Maternal Health of Transition Age Individuals with ASD

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Background

Previous studies have focused primarily on the well-being of mothers of young, school-aged children; however, little is known about the well-being of mothers of teen/young adults with ASD, despite the recognized challenges of the transitional period.

Objective

To determine health outcomes, including contributing factors, in mothers of teens/young adults with ASD.

Methods

Maternal participants in the Interactive Autism Network (IAN)—a large, validated and verified, internet-mediated, parent-report research registry—with at least one teen/young adult aged 15-29 were recruited to complete a questionnaire that incorporated: Patient Reported Outcomes Measurement Information System (PROMIS), Global Short Form (GSF), Perceived Stress Scale (PSS), Waisman Activities of Daily Living Scale (W-ADL), Supplemental Demographic Data, General health-related questions about the child.

Path Analysis/Structural Equation Modeling was performed to express causal connections between these sets of variables.

Results

488 mothers completed the study.

Path Analysis:

Primary factors associated with decreased health for mothers of teens/young adults with ASD are (1) increased stress (which is inversely associated with household income and the teen/young adult’s general health), (2) the presence of another child/young adult with ASD/disability in the home, and (3) male gender of the affected child with ASD.

Results (Continued)

Greater maternal Perceived Stress (PSS) + presence of another teen/young adult (15-29 years) in the home with ASD/disability was associated with lower Global Physical Health (T Score), $R^2 = .33$, F(2,482)=116.51, p<.001.

Greater maternal Perceived Stress (PSS) + presence of another teen/young adult (15-29 years) in the home with ASD/disability + male gender of the ASD teen/young adult were associated with lower Global Mental Health (T Score), $R^2 = .56$, F(3,479)=199.47, p<.001. See Figure 1, at right, for full causal model.

Comparison to norms:

Z-tests were used to compare means for the mothers for Global Physical Health (PROMIS), Global Mental Health (PROMIS), and Maternal Perceived Stress (PSS) to measure norms. Maternal physical health and mental health were both significantly worse than the norm, and the mothers were significantly more stressed than the norm.

See Table 1, below.

Table 1. Comparison of Health and Stress Measures (Mothers of Transition Age Youth vs. Norms)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Study Mean (SD)</th>
<th>Normed Mean (σ)</th>
<th>Z-test Results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Global Physical Health (PROMIS) Higher score is better</td>
<td>48.51 (8.16)</td>
<td>50 (10)</td>
<td>z=3.29, p&lt;.001, two-tailed ***</td>
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<tr>
<td>Global Mental Health (PROMIS) Higher score is better</td>
<td>45.88 (9.50)</td>
<td>50 (10)</td>
<td>z=-1.0, p&lt;.001, two-tailed ***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maternal Perceived Stress (PSS) (Compared to Norms for Females) Lower score is better</td>
<td>17.34 (7.28)</td>
<td>13.7 (6.6)</td>
<td>z=12.18, p&lt;.001, two-tailed ***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*** Statistical significance p<.001

Figure 1: Causal Model Developed using Path Analysis/Structured Equation Modeling

Conclusions

Mothers of transition age youth with ASD have poorer Physical and Mental Health than the norms, with high stress levels as a major contributing factor per the causal model.

Actionable factors to improve maternal well-being per the causal model include provision of financial assistance (potentially including more flexible employment options) and programs to increase the independence level of the ASD affected individual.

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