



Longitudinal effects of educational involvement on parent and family functioning among mothers of children with ASD



Paul R. Benson *

Department of Sociology, University of Massachusetts Boston, 100 Morrissey Blvd., Boston, MA 02125, United States

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 31 July 2014

Received in revised form 20 November 2014

Accepted 22 November 2014

Available online 31 December 2014

Keywords:

Autism spectrum disorder

Mothers

Educational involvement

Psychological adjustment

Psychological distress

Family functioning

ABSTRACT

Utilizing a cohort sequential design and multilevel modeling on a sample of 113 mothers, the effects of three forms of maternal educational involvement (school-based involvement, home-based involvement, and home-school communication) on maternal and family functioning (maternal psychological distress, parenting efficacy, and family cohesion) were assessed over a seven year period when children with ASD in the study were 7–14 years of age. Findings indicated that maternal home-based educational involvement was linked to decreased psychological distress as well as to increased parenting efficacy and family cohesion, while home-school communication was linked to decreased distress and increased parenting efficacy (school-based involvement was related to decreased maternal distress only). In addition, in two instances, home-based involvement was found to moderate the effects of child and maternal risk factors (child problem behavior and stress proliferation) on maternal and family outcomes. Study findings are discussed in light of prior research and study limitations and implications are highlighted.

© 2014 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Autism spectrum disorders (ASD) represent a complex array of neurological and developmental disorders characterized by deficits in social interaction and communication, as well as the presence of restricted, repetitive, and stereotyped interests and behaviors. These deficits emerge in early childhood and are pervasive and chronic in nature, impacting persons with ASD and their families throughout the child's life (Lord & Bishop, 2010).

Over the past four decades, a wide variety of educational and therapeutic interventions have been developed for children and adolescents with ASD, including behavioral and developmentally based therapies, social skills training programs, and comprehensive treatment approaches such as LEAP and TEACCH (for an overview, see Myers & Johnson, 2007). While diverse in their approaches, all of these interventions involve parents, at least to some degree, in service planning, coordination, or provision (Karst & Van Hecke, 2012; Marcus, Kunc, & Schopler, 2005).

Research indicates that parent educational involvement can benefit children with ASD in a variety of ways, including improved provider understanding of the child and their home environment, improved home-school communication and service coordination, and increased generalization of child skills across school, home, and community settings (Dunlap,

* Tel.: +1 617 287 6269; fax: +1 617 287 6288.

E-mail address: paul.benson@umb.edu

1999; Kaiser & Hancock, 2003; Matson, Mahan, & Matson, 2009). As a result, it is now generally recognized that parent involvement constitutes a critical best practice in the education of children with ASD (National Research Council, 2001).

Among typically developing children, research has linked parent educational involvement to a number of positive developmental and academic outcomes, including improved academic performance, decreased behavioral and disciplinary problems, and higher rates of high school graduation (Fan & Chen, 2001; Sheldon & Epstein, 2002; Topor, Keane, Shelton, & Calkins, 2010). In contrast, research on the effects of parent involvement in the education of children with ASD has been limited. In particular, very little research has examined how parent educational and therapeutic involvement affects parents of children with ASD and the family as a whole. The absence of research in this area is particularly problematic given that the long-term success of ASD interventions is often dependent on close, ongoing family engagement (Karst & Van Hecke, 2012; Marcus et al., 2005). In addition, it is important to consider parent educational involvement within the overall context of parenting a child with ASD. It has been repeatedly demonstrated that mothers of children with ASD experience higher levels of parenting stress and depressed mood than do mothers of either typically developing children or children with non-ASD disabilities (Barker, Mailick, & Smith, 2014; Singer, 2006). Given that parents of children with ASD are already at increased risk for stress and other mental health problems (Benson & Karlof, 2009; Benson, 2006), and that high parent stress can at times erode the effectiveness of ASD interventions (Osborne, McHugh, Saunders, & Reed, 2008), it is important that the impact of parent educational involvement on parent and family functioning be better understood.

