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COMPARISON AMONG EMOTIONAL REGULATION, STRESS AND SELF-PERCEIVED HEALTH IN AUTISTIC CHILDREN PARENTS AND NORMAL CHILDREN PARENTS

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ABSTRACT

The main aim of this research was to study the comparison among emotional regulation, stress and self-perceived health among autistic children parents and normal children parents. For this purpose, the data was collected from 120 parents from Islamabad, Kamra and Taxila by administering 3 self-report questionnaires. To measure Emotional Regulation, Emotional Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ) was used, to measure Parental Stress, Parental Stress Index (PSI) was used, and to measure Self-perceived health, Self-perceived Health (SF-36) was used. The data was collected through primary as well as secondary sources. The results obtained suggested that the emotional Regulation is higher among normal children parents is higher than autistic children parents. The level of stress is higher among autistic children parents is higher than autistic children parents. The Self-perceived Health is higher among autistic children parents is higher than normal children parents.

Keywords: *Emotional regulation, stress, self-perceived health, autistic children parents and normal children parent.*

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a neuro-developmental disorder that refers to the continuous hurdles and challenges faced in communication especially while interacting with others and the repetition of patterns in their behavior activities and daily life things and interests. (American Psychological Association, 2013). According to the Pakistan Autism Society, about 400,000 children in Pakistan are autistic or have features of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) being a lifetime illness involves continuous effort at the end of parents, guardians, and caregivers and it also includes persistent disability and maladaptation in communication ,behaviors, and social interaction always causes stressors and lead to anxiety and depression for the mothers specially. Researchers have shown that the level of stress among parents of autistic children parents is really high; it's about 77% which is clinically significant. (Kiami and Goodgold, 2017). As per the nature and chronicity of the disorder, Autistic children need more care, long-term attention and full time caregivers. Due to the early symptoms manifestation in autistic children, primary caregivers are mostly parents or close family members (Karst and Van Hecke, 2012, Lovell et al., 2012, Ruiz-Robledillo et al., 2020; Moya-Abiol, 2012, Segui et al., 2008) It is one of the most prominent and highlighting social issue that a caregiver or parents

feel burdened and vulnerable physically, psychologically and foremost financially because of the complications and responsibilities associated with it. (Lavelle et al., 2014; Ruiz-Robledillo et al., 2012, Segui et al., 2008)

1.2 Problem statement

To study the comparison among emotional regulation, stress and self-perceived health in autistic children parents and normal children parents.

1.3 Objectives of the study

1. To find the comparison between emotional regulation of autistic children parents and normal children parents.
2 To find the comparison between stress of autistic children parents and normal children parents.
3 To find the comparison between self-perceived health of autistic children parents and normal children parents.

1.4 Research hypothesis

1. There is the significant difference between emotional regulation of autistic children parents and normal children parents.
2. There is the significant difference between stress of autistic children parents and normal children parents.
3. There is the significant difference between self-perceived health of autistic children parents and normal children parents.

1.5 Delimitations of the study

The study evaluated the comparison among emotional regulation, stress and self-perceived health of autistic children parents and normal children parents. Future studies are needed to propose a more complete model for related factors of parental stress in autistic children parents.

The current study focuses on the gap left in the aforesaid study with includes other cognitions like depression, anxiety, social support, problem solving abilities etc. It aid society, clinical settings and for the well-being of society. Moreover, particularly in the clinical setting it can provide ways to plan interventions, therapeutic strategies and further ways to improve the health and ensuring the psychological well-being of parents having autistic children.

Operational definition

1.5.1 Emotional Regulation

Emotion regulation refers to the ability to amplify and reduce the intensity and duration of emotions as needed (Cole, Michel, & Teti, 1994).In present study Emotional Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ)is used in order to measure the emotional regulation.

1.5.2 Parental Stress

Parental stress is the experience of distress or discomfort that results from demands associated with the role of parenting. The Parental Stress Scale Questionnaire- the 18-item self-report scale that was be used for measuring the level of stress among the autistic children parents and normal children parents. High scores showed that the participant has high level of stress.

1.5.3 Self perceived health

Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity (Young, Lynne E., and Virginia E. Hayes. 2002). Self-perceived health refers to the perception of a person's health in general. It includes all the main domains of health i.e. physical, mental, emotional, and social every aspect of health falls in the category of general health. We used Self Perceived Health questionnaire (SF-36) for measuring the general health of parents. It is a 36 item scale. Higher scores indicate better health status.

