



PSYCHOPATHOLOGY IN PARENTS OF CHILDREN WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER

Psychiatry

Abhijit Chakraborty*

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

Srijit Ghosh

Prof. 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. 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. Depression had highest mean among psychopathologies. Mothers had higher score for depression and Interpersonal-sensitivity.

KEYWORDS

Autism Spectrum Disorder, parents, psychopathology

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. These areas of psychopathology have not been adequately explored. In our study we have tried to explore the psychopathologies 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. Psychopathology in parents were obtained using symptom checklist 90R⁵. Symptom checklist 90 revised (SCL 90R) is a self rated item response, scored on 0-4. It covers 9 sub domains -somatization, obsessive-compulsive (OC) symptoms, interpersonal-sensitivity (IPS), depression, anxiety, anger-hostility, phobic-anxiety, paranoid ideation, and psychoticism and a global severity index (GSI) score⁶. GSI is the mean score of SCL90R. The scale was translated to Bengali and backtranslated for the purpose of study.

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 highest mean psychopathology was for subscale of depression followed by somatization, obsessive-compulsive and anger-hostility subscales for the study sample (Table-1). On further analysis of parents significant difference was found in both genders in interpersonal sensitivity (IPS) and depression subscale (Table-2).

In this study we examined the psychopathology of parents of children with ASD. As the child grows up there is increasing parental burden. The parental stress in parents of a child with ASD is also well known⁷.

Child's disability found to be a major concern to most of the parents. Parental stress affects the psychological well-being of the parents. Depression and somatization were the common psychopathologies. This finding corroborates similar studies in other parts of the world⁸. It was also found in our study that mothers having more interpersonal sensitivity and depression than fathers.

Table 1:- Table showing various Psychopathologies among parents

PARAMETER	Total (n)	Mean \pm SD
Somatization	50	0.63 \pm 0.50
Obsession-compulsion	50	0.61 \pm 0.51
Interpersonal sensitivity	50	0.43 \pm 0.36
Depression	50	0.91 \pm 0.64
Anxiety	50	0.52 \pm 0.41
Anger-Hostility	50	0.57 \pm 0.38
Phobic anxiety	50	0.31 \pm 0.38
Paranoid ideation	50	0.45 \pm 0.37
Psychoticism	50	0.16 \pm 0.23
GSI	50	0.53 \pm 0.36

Table 2:- Table showing association between psychopathology and gender of parents

PARAMETER	PARENT	TOTAL No (n)	mean \pm SD	Unpaired t-test
Somatization	Mother	30	0.71 \pm 0.50	1.073 p-0.287
	Father	20	0.59 \pm 0.52	
Obsession-compulsion	Mother	30	0.62 \pm 0.53	0.589 p-0.556
	Father	20	0.56 \pm 0.48	
Interpersonal sensitivity	Mother	30	0.50 \pm 0.36	2.507 p- 0.014*
	Father	20	0.32 \pm 0.34	
Depression	Mother	30	1.03 \pm 0.60	2.415 p- 0.016*
	Father	20	0.72 \pm 0.49	
Anxiety	Mother	30	0.52 \pm 0.33	0.290 p-0.783
	Father	20	0.49 \pm 0.40	

Anger-Hostility	Mother	30	0.62±0.49	0.581
	Father	20	0.55±0.51	p- 0.215
Phobic anxiety	Mother	30	0.33±0.36	1.232
	Father	20	0.24±0.31	p-0.215
Paranoid ideation	Mother	30	0.50±0.39	0.670
	Father	20	0.41±0.50	p-0.514
Psychoticism	Mother	30	0.19±0.27	0.469
	Father	20	0.16±0.29	p- 0.640
GSI	Mother	30	0.56±0.33	1.878
	Father	20	0.44±0.28	p- 0.066

(*p<0.05)

CONCLUSION:- In this study we tried to understand the psychological issues of parents of children with ASD. Mothers were found having more psychopathology than fathers because in our society they are more actively involved in childcare. 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.

REFERENCES:-

1. American Psychiatric Association.(2013). Diagnostic and Statistical manual of mental disorders (5th ed.). Arlington, VA: American Psychiatric Publishing.
2. Lai MC, Lombardo MV, Baron-Cohen S. Autism. *Lancet*. 2014; 383:896-910
3. Sheikh MH, Ashraf S, Imran N, Hussain S, Azeem MW. Psychiatric morbidity, perceived stress and ways of coping among parents of children with intellectual disability in Lahore, Pakistan. *Cureus* 2018;10:e2200
4. Hassall R, Rose J, McDonald J. Parenting stress in mothers of children with an intellectual disability: The effects of parental cognitions in relation to child characteristics and family support. *J Intellect Disabil Res* 2005;49:405-18
5. Derogatis LR, Unger R. Symptom checklist-90-revised. *The Corsini encyclopedia of psychology*. 2010;30:1-2.
6. Hilsenroth MJ, Ackerman SJ, Blagys MD, Baumann BD, Baity MR, Smith SR, et al. Reliability and validity of DSM-IV axis V. *Am J Psychiatry* 2000;157:1858-63
7. Dabrowska A, Pisula E. Parenting stress and coping styles in mothers and fathers of pre-school children with autism and down syndrome. *J Intellect Disabil Res* 2010;54:266-80
8. Sabih F, Sajid WB. There is significant stress among parents having children with autism. *J Rawalpindi Med* 2008;33:214-6.