



Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Research in Autism Spectrum Disorders

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/rasd

Research paper

Mind-mindedness in mothers of children with autism spectrum disorder

Elizabeth Kirk^{a,b}, Shivani Sharma^{c,*}^a Department of Psychology, University of York, UK^b Department of Psychology, Anglia Ruskin University, Cambridge, UK^c Department of Psychology and Sport Sciences, University of Hertfordshire, UK

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Autism
Maternal mind-mindedness
Parenting stress
Parenting

ABSTRACT

Background: Little is currently understood about the ways in which caregivers represent the internal mental states of their child with autism. Previous research has shown that being mind-minded can limit the experience of parenting stress in typically developing samples. The current study explored mind-mindedness in mothers of children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and examined whether this related to the experience of parenting stress.

Method: Mind-mindedness was coded from mothers' descriptions of their child obtained from an online survey ($N = 55$). A subsample of these mothers also provided data on a non-ASD sibling ($n = 27$). We compared mothers' mind-mindedness when describing their child with ASD and a non-ASD sibling.

Results: Mothers predominantly described their child with ASD using mental and behavioral attributes. There were no overall differences in mothers' use of mental state descriptors when referring to their child with ASD or a sibling, however, when considering the valence of descriptors, a significantly higher proportion of the mental attributes used to describe the child with ASD were negative. Associations between mind-mindedness and overall parenting stress failed to reach significance.

Conclusions: Parenting a child with ASD does not appear to limit the parent's ability to tune-in to their child's mind. Maternal mind-mindedness scores were similar for the ASD and non-ASD sibling, although there were differences in the valence of representations. Being mind-minded did not protect against parenting stress, however we suggest that the high levels of stress experienced by our sample were beyond the protective reach of mind-mindedness.

1. Introduction

Impairments in social relatedness are central to autism spectrum disorders (ASD) and present a significant challenge to the caregiver's ability to read their child's behavior, and contribute to the experience of parenting stress (Davis & Carter, 2008; Kasari & Sigman, 1997). Given these difficulties, one might expect the caregiver to be less able to respond sensitively to the child's cues, limiting the quality of dyadic interactions. Alternatively, these difficulties may drive the caregiver to overcome barriers to communication, in order to tune-in to their child to better interpret and anticipate their behavior. Beyond responding to the child's immediate needs, the caregiver may strive to develop a deeper understanding of the mental states underlying behaviors, which may at times be unusual or challenging. Little is currently understood about the ways in which caregivers represent the internal mental

* Corresponding author at: Department of Psychology and Sport Sciences, University of Hertfordshire, Hatfield, Hertfordshire AL10 9AB, UK.

E-mail addresses: elizabeth.kirk@york.ac.uk (E. Kirk), s.3.sharma@herts.ac.uk (S. Sharma).

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.rasd.2017.08.005>

Received 26 October 2016; Received in revised form 10 August 2017; Accepted 16 August 2017

1750-9467/© 2017 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

states of their child with autism. The aim of this paper is to examine mind-mindedness of caregivers of children with autism.

Mind-mindedness refers to the caregiver's tendency to treat their child as an individual with a mind (Meins, 1997) and is closely related to, but distinct from, maternal sensitivity. Mind-mindedness is indexed in infancy via an observational measure that captures a caregiver's tendency to comment appropriately on their infant's behavior (Meins, Fernyhough, Fradley, & Tuckey, 2001), and in childhood by the extent to which caregivers describe their child with reference to mental characteristics (i.e. thoughts, feelings, desires) in an interview (Meins, Fernyhough, & Russell, 1998). Mind-mindedness is suggested to be an important aspect of caregiver behavior and has been associated with various child outcomes, including attachment security (Meins et al., 2001), theory of mind (Kirk et al., 2015; Laranjo, Bernier, Meins, & Carlson, 2010; Meins, Fernyhough, Arnott, Leekam, & Rosnay, 2013; Meins et al., 2002) and behavioral difficulties (Meins, Centifanti, Fernyhough, & Fishburn, 2013). As a construct, mind-mindedness has yet to be explored amongst mothers of children with autism, although it may present an important source of information about parenting behavior.

