



COPING SKILLS IN PARENTS OF CHILDREN WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER

Abhijit Chakraborty*

Department of Psychiatry, Calcutta National Medical College, Kolkata, West Bengal.*Corresponding Author

Prof. Srijit Ghosh

Department of Psychiatry, Calcutta National Medical College, Kolkata, West Bengal.

ABSTRACT Raising a child with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) can cause significant parental stress. This stress can cause psychological problems in them. Each parent has their own coping mechanism. In this study the psychopathology in parents of children having ASD were assessed. A total number of 50 consecutive consenting parents of children with ASD were interviewed using a semi-structured pro forma, symptom checklist 90 revised (SCL90R). Mean age for the parents was 37 (± 7.40) years, and for the children, it was 8.3 (± 3.42) years. There were 30 mothers. Thirty-five of parents considered their child's illness to be a major concern in their life. The fatalism subscale of coping was found having highest mean value followed by problem solving and expressive action.

KEYWORDS : Autism Spectrum Disorder, parents, coping skills.

INTRODUCTION:

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a neurodevelopmental disorder according to The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders-5 (DSM-5)¹. It is characterized by impairment in social communication and repetitive behaviours. The overall prevalence of ASD is about 1 in 160 children².

There are various factors which increases the complexity of management of children having ASD. The parents used to shuttle between psychiatrist, psychologists, occupational therapist, and special educators³. They end up investing almost all of their time and energy in the child's needs, leaving very little time for them. Both parents may experience huge stress as they adapt and learn to care for their special child⁴.

Parental burden is increased due to this huge stress which results in social, familial, marital and emotional problems. Significant psychological distress is often associated with parenting of children with ASD. Studies have found that the parents have a significant level of anxiety and depression. Each parent has their own unique style to cope with this stressful situation⁵. Emotion based coping mechanism makes them prone to psychiatric disorders. Whereas use of problem based coping mechanism have a positive impact⁶. These areas of coping mechanism in parents of children having ASD have not been adequately explored. In our study we have tried to explore the coping mechanisms in parents having children with ASD.

MATERIALS AND METHODS:-

This was a cross-sectional single interview study and participants were obtained from the Out Patients Department of Department of psychiatry in tertiary care teaching hospital, Kolkata, India. Consecutive 50 parents of children having ASD were interviewed. Parents who were already diagnosed with a mental illness or having major physical illness were excluded from the study. For each child only one parent was interviewed.

Parents were interviewed with a pre-designed pre-tested case record proforma for socio-demographic profile, child's age, sex, address etc. Coping mechanisms in parents were assessed by using a scale namely Mechanism of Coping Scale (MOCS)⁷. MOCS is the modified Indian version of the Ways of Coping Questionnaire. Indian version was developed by Parikh et al⁸. Selected items from the original scale and Six items from fatalism were taken for this study. They were divided into five individual ways of coping namely escape-avoidance (Esc), fatalism (Fat), expressive-action (Exp), problem-solving (Prob), and passivity (Pass). The scores range from 0 to 3. The average score for each factor was taken. MOCS is widely used scale to assess the coping mechanism.

Result and Discussion: - We interviewed 50 parents among which 30 were mothers. Mean age for the parents was 37 (± 7.40) years ranging from 21 to 53 years of age. Mean age of children was 8.3 (± 3.42) years ranging from 3 to 15 years. 21 of the parents were educated till primary

level or less, 18 were educated till secondary and 11 were at least a graduate. 35 of the children were raised in a nuclear family and the 15 from joint family. Parents were enquired about their perception of their child's illness. 35 of them considered it to be a major concern while 15 considered it as a minor concern in their life.

The fatalism subscale of coping was found having highest mean value followed by problem solving and expressive action (see Table 1)

Table 1:- Table showing various coping mechanisms in parents

PARAMETER	Total no of parents(n)	mean \pm SD
Escape avoidance	50	0.97 \pm 0.48
Fatalism	50	1.54 \pm 0.56
Expressive action	50	1.09 \pm 0.52
Problem-solving	50	1.31 \pm 0.57
Passivity	50	0.99 \pm 0.46

CONCLUSION:-

In this study we tried to understand the coping mechanisms of parents of children with ASD. Fatalism, passivity, and expressive action are the coping mechanisms associated with worse outcome regarding general dysfunction of the parents^{9,10}. To address the psychological problems of these parents is needed. This will improve the outcome of the child, parents, and family life by decreasing caregiver burden.

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