

# Parenting Styles and Associations with Child Behavior Problems in Parents of Children with and without ASD



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## Introduction

Families who have a child with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) experience a unique parenting context. In addition to ASD symptoms, children with ASD often exhibit high levels of co-occurring behavior problems. Parents of children with ASD may be faced with extraordinary caregiving activities and report higher levels of parenting stress compared to both parents of children without disabilities and parents of children with other types of disabilities (e.g., Estes et al., 2013). Little is known about how this unique parenting context influences parenting styles and/or how parenting styles are linked to the child with ASD's level of behavior problems.

According to Baumrind (1971), there are three main parenting styles - *authoritative*, *authoritarian*, and *permissive*. Research in the general population has found that *authoritarian* and *permissive* parenting styles are often related to maladaptive child outcomes, including higher levels of child behavior problems, whereas an *authoritative* parenting style is related to more adaptive child outcomes. However, whether these same patterns emerge in families of children with ASD is largely unknown. The study aims were as follows:

1. Determine if parenting styles differ between parents of children with ASD and parents of children without ASD.
2. Examine whether parenting style is related to level of behavior problems in children with and without ASD.

## Methods

### Sample

#### • 184 couples with a child with ASD

- Parents: Age ( $M = 38.53$ ,  $SD = 5.45$ ); 89.70% White, non-Hispanic, 6.3% Hispanic, 2.4% Asian/ Pacific Islander, 1.1% African-American; 60.9% some college education/ college degree; and 16.5 % income < \$50,000
- Child with ASD: Age ( $M = 7.92$ ,  $SD = 2.25$ ); 85.30% male; and 34.80% with intellectual disability (ID)

#### • 183 couples with a child without ASD

- Parents: Age ( $M = 39.50$ ,  $SD = 6.30$ ); 86.00% White, non-Hispanic, 2.5% Hispanic, 2.7%, Asian/ Pacific Islander, 6.3% African-American; 53.10% some college education/ college degree; and 15.6 % income < \$60,000
- Child: Age ( $M = 7.97$ ,  $SD = 2.38$ ); 84.10% male

### Measures

- *Child Behavior Problems*: Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL; Achenbach & Rescorla, 2000 & 2001)
- *Parenting Style*: Parenting Styles and Dimensions Questionnaire (PSDQ; Robinson, Mandileco, Olsen, & Hart, 2001)

## Results

Table 1. ANCOVA for Authoritarian Parenting Style between Mothers of Children with ASD vs. without ASD

	SS <sub>M</sub>	df	F	p
Corrected model	1488.75	7	3.83	.00*
Main effect				
Group (ASD vs. control)	196.26	1	3.54	.06*
Covariates				
Child gender	0.209	1	0.004	.95
Child age	129.90	1	2.34	.13
Parent age	839.86	1	15.13	.00*
Parent ethnicity	390.04	1	7.03	.01*
Parent education	158.50	1	2.86	.09
Household income	5.55	1	0.10	.75
R <sup>2</sup>	.070			

Father MANCOVA:  $\lambda = 0.99$ ,  $F(3, 344) = 1.63$ ,  $p = .18$ ; Mother MANCOVA:  $\lambda = 0.95$ ,  $F(3, 348) = 6.35$ ,  $p = .00$

## Results

Table 2. ANCOVA for Authoritative Parenting Style between Mothers of Children with ASD vs. without ASD

	SS <sub>M</sub>	df	F	p
Corrected model	1310.90	7	1.20	.30
Main effect				
Group (ASD vs. control)	925.28	1	5.91	.02*
Covariates				
Child gender	89.61	1	0.57	.45
Child age	46.91	1	0.30	.59
Parent age	23.31	1	0.15	.70
Parent ethnicity	5.08	1	0.03	.86
Parent education	151.84	1	0.97	.33
Household income	62.74	1	0.40	.53
R <sup>2</sup>	.023			

