Mother

A Look into the Future

We are continuing to recruit new families for the study. In the near future, we will also be contacting families who have already participated in the study to see if they are willing to complete additional measures.

Highlighting Student Projects



Emily Schaidle, graduate student, is using data from the study to examine how parents cope with their child's behavior problems and how this influences their psychological well-being.



Emily Hickey, graduate student, is using data from the study to investigate fathers' sources of social support and its' effect on their psychological well-being.

In the Community

Waisman Center Day with the Experts: Autism 2013

Find a link to 2013 and previous event webcasts here:

<http://www.waisman.wisc.edu/cedd/autism/>

Autism Society of Wisconsin Conference

April 18-20, 2013
Wisconsin Dells, WI

Circles of Life Conference

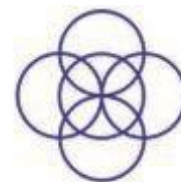
April 25-26, 2013
Steven's Point, WI

Camp AweSum Youth Camp

Ages 9-15
June 23-28, 2013
St. Germain, WI

Camp AweSum Family Camp

All ages
Week 1: June 16-22, 2013
Week 2: August 11-17, 2013



Waisman Center

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The Hartley Lab (also known as the Family Interaction Lab) is located at the Waisman Center, University of Wisconsin-Madison.

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