Extant research on the impact of educational involvement on parents of children with ASD has focused largely on Intensive Behavioral Intervention (IBI), a treatment approach utilizing the principles of applied behavior analysis (ABA) and typically provided to young children with autism in the home (for a review, see Grindle & Remington, 2014). Overall, these studies suggest that the parents of young children with ASD receiving IBI are at no greater risk for poor psychosocial outcomes than are comparable parents of young children with ASD not receiving IBI (Birnbauer & Leach, 1993; Estes et al., 2014; Smith, Buch, & Gamby, 2000). In a two-year prospective study, for example, Remington et al. (2007) compared psychological functioning in the parents of 23 children with ASD receiving home-based IBI with the parents of 21 comparison group children not receiving IBI. At 12 and 24-months, mothers of children in the IBI group reported levels of stress, anxiety, and depressed mood that were no different from those reported by mothers in the non-IBI group (fathers in the IBI group, however, did report slightly elevated levels of depression relative to the comparison group). Similarly, in a cross-sectional study, Hastings and Johnson (2001) reported that 130 mothers of young children with ASD participating in IBI had similar levels of stress to mothers of children with autism in other research studies. Additional studies have also found no significant differences in behavioral adjustment among siblings of children with ASD engaged in IBI compared to siblings of children not using IBI (Cebula, 2012; Hastings, 2003).

It should be noted, however, that some studies have reported more equivocal results in regard to the familial impact of IBI. In a small cross-sectional study of 41 mothers of children with ASD participating in IBI, for example, Schwichtenberg and Poehlmann (2007), found intensity of parent IBI involvement to be significantly related to increased maternal depression and personal strain. In addition, several qualitative studies have also described potentially negative effects of IBI involvement on the family, including loss of privacy, disruption of family routines, and high demands on parent time, energy, and financial resources (Granger, des Rivières-Pigeon, Sabourin, & Forget, 2012; Grindle, Kovshoff, Hastings, & Remington, 2009; Johnson & Hastings, 2002).

While studies focusing on IBI have added to our understanding of the impact of parent educational involvement on the families of children with ASD, the generalizability of findings flowing from this work is limited given that most children with ASD, particularly older children, do *not* receive IBI as their primary educational intervention, but instead receive an eclectic array of behavioral and non-behavioral therapies for their disorder (Hess, Morrier, Heflin, & Ivey, 2008). However, only a handful of studies to date have examined the impact of parent involvement on the family outside the context of IBI. In a cross-sectional study of mothers of children with ASD, for example, Kuhn and Carter (2006) found maternal involvement to be linked to greater parenting efficacy, while, in a short-term longitudinal study, Benson and Karlof (2008) found parent involvement to be related to gains in sibling adjustment when assessed a year later. Finally, in a more recent online study, Hesse et al. (2013) found parent educational and therapeutic engagement to be correlated with parent efficacy, but not with sibling functioning.

1.1. The present study

As the brief review above suggests, the existing literature on the familial effects of parent involvement in the education of children with ASD is limited and leaves many key issues unresolved. For example, very little is currently known about the ways different forms of parent educational involvement affect parent and family functioning, particularly among older children with ASD receiving non-IBI interventions. In addition, because most research on parent educational and therapeutic involvement in ASD has been either cross-sectional or followed parents for only short periods, little is known about how parent involvement affects parent and family outcomes *over time*.

To address these gaps in the literature, I employed a cohort sequential design (Raudenbush & Chan, 1993) to examine the longitudinal impact of educational involvement on parent and family functioning among 113 mothers of children with ASD from age 7 to 14.

Following Benson, Karlof, and Siperstein (2008), maternal educational involvement was defined as mothers' active engagement in activities and behaviors aimed at enhancing their child's learning and development. In addition, following

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/370004>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/370004>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)