

Introduction

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a developmental disability characterized by impairments in social interactions and communication, as well as restrictive and repetitive behaviors (Duvekot et al., 2018). Children with ASD also experience a high prevalence of internalizing behavior problems, which include depressive and anxious affect (Bos et al., 2018). Research on families with typically developing children has indicated that couples with a strong co-parenting alliance have reported better outcomes for their child's wellbeing (Sim et al., 2017).

Previous research has found that co-parenting quality (parenting alliance) is correlated with parenting stress in both mothers and fathers of children with ASD. It also found that the link between parenting stress and co-parenting quality was stronger for fathers. (May et al. 2015). There is a lack of literature looking at the four subtypes of parenting alliance and how those subtypes compare for mothers and fathers. This research looks at differences between mothers and fathers stress and co-parenting as well as how that specifically impacts the internalizing behaviors of the child.

Study Aims

1. Describe the associations between parent stress, parent alliance and child internalizing behavior problems in ASD
2. Examine differences between mother and father report of parent stress and parent alliance for families with children with ASD

Method

Participants

- Part of the Family Outcomes in ASD Study

Table 1.

Sociodemographics

Socio-demographic	<i>M(SD)</i>
Mother (n=189)	
Age (<i>M[SD]</i>)	38.69 (5.62)
Ethnicity (n[%])	
White, Non-Hispanic	170 (89.9)
Education (n[%])	
Associates or Above	125 (66.1)
Father (n = 189)	
Age (<i>M[SD]</i>)	40.76 (6.19)
Ethnicity (n[%])	
White, Non-Hispanic	166 (87.8)
Education (n[%])	
Associates or Above	114 (60.3)
Child	
Age (<i>M[SD]</i>)	7.90 (2.25)
Gender-male (n [%])	162 (86.2)

Measures

- Parenting Burden Scale (Pburd; Zarit, Reever, & Bach-Peterson, 1980)
- Parenting Alliance Inventory (PAI; Feinburg, Brown, & Kan, 2012)
 - Co-parenting Closeness
 - Co-parenting Support
 - Co-parenting Undermining
 - Endorse Partner Parenting
- Child Behavior Checklist: Internalizing (CBCL; Achenbach & Rescorla, 2001)

Results

Table 2.

Correlations among study variables for mothers (shaded and above the diagonal) and fathers (unshaded and below the diagonal)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. CBCL Internalizing T	---	.297**	.013	.034	.053	-.056	-.002
2. Parent Burden	.288**	---	-.295**	-.218**	.372**	-.347**	-.333**
3. Co-parenting closeness	-.031	-.255**	---	.730**	-.550**	.670**	.839**
4. Co-parenting Support	-.094	-.344**	.711**	---	-.634**	.720**	.921**
5. Co-parenting undermining	.168*	.395**	-.477**	-.612**	---	-.497**	-.847**
6. Endorse partner parenting	-.047	-.290**	.554**	.612**	-.366**	---	.720**
7. Total Co-parenting score	-.127	-.400**	.791**	.909**	-.855**	.582**	---

Note. Pearson Correlations. CBCL = Child Behavior Checklist (Achenbach & Rescorla, 2001); * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

Table 3.

Mother and father reported means, standard deviations, and t-values for main variables.

Measure	Mother	Father	<i>t</i> -value	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i> -value
	<i>M(SD)</i>	<i>M(SD)</i>			
	n=189	n=189			
CBCL_ Internalizing T	62.99 (9.60)	61.97 (9.82)	1.37	186	.173
Parent Burden	19.16 (9.82)	17.84 (8.67)	1.83	187	.067 ⁺
Co-parenting closeness	2.05 (.62)	2.17 (.55)	-2.58	187	.011*
Co-parenting support	2.28 (.52)	2.23 (.49)	1.16	187	.248
Co-parenting undermining	.42 (.45)	.61 (.50)	-4.13	187	.000***
Endorse Partner Parenting	2.28 (.56)	2.58 (.43)	-6.08	187	.000***
Total co-parenting score	2.35 (.45)	2.28 (.43)	1.93	187	.055 ⁺

Note. *M* = mean; *SD* = standard deviation; *t*-value = value for paired-samples *t*-test; *df* = degrees of freedom; CBCL = Child Behavior Checklist (Achenbach & Rescorla, 2001); ⁺ $p < .9$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p = .000$.

Findings

- Parenting stress is significantly associated with parenting alliance for both mother and father reports across all subscales.
- There is a significant association between parent stress and child internalizing behavior problems for both mother report ($r = .297, p < .01$) and father report ($r = .288, p < .01$).
- Child internalizing behavior problems and parent alliance are not significantly associated for mother or father report.
- Mothers and fathers report differences in co-parenting closeness ($t(187) = -2.580, p < .05$), co-parenting undermining ($t(187) = -.4130, p = .000$), and endorse partner parenting ($t(187) = -.6084, p = .000$).

Discussion

- Findings suggest parent stress may negatively influence both the parent relationship and child internalizing behavior problems.
- Findings suggest discrepancy between mother and father report of parenting alliance with fathers reporting higher levels on the co-parenting closeness, co-parenting undermining, and endorse partner parenting subscales.

Future research should:

- Investigate intervention methods to reduce parent stress levels in hopes of decreasing child internalizing behavior problems as well as to increase parenting alliance in the parent-couple relationship
- Explore possible reasons why mothers and fathers of a child with ASD report differences in parenting alliance
- Explore more diverse samples

References

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