

Perceived Social Support in Parents of Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder

Hailey Boyer, Iulia Mihaila, Sigan L. Hartley, Ph.D.
Waisman Center, University of Wisconsin – Madison

INTRODUCTION

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a neurodevelopmental condition that affects in 1 in 68 children in the U.S.¹ ASD is characterized by impairments in social communication and repetitive/restrictive interests and behaviors and may also include cop-occurring behavior problems. Due to the characteristics associated with ASD, parents of children with ASD experience unique challenges and stressors. Social support for parents of children with ASD is important for family well-being. The purpose of this study is to better understand the experience of social support in mothers and fathers of a child with ASD through an examination of parents' positive and negative social exchanges. Additionally, this study explores associated child and family factors.

STUDY AIMS

1. Describe the social support of mothers and fathers of children with ASD.
2. Examine differences in level of perceived social support between mothers and fathers of children with ASD.
3. Examine child and family factors associated with social support for mothers and fathers of children with ASD.

SAMPLE

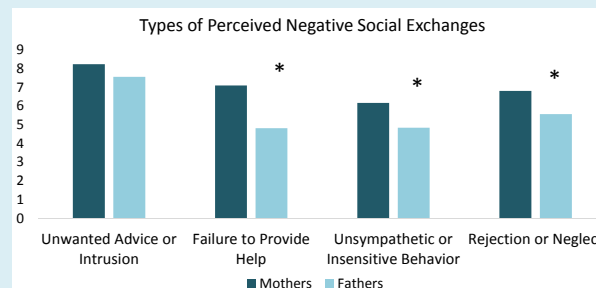
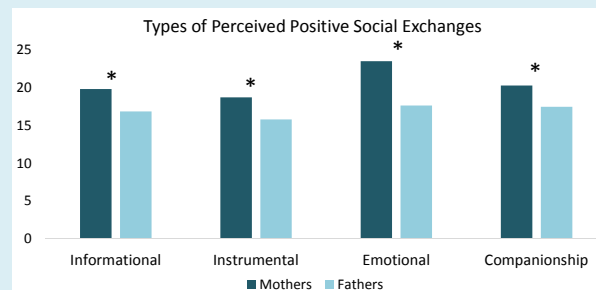
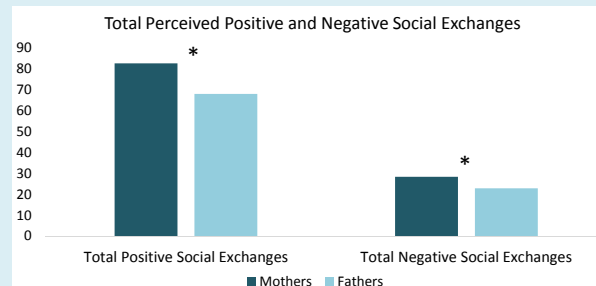
Parents	
n=189	
Age M(SD)	
Mothers	38.69(5.61)
Fathers	40.76(6.19)
Caucasian, Non-Hispanic N(%)	
Mothers	170(89.90%)
Fathers	166(87.80%)
Bachelor's degree or higher N(%)	
Mothers	117(61.90%)
Fathers	107(56.50%)
Household Income N(%)	
<\$50,000	25(13.20%)
\$50,000 to \$99,999	84(44.40%)
>= \$100,000	72(38.20%)
Children	
Age M(SD)	7.90(2.248)
Male N(%)	162(85.70%)
Intellectual Disability N(%)	65(34.4%)

MEASURES

- Positive and Negative Social Exchanges (PANSE; Newsom, et al., 2004)²
- Social Responsiveness Scale (SRS; Constantino, Gruber, 2005)³
- Center for Epidemiologic Studies—Depression (CESD; Radloff, 1977)⁴
- Broad Autism Phenotype Questionnaire (BAPQ; Hurley, et al., 2007)⁵

Funding received by the National Institute of Mental Health (R01 MH0091) and the National Institute of Child Health and Development (U54 HD090256).