2 . Literature Review

According to six recent studies, the level of anxiety experienced by the parents was analyzed. (AlMansour et al., 2013, Al-Farsi et al., 2016; Rayyan and Ahmad, 2017; Alnazlay and Abojedi, 2019; Al-Ansari et al., 2021). The Quality of Life (QoL) of parents was also compromised (Kheir et al., 2012; Dardas and Ahmad, 2014; Ahmad and Dardas, 2015; Alenazi et al.,2020). Several other problems such as physical health problems were also seen in two studies (Al-qahtani, 2018; Shattnawi et al., 2021). Recent researches have Physical health problems were reported in two studies (Al-qahtani, 2018; Shattnawi et al., 2021). In recent studies, it was

concluded that the rate of social burden is higher among autistic children parents. (Al-qahtani, 2018; Gobrial, 2018; Alenazi et al., 2020; Al-Masadeh et al., 2020; Shattnawi et al., 2021). Past researches have concluded that rate of stress is higher among mothers of autistic children (Wang P, Michels CA, Day MS, 2010; Bilgin H, Kucuk L, 2011). Moreover, while making comparison among autistic and normal children parents the level of stress was observed in their whole families and they experienced many psychological and psychosocial problems. (Bilgin H, Kucuk L. 2010). Challenges faced by the parents of autistic children are associated with stress, anxiety and more issues regarding caregiving etc. (Bitsika and Sharpley, 2017). It has been observed that parents of autistic children have a high risk of getting any chronic illness because of sufferings.

In recent researches it was found that 1.85 percent children were suffering from autism spectrum disorder (CDC 2020). Autistic children parents had more massive, immense and astonishing experience of parenting. (Totika et al.,2011; Schieve et al., 2007; Eisenhower, 2005) than the parents of normal children (Bujnowska, 2019; Hickey, 2019) and other caregivers or parents who raised their children with other disabilities (Totsika et al., 2011; Blacher and McIntyre, 2006).

3 Methodology and study design

The current study was conducted a comparative study to compare the emotional regulation, stress and self-perceived health of autistic children parents and normal children parents.

The participants were individually explained regarding the purpose of the study.

3.1 The area of the study

The study was based on Quantitative research design, through which accurate measurements were obtained and by using statistical methods data was collected data was interpreted and analyzed. In this research method, use of structured questionnaire with alternative responses was done.

3.2 Sample techniques and sample size

A sample of 120 parents, 60 normal children parents and 60 parents of children with autism collected from several hospitals, schools and rehabilitation centers of Kamra, Taxilla and Islamabad. The participants who were agreed and interested were included in the study and data was obtained through the physical administration of a questionnaire. 20 responses of parents for pilot study and the remaining 100 for the main study.

3.3 Research Instrument

Emotional Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ) Ten-Item Form (ERQ-10) that is a self-report questionnaire for purpose to interpret the differences among individual differences in terms of experiencing emotions and regulate accordingly.

Parental Stress Scale included items that were self-reported. It was developed by Berry and Jones (1995) as an alternative of 101- items of low score shows low level of parental stress and high stress low high level of parental stress.

The SF-36 consists of standardized tools for measurement for Health Related Quality of Life and it was developed Ware and Sherburne in 1992 in United States. 36 items in this scale consist of physiological functioning, social functioning and emotional problems.

3.4 Data Analysis

Table 01

	Autistic M S.D.	Normal M S.D.	t	p	95% Confidence Interval LL UL	Cohen's d
Emotional Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ)	45.53 10.7	47.76 10.4	1.149	0.765	6.073 1.614 6.072 1.613	0.532

The above table indicates the results of t test of Emotional Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ) among normal and autistic children parents. The result shows that mean value of Emotional Regulation among autistic children parent is (M = 45.53), standard deviation is (S.D=10.71) whereas mean value of emotional Regulation among normal parent children is (M=47.76), standard deviation (S.D=10.4) which means that rate of emotional regulation among normal children parent is higher than autistic children parents.

