

Summary

Aleksandra Szczęsna

Determinants of family life satisfaction and perceived parental stress in a sample of mothers raising a child aged 2-7 with autism spectrum disorder

SUMMARY

Keywords: parenting, mother, child with autism spectrum disorder, parental stress, family satisfaction, parental cooperation, perceived social support, ego-resiliency, optimism, emotional stability

The main objective of the research was to deepen the knowledge of the importance of individual and relational resources in achieving satisfaction with family life in a sample of mothers raising a child with autism spectrum disorder aged 2 to 7 years. The age of the child considered in the study is, in most cases, the time for a comprehensive specialized diagnosis of autism spectrum disorders in children. The time when a child is diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder is often associated with a family crisis. The family system must change in order to adapt to this situation. The existing research reports suggest that in the face of a new family reality and the experienced high parental stress, the assessment of the quality of family life also changes (e.g., Pisula, 1998; Pisula, 2007; Bayat 2007; Hastings et al., 2005; Shatayermman,2013; Doig et al.,2009; Kersh et al.,2006; Marat, 2014). Mothers' satisfaction with family life as they adapt to their child's disability has become an important area of research interest.

The thesis addresses four main research questions about: (1) the differences with regard to relational resources, parental stress, and family life satisfaction between mothers raising a child with autism spectrum disorder and those raising a child with typical psychophysical development, (2) the differences regarding resources, parental stress and family satisfaction in a sample of mothers raising a child with autism spectrum, (3) significant predictors of satisfaction with family life in a sample of mothers of children with autism spectrum and mothers of typically developing children, and (4) the role of mediators helpful in maintaining satisfaction with family life. The research model included individual variables such as

emotional stability, ego-resiliency, optimism, and relational variables - social support and parental cooperation. Parental stress was included in the predictive analyses, as this variable is considered a risk factor for family life satisfaction. The question to be answered was which variables included in the research model might be significant in explaining family life satisfaction in mothers' adaptation to coping with their child's disability.

The study was carried out on a total of 411 women, including 219 mothers of typically developing children and 192 mothers of children with autism spectrum disorders. The following measurement tools were used: The Emotional Stability Scale - IPIP-BFM-50 (Goldberg, 1992; Polish adaptation: Strus, Ciecuch, Rowiński, 2014); The Ego-Resiliency Scale ER89-R12 (Block, Kremen, 1996, Polish adaptation: Kołodziej-Zaleska, Przybyła-Basista, 2018); The Revised Life Orientation Test (LOT-R) (Scheier, Carver, 1992, Polish adaptation: Poprawa, Juczyński 2012); The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support - MSPSS (Zimet et al., 1988, Polish adaptation: Buszman, Przybyła-Basista, 2017); The Daily Co-Parenting Scale (D-Cop-R) (McDaniel, Teti, Feinberg, 2017, Polish translation: Przybyła-Basista, Gruszka, Rojewska, 2020); The Parental Stress Scale - PSS (Berry, Jones, 1995, Polish adaptation: Przybyła-Basista, Kołodziej-Zaleska, Jazłowska, 2022); The Satisfaction with Family Life Scale- SWFL (Zabriskie, McCormick, 2003, Polish adaptation: Przybyła-Basista, Januszek, Jarosz, Burda, 2021).

The majority of the research questions were answered satisfactorily. The most significant findings include: (1) differences in satisfaction with family life and perceived parental stress - mothers raising a child with autism spectrum disorder reported lower satisfaction with family life and higher levels of parental stress than mothers raising a child with typical psychophysical development; (2) differences in the assessment of relational resources - mothers raising a child with autism spectrum disorders received less support and reported less parental cooperation than mothers raising a child with typical psychophysical development; (3) mothers from both groups emphasized parental cooperation as a statistically significant relational resource contributing to explaining satisfaction with family life; (4) optimism was a statistically significant predictor involved in explaining satisfaction with family life only in the group of work-active mothers raising a child with the autism spectrum; (5) parental stress was a statistically significant predictor contributing to explaining satisfaction with family life in both groups of mothers; (6) the partial mediating contribution of variables describing individual resources (i. e. optimism) and relational resources (parental cooperation,

in particular) in explaining the relationship between parental stress and family life satisfaction in both groups of mothers.

In addition, there are many other interesting and detailed research findings. On the one hand, the results align with previous analyses highlighting that parents raising a child with autism spectrum disorder have experienced much higher parental stress and reduced life satisfaction. On the other hand, they provide new insights into the importance of parental cooperation as an important explanatory factor for mothers' satisfaction with family life.

It is to be noted also that few empirical studies have been conducted among mothers raising a child with an autism diagnosis dedicated to explaining their global assessment of satisfaction with family life. In this respect, the present study represents new contributions to describing maternal functioning. Most studies have concentrated on analyzing the parent's psychological well-being or assessing the marital relationship's quality. The dissertation also contains applicative conclusions suggesting the use of research findings in psychological practice.