Predictors of Caregiver Burden of Parents of Children with Disabilities

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**ABSTRACT**

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 when looking at different family intervention options that may be used to reduce parental stress.

**INTRODUCTION**

The increase in number of children with special needs is often related to the increase in the demands of special care from parents or caregiver. It is crucial to consider that parents of children with special needs are at risk for higher levels of stress, and the resulting caregiver burden.

When parents are at risk because of the demands of their child with a disability, there can be effects to the parent-child relationship or to the family as a whole. Consequently, because families are systems and processes of interrelated members that comprise the entire system, changes in one part can impact other parts of the systems (Hatchinson, 2008).

The present study was designed to examine caregiver burden of parents of children with disabilities. There are also important questions that we need to consider in analyzing the factors related to burden. Specifically, when investigating parent-related and child-related factors, which one contributes more to the caregiver burden and which individual factor affects it the most?

**METHODS**

Participants

- 37 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: 14.99
- Disabilities included autism, Down syndrome, orthopedic impairment, multiple disabilities
- Race: 85.8% Caucasians
- Average number of children in family: 3.83

Procedure and Measures

- Parents independently completed self-report questionnaires in their homes.
- Fathers and mothers completed a 20-item Caregiver Burden (Stress) questionnaire. Participants evaluated the hassle of the burden using a scale ranging from 1 (no hassle) to 4 (big hassle). Example items include “Feeling that my time is not my own”; “Feeling overwhelmed at all there is to do...”
- Fathers and mothers also completed a 5-item cohesion subscale of Bloom’s family functioning instrument (Bloom, 1985). The cohesion subscale evaluates how close family members feel towards one another with items such as, “Family members really help and support one another”. Items were scored from 1 (very untrue with my family) to 4 (very true for my family).

**DATA/RESULTS**

- Table 1 shows that economic hardship had a standardized total effect of -0.406 (p<.001) on fathers’ burden and 0.282 (p<.01) for mothers.
- Economic hardship also was found to have direct effects on fathers’ and mothers’ burden, 0.285 (p<.01) and 0.203 (p<.05), respectively.

**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 family cohesion as a way to reduce the 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.
- 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 bar in lesser degree. Thus, when a child needs extra care, parents are obligated to provide that necessary care.

**REFERENCES**


“*Faculty Mentor”