Predictors of Caregiver Burden of Parents of Children with Disabilities

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Parents of children with disabilities experience elevated stress, which may contribute to their caregiver burden. Factors related to caregiver burden may be child or parent related. In this study, we investigated how income, economic hardship, age of the child with a disability, number of children in the family, and family cohesion were associated with mothers' and fathers' caregiver burden. Participants consisted of parents of 192 children; 155 of the children had some form of disability. The results show that family cohesion was negatively related to mothers' and fathers' burden. Economic hardship was also strongly associated with burden. Results suggest that it is important to examine parent related factors in examining parental burden. It is also important to examine parental burden in when looking at different family intervention options that may be used to reduce parental stress.

METHODS
Participants
- 57 typically developed children, 155 children with disabilities (ages 0 to 22 years old) and their parents.
- Parents of children with disabilities were recruited from early intervention workshops and programs.
- Parents of typically developing children were recruited through snowball sampling.
- Fathers' age in years: M = 41.49, SD = 7.38
- Mothers' age in years: M = 39.74, SD = 7.26
- Father's average years of education: 14.95
- Mother's average years of education: 14.95
- Economic hardship was related to the caregiver burden of parents. The higher the economic hardship the greater the burden for both parents. Economic hardship was found to have a more of an effect on fathers' burden perhaps because fathers are financially responsible for the family.
- Economic hardship was also related to family cohesion. These results will benefit therapists and researchers looking for possible ways to reduce the stress levels of parents.
- The study was limited to a few independent variables. However, the results did show that parent-related factors were strongly associated to caregiver burden. Child-related factors may also be associated to the stress but in lesser degree. Thus, when a child needs extra care, parents are obligated to provide that necessary care.

RESULTS
- Economic hardship was found to be negatively related to both fathers' and mothers' ratings of cohesion -0.319 (p<.001) and mothers' ratings of cohesion -0.190 (p<.05).
- There was a negative relationship between family cohesion and burden for both fathers and mothers, -0.353 (p<.05) and -0.421 (p<.05).
- The results showed that the age of the child with disability is negatively related to the fathers' burden, -0.205 (p<.05).

DISCUSSION
- Ratings for family cohesion of fathers and mothers were negatively related to the burden scores. The more cohesive the family was, the less the burden of the parents. Therapists might consider offering interventions to improve cohesion as a way to reduce burden.
- Economic hardship was related to the caregiver burden of parents. The higher the economic hardship the greater the burden for both parents. Economic hardship was found to have a more of an effect on fathers' burden perhaps because fathers are financially responsible for the family.

REFERENCES

*Faculty Mentor