RESULTS



* = statistically significant

KEY FINDINGS

Findings indicate a significant difference in perceived positive ($t = 5.19, p = .00$) and negative ($t = 2.56, p = .01$) social exchanges between mothers and fathers. There were significant differences in all four categories of perceived positive social exchanges (informational: $t = 3.41, p = .00$; instrumental: $t = 3.66, p = .00$; emotional: $t = 6.98, p = .00$; companionship: $t = 3.81, p = .00$). In all cases, mothers perceived significantly greater social support than fathers. With regard to negative social exchanges, there were significant differences in failure to provide help ($t = 3.57, p = .00$), unsympathetic or insensitive behavior ($t = 2.02, p = .04$), and rejection or neglect ($t = 2.14, p = .03$), wherein mothers perceived greater negative social support than fathers.

RESULTS

Predictors of Mothers' and Fathers' Perceived Social Support				
	B	SE B	β	p-value
Mothers' Perceived Positive Social Exchanges				
Child ID	-.2366	4.367	-.040	.589
Child Age	1.445	.914	.116	.116
Household Income	.334	.689	.036	.629
Mother BAP	.037	.089	.030	.677
Mother Depressive Symptoms	-.767	.204	-.277	.000*
Mothers' Perceived Negative Social Exchanges				
Child ID	8.849	14.624		.546
Child Age	.513	.652	.052	.433
Household Income	-.538	.491	-.074	.274
Mother BAP	-.046	.064	-.047	.475
Mother Depressive Symptoms	1.052	1.145	.484	.000*
Fathers' Perceived Positive Social Exchanges				
Child ID	-.408	4.261	-.007	.924
Child Age	.240	.896	.021	.789
Household Income	.237	.670	.354	.724
Father BAP	-.014	.094	-.011	.886
Father Depressive Symptoms	-.103	.232	-.034	.658
Fathers' Perceived Negative Social Exchanges				
Child ID	8.170	2.678	.204	.003*
Child Age	-.603	.563	-.071	.286
Household Income	.192	.421	.031	.648
Father BAP	.002	.059	.002	.971
Father Depressive Symptoms	.982	.146	.450	.000*

- Mothers' depressive symptoms predicted decreased perceived positive social exchanges ($\beta = -.28, p = .00$) and increased perceived negative social exchanges ($\beta = .48, p = .00$).
- Fathers' depressive symptoms ($\beta = .45, p = .00$), and having a child with ID ($\beta = .20, p = .00$) predicted increased perceived negative social exchanges.

CONCLUSIONS

Mothers and fathers experience different levels of perceived positive and negative social support. Overall, mothers perceived significantly more positive social exchanges than fathers and significantly more negative social exchanges in three of four categories. Findings indicate that parents' depressive symptoms predict level of perceived positive and negative social exchanges. For fathers, child ID status also predicted perceived negative social exchanges. Future research focusing on understanding sources of perceived positive and negative social support for mothers and fathers of children with ASD will have implications for service delivery for parents. Understanding factors that predict social support, such as depressive symptoms, can help focus intervention.

REFERENCES

1. Christensen, D. L., PhD, Baio, J., EdS, Van Naarden Braun, K., PhD, Bilder, D., MD, Charles, J., MD, Constantino, J. N., MD, ... Yeargin-Allsopp, M., MD. (2016). Prevalence and Characteristics of Autism Spectrum Disorder Among Children Aged 8 Years. *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report: Surveillance Summaries*, 65(3), 1-23. Retrieved March 6, 2018, from <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/65/sr6503a1.htm>.
2. Newsom, J. T., Rook, K. S., Nishishiba, M., Sorkin, D. H., & Mahan, T. L. (2005). Understanding the Relative Importance of Positive and Negative Social Exchanges: Examining Specific Domains and Appraisals. *The Journals of Gerontology: Series B*, 60(6), doi:10.1093/geronb/60.6.p304
3. Constantino J.N., Gruber, C.P. (2005). *Social Responsiveness Scale, Second Edition (SRS-2)*. Los Angeles: Western Psychological Services; 2012
4. Radloff, L. S. (1977). The CES-D scale: A self-report depression scale for research in the general population. *Applied Psychological Measurement*, 1(3), 385-401. doi:10.1177/0146167700100306
5. Hurley, R., Losh, M., Parlier, M., Reznick, J. S., & Piven, J. (2007). The broad autism phenotype questionnaire. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 37(9), 1679-1690. doi:10.1007/s10803-006-0299-3