There are individual differences in the capacity of caregivers for mind-mindedness, however this variation does not appear to be driven by child or maternal factors. In community samples, mind-mindedness is unrelated to child temperament (Meins, Fernyhough, Arnott, Turner, & Leekam, 2011) and general cognitive ability (Meins et al., 2001). Furthermore, a caregiver's social economic status (SES) has not been found to impact upon mind-mindedness (Meins et al., 2011), neither has depression (Pawlbly et al., 2010; Walker, Wheatcroft, & Camic, 2011). Therefore, in non-clinical samples, evidence suggests that characteristics of the parent and child do not appear to impact upon capacity for mind-mindedness.

Research has begun to consider mind-mindedness in clinical samples, including mothers with severe mental illness (Pawlbly et al., 2010) and parents of children referred to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) (Walker et al., 2011). Pawlbly et al. compared mind-mindedness of mothers who were in-patients on a mother and baby unit diagnosed with schizophrenia and mood disorders with a healthy control sample. No significant differences in mind-mindedness were found, however, there was a trend for depressed mothers to comment less frequently on their infant's thoughts and feelings upon admission. These findings suggest that maternal clinical features do not significantly disrupt mind-mindedness, although there is some evidence to indicate that child clinical features can have an impact.

Walker et al. (2011) examined mind-mindedness in a clinical sample of parents whose children had been referred to CAMHS for different emotional and behavioral issues, including aggression, tantrums, anxiety, sleeping, and eating difficulties. Compared to a community sample, the clinical sample used significantly fewer mental descriptors when describing their child. The authors additionally coded the valence of the mental descriptors as positive, negative, or neutral. The mental descriptors of the mothers in the clinical sample were significantly more likely to be negative. While in community samples child factors do not impact upon the caregiver's capacity for mind-mindedness, these findings indicate that challenging child behaviors in a clinical sample can restrict mind-mindedness. These findings also highlight the value in coding the valence of the descriptions, providing additional insight into the way that parents represent their children.

Research to date has not considered mind-mindedness of caregivers of children with a disability. The major social impairments that characterize autism pose unique challenges to the parent's ability to understand their child's behavior and this may in turn impact the nature of parent-child interaction. For example, Hutman et al. (2009) found that aspects of mother's narratives about their child with autism were related to observations of synchronicity when engaged in play. Mothers who provided 'insightful' narratives (The Insightfulness Assessment, Koren-Karie & Oppenheim, 1997) of their child's thoughts and behaviors from videotapes of mother-child interaction (for example, by considering multiple explanations for their child's behavior) were more synchronous during play than mothers who gave non-insightful narratives. Additionally, Oppenheim, Koren-Karie, Dolev, and Yirmiya (2009) found that mothers who were insightful and had reached resolution about their child's diagnosis were more likely to have securely attached children. Whilst the researchers did not employ indices of mind-mindedness, their findings suggest the value of exploring this mental representational construct in the context of ASD.

To fully explore mind-mindedness in parents of children with ASD, we compared the descriptions that mothers gave of their child against their description of a sibling without such a diagnosis. Comparing mothers' descriptions of her children has the advantage of a within-subjects design, providing the opportunity to assess relational quality rather than differences between groups of parents. We were interested to see whether mothers would be equally likely to describe their child with ASD using mental descriptors as they were his or her sibling, and whether there would be any differences in the valence of these descriptions. Previous research has established that an analysis of the valence of descriptors can reveal meaningful differences between clinical and non-clinical groups (Walker et al., 2011). We predicted that the descriptions of ASD children would contain more negative, and fewer positive mental attributes, than descriptions of their non-ASD siblings. This is because we expect that the challenging behaviors typical of children with ASD will impact upon the way that parents mentally represent their child.

To date, only one study has compared mind-mindedness across siblings (Illingworth, MacLean, & Wiggs, 2015). This study assessed mind-mindedness using both representational and observational methods and revealed inconsistency in mind-mindedness between siblings, but only when mind-mindedness was measured via the describe your child interview and not when mind-mindedness was measured through observation of parent-child interactions. These findings support the representation of mind-mindedness as a relational construct, rather than a trait (Meins, Fernyhough, & Harris-Waller, 2014) such that a mother's use of mental terms to describe her children reveals something about the close relationship between the mother and the child she is describing, rather than a general tendency to focus on mental attributes.

We also sought to examine the relationship between maternal mind-mindedness and the experience of parenting stress in relation to both a child with ASD and his or her non-ASD sibling. Recent investigations have expanded the original measurement of mind-mindedness to consider the valence of mother's descriptions of their children and have yielded interesting findings, particularly in

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/4940863>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/4940863>

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