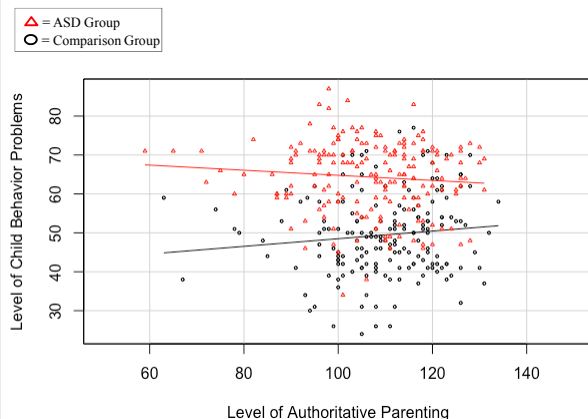
## Results

Table 4. Multiple Regression Model of Mother Parenting Style and Association with Child Behavior Problems

	B	SE	$\beta$
Constant	39.30	8.64	
Mother Characteristics			
Group (ASD vs. control)	17.76	6.86	1.44*
Age	0.01	0.11	.01
Ethnicity	-0.33	0.55	-.03
Education	-0.14	0.30	-.02
Household Income	0.23	0.18	.06
Child Characteristics			
Gender	0.87	1.46	.03
Age	0.05	0.26	.01
Parenting Styles			
Authoritative	0.05	0.04	.05
Authoritarian	0.14	0.08	.09*
Permissive	0.09	0.12	.04
Interaction Terms			
Authoritative x Group	-0.11	0.04	-.92*
Authoritarian x Group	-0.08	0.08	-.25
Permissive x Group	0.12	0.12	.35
R <sup>2</sup>		.39	
F		16.40	

\*  $p < .05$ ; +  $p < .07$

Figure 1. Association of Mother Authoritative Parenting Style with Child Behavior Problems



## Results

Table 3. ANCOVA for Permissive Parenting Style between Mothers of Children with ASD vs. without ASD

	SS <sub>M</sub>	df	F	p
Corrected model	332.07	7	2.11	.04*
Main effect				
Group (ASD vs. control)	104.97	1	4.66	.03*
Covariates				
Child gender	4.62	1	0.21	.65
Child age	57.61	1	2.56	.11
Parent age	0.33	1	0.02	.90
Parent ethnicity	50.25	1	2.23	.14
Parent education	6.47	1	0.29	.59
Household income	33.76	1	1.50	.22
R <sup>2</sup>	.040			

## Results

Table 5. Multiple Regression Model of Father Parenting Style and Association with Child Behavior Problems

	B	SE	$\beta$
Constant	49.44	7.89	
Father Characteristics			
Group (ASD vs. control)	3.73	6.43	.30
Age	-0.06	0.10	-.03
Ethnicity	-0.78	0.56	-.06
Education	-0.09	0.27	-.01
Household Income	0.21	0.18	.05
Child Characteristics			
Gender	-0.18	1.41	-.01
Age	0.10	0.24	.02
Parenting Styles			
Authoritative	-0.12	0.04	-.14*
Authoritarian	0.18	0.07	.13*
Permissive	0.43	0.12	.16*
Interaction Terms			
Authoritative x Group	0.07	0.04	.56
Authoritarian x Group	-0.11	0.07	-.37
Permissive x Group	0.02	0.12	.06
R <sup>2</sup>		.45	
F		21.65	

\*  $p < .05$ . Follow-up step-wise regression model found group variable to have a significant effect until interaction terms were included in the final level.

## Discussion

In sum, mothers of children with ASD reported a higher level of *authoritative* and *permissive* parenting than mothers in comparison group. There was no difference in parenting styles between fathers of children with ASD and fathers in the comparison group.

For mothers, there was a trend for greater *authoritarian* parenting to be associated with higher levels of child behavior problems. For fathers, all three parenting styles were associated with child behavior problems in the expected direction. Group (i.e., ASD vs. comparison) moderated the association between level of *authoritative* parenting and child behavior problems in mothers.

Findings have implications for family supports and interventions. For example, multi-system efforts to promote education about effective parenting styles as well as providing resources to reduce barriers (e.g., stressors) may help in the management of child behavior problems in children with ASD.

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