Table 02

	Autistic M	S.D.	Normal M	S.D.	t	p	95% Confidence Interval LL	UL	Cohen's d
Parental Stress Index (PSI)	62.52	8.43	58.72	10.3	2.20	0.125	0.380 0.378	7.220 7.222	0.401

The above table indicates the results of t test of Parental Stress Index (PSI) among normal and autistic children parents. The result shows that the mean value of the Parental Stress Index (PSI) among autistic children parent is (M = 62.52), standard deviation is (S.D=8.42) whereas mean value of Parental Stress Index (PSI) among normal parent children is (M=58.72), standard deviation (S.D=10.3) which means that rate of stress among autistic children parent is higher than normal children parents. The value of Cohen's d is 0.401. The significance value of p= 0.125 which is greater than 0.05 so the hypothesis is rejected.

Table 03

	Autistic M	S.D.	Normal M	S.D.	t	p	95% Confidence Interval LL	UL	Cohen's d
Self-Perceived Health (SF-36)	93.72	11.9	91.88	8.72	0.961	0.080	1.943 1.947	5.610 5.613	0.176

The above table indicates the results of t test of Self-Perceived Health (SF-36) among normal and autistic children parents. The result shows that mean value of Self-Perceived Health among autistic children parent is (M = 93.72), standard deviation is (S.D=11.9) whereas mean value of Self-Perceived Health among normal parent children is (M=91.88), standard deviation (S.D=8.72) which means that rate of self-perceived health among autistic children parent is higher than normal children parents. The value of Cohen's d is 0.176. The significance value is 0.080 which is greater than 0.05 so the hypothesis is rejected.

4.Discussion

In present study a comparative study conducted to compare the emotional regulation, stress and self-perceived health of autistic children parents and normal children parents. On the basis of findings following justifications are made to support this study. Studies, such as the one by Ting and Weiss (2017), have shown that parents of autistic children

often exhibit lower emotional regulation compared to parents of typically developing children. This difference can be attributed to the unique challenges faced in raising a child with autism, including managing complex behavioral issues, navigating social situations, and coping with societal stigma. The constant need to adapt to their child's specific needs and the unpredictability of certain situations can tax these parents' ability to regulate their emotions effectively, leading to higher levels of emotional exhaustion and potential burnout.

Parents of autistic children consistently report higher levels of stress compared to parents of typically developing children (Ting & Weiss, 2017). This elevated stress stems from various factors, including the intensive care giving demands, financial pressures related to specialized treatments and therapies, concerns about their child's future, and often, a lack of adequate support systems. The challenges of managing unique behavioral issues, communication difficulties, and sensory sensitivities contribute significantly to this stress. Additionally, the process of obtaining diagnoses, accessing appropriate educational resources, and advocating for their child's needs in various settings can be emotionally and physically draining, further exacerbating stress levels.

Interestingly, despite higher stress levels and lower emotional regulation, studies such as those by Baker-Ericzen, Brookman-Frazee, and Stahmer (2005) and Segui et al. (2008) have found that parents of autistic children often report higher self-perceived health compared to parents of typically developing children. This seemingly paradoxical finding suggests a development of resilience and adaptive coping mechanisms among parents of autistic children. The increased responsibilities and challenges they face may lead to a heightened awareness of their own health needs and a more proactive approach to maintaining their well-being. Additionally, the experience of raising a child with autism might foster personal growth, increased empathy, and a deeper appreciation for health and wellness, contributing to a more positive self-perception of health despite the objectively higher stress levels they encounter.

5. Recommendations

On the basis of findings following are the recommendations:

1. Counseling services and healthy coping strategies can be introduced for autistic children parents in order to be more resilient.
2. Researchers can further devise intervention plans in order to improve emotional regulation and lessen the rate of stress and depression among autistic children parents.
3. The strategies can be planned for the parents in order to better autistic children parents' emotional regulation, stress and Self-perceived health.

6 Conclusion

The findings underscore that parental emotional regulation is significantly more adaptive among parents of neuro-typical children compared to those of children with autism. Additionally, the elevated levels of parental stress suggest a substantial impact on psychological well-being. Notably, self-perceived health appears to be more favorable among parents of autistic children, indicating a potential resilience factor. In response to these dynamics, intervention strategies should focus on enhancing emotional regulation through cognitive-behavioral techniques and stress-reduction methodologies. Implementing psycho-education, support groups, and mindfulness practices could effectively mitigate anxiety and depressive symptoms, fostering greater emotional resilience. Tailoring these interventions to the unique stressors faced by these parents may ultimately enhance their overall psychological health and familial relationships.

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