



Psycho-social factors associated with parental stress among parents of children with autism, cerebral palsy and Down syndrome in Sri Lanka

P. K.S. Godamunne¹, A. Pathmeswaran¹, G. Samarasinghe² & A.D. Samankula¹

Faculty of Medicine, University of Kelaniya¹

Faculty of Arts, University of Colombo²

Introduction

Studies from various countries have identified a variety of factors that have an impact on stress experienced by parents of children with developmental disabilities. But no such studies have been done in the Sri Lanka. This study aimed to identify psycho-social factors associated with parental stress and psychological health among parents of children with autism, cerebral palsy (CP) and Down syndrome (DS) among Sri Lankan parents.

Materials & Methods

Cross-sectional comparison study (N=288)

192 parents of children with autism, CP & DS (96 mothers; 96 fathers)

96 parents of typically developing children (48 mothers; 48 fathers)

- Socio-demographic questionnaire
- Child's level of functioning in activities of daily living questionnaire
- Perceived social support questionnaire
- Parental Stress Scale
- BriefCOPE
- General Health Questionnaire -12 (GHQ-12)

Results

Comparisons using one way ANOVA revealed that parents of children with autism, cerebral palsy or Down syndrome experienced significantly higher scores on the parental stress scale and the GHQ-12 than parents of typically developing children indicating significantly higher parental stress levels and psychological morbidity. Mothers used positive coping strategies significantly more often than fathers while fathers used alcohol for coping significantly more often than mothers.

Multiple regression analyses revealed that socio-economic status and the use of avoidant coping were significant predictors of parental stress levels and in turn, parental stress levels along with avoidant coping and child's level of independence were significant predictors of parents' psychological morbidity.

Discussion

Higher parenting stress, use of avoidant coping strategies and lower child independence in activities of daily living contributed to poorer psychological health among parents of children with developmental disabilities while lower socio-economic status and the frequent use of avoidant coping strategies contributes to higher levels of parenting stress.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Interventions for parents of children with developmental disabilities in Sri Lanka should focus on developing positive coping strategies in parents.