Parental Perceptions: Depression and Hardiness in Families Raising a Child with a Disability

Susanne Roper, Barbara Mandleco, Donna Freeborn, Tina Dyches, Shannon McOmber
Background

- Improved longevity/healthcare = increased number of families living with a child with a disability (CWD)
- Parents raising CWD experience a number of situations and stresses parents of typically developing children do not experience
  - Parent’s perception of whether or not they are depressed and their sense of family hardiness may affect their reactions to raising a CWD
Depression

• Feel "down" (sad) for more than two weeks
• Little interest/pleasure in daily activities
• Interferes with daily life
• Twice as common in females as in males
Depression

• Parents of CWD have higher levels of depression than parents of typically developing children
  o When disability affects the child’s intellectual/behavioral development, mothers’ depression higher than mothers raising children who do not have such a disability
  o Parental depression may be related to child’s challenging behaviors (anger, aggression)

• Mothers of CWD also experience higher depression levels than fathers
Hardiness

• Personal characteristic enabling individuals to cope/benefit from stressful life events

• Three constructs
  – Control: believe one has control over own experiences
  – Commitment: feeling involved in one’s life
  – Challenge: believe change is an opportunity to grow
Hardiness

• Related to lower levels of depression in caregivers

• Related to better mental health for mothers caring for adult CWD, even in the presence of medical problems, economic stress, education, stress and social support

• Related to coping/satisfaction with family functioning for mothers of children under 6 years of age with developmental disabilities
Parents of CWD

In families raising a CWD:

• Little is known about how depression and hardiness differ according to parent gender and type of disability

• Little is known about relationship between depression and hardiness
Purpose

• To examine parental perceptions of depression and hardiness in families raising a CWD to determine

  1) If there are differences in these variables according to parent gender and type of disability

  2) If there is a relationship between these variables
Procedure

• Parents
  – Signed consent
  – Independently completed Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression (CES-D) Scale and Family Hardiness Index

• Families received a $20 gift card
Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression (CES-D) Scale

- 20-item scale developed for use with general population (Radloff, 1977)

  - Items describe typical feelings:
    - I felt sad
    - I could not get going
    - my sleep was restless

  - Rated how often these feelings occurred in the past week rarely or none of the time (1) to most or all of the time (4)

  - Higher scores indicated higher levels of depression
Family Hardiness Index

• 20 items measuring strengths families use to manage hardships/difficulties/crises (McCubbin, McCubbin, & Thompson, 1991)

• Sample items:
  – we have a sense of being strong even when we face big problems
  – we strive together and help each other no matter what
  – we listen to each others’ problems, hurts and fears

• Rated as false (0) to true (3)

• Higher scores indicate greater family hardiness
Sample

• 209 pairs of parents raising
  – Typically developing children (n = 37)
  – Children with a variety of disabilities
    • Autism (n = 57)
    • Down syndrome (n = 37)
    • Multiple disabilities: both physical and intellectual disabilities (n = 31)
    • Other disabilities: developmental delay, emotional disability, hearing impairment, communication disorder, speech delay, ADHD (n = 46)
## Family Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mean / %</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mothers’ age</td>
<td>40 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fathers’ age</td>
<td>42 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mothers’ work</td>
<td>56.5% full/part time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fathers’ work</td>
<td>98.4% full time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family income</td>
<td>55% &gt; $50,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family ethnicity</td>
<td>94.5% Caucasian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CWD age</td>
<td>8.8 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CWD gender</td>
<td>130 males; 79 females</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Data Analysis

• Descriptive statistics
• ANOVAs
• Correlations
• Regressions
Results: Depression

- Significant differences by disability ($F=2.598$, $p=.038$) and parent gender ($F=10.297$, $p=.002$)
  - Mothers: higher levels of depression than fathers
  - Parents of children with autism: higher levels of depression than parents of typically developing children
- No significant disability x gender interaction ($F=.877$, $p=.479$)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Depression</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>1.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father</td>
<td>1.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Typically developing</td>
<td>1.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autism</td>
<td>1.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Down Syndrome</td>
<td>1.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Disability</td>
<td>1.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple Disabilities</td>
<td>1.63</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Results: Hardiness

- No significant differences by parent gender
- Significant differences by disability ($F=3.722, p=.006$)
  - Parents of children with autism: lower levels of hardness than parents of children with other disabilities or parents of typically developing children
- No significant disability x gender interaction ($F = .053, p = .995$)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Hardiness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>3.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father</td>
<td>3.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Typically developing</td>
<td>3.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autism</td>
<td>3.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Down Syndrome</td>
<td>3.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Disability</td>
<td>3.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple Disabilities</td>
<td>3.18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Results: Correlations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>M Hardiness</th>
<th>F Hardiness</th>
<th>M Depression</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>F Hardiness</td>
<td>.411*</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M Depression</td>
<td>-.540*</td>
<td>-.360*</td>
<td>-------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F Depression</td>
<td>-.246*</td>
<td>-.559*</td>
<td>.373*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p < .01

- Mothers’ and fathers’ hardiness ($r = .411$) and depression ($r = .373$) are **positively** correlated.
- Mothers’ depression and hardiness ($r = -.540$) and fathers’ depression and hardiness ($r = -.559$) are **negatively** correlated.
Hierarchical Regressions

• Separate regressions were tested for both mothers and fathers

• DV = Mother or Father Depression

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Independent Variables Added</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Disability type (0= typically developing children)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Hardiness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Control variables (family income, number of children in the family, and age and gender of the CWD)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Hierarchical Regressions

• Model 1:
  – Mothers and fathers of children with autism rated themselves as having more depression than parents of typically developing children
  – Mothers of children with other disabilities rated themselves as having more depression than parents of typically developing children
Hierarchical Regression

• Model 2: Hardiness added
  – Mothers of children with other disabilities rate themselves as having more depression than parents of typically developing children
  – The more hardiness both mothers and fathers have, the lower their levels of depression
Hierarchical Regression

• Model 3: Hardiness, family income, total number of children, CWD age, and CWD gender added
  – Mothers of children with other disabilities rate themselves as having more depression than parents of typically developing children
  – The higher the level of hardiness, the lower the level of depression, even after controlling for family income, number of children in the family, and age and gender of the CWD
Summary

- Mothers have higher levels of depression than fathers.
- Parents of children with autism have higher levels of depression than parents of typically developing children.
- Parents of children with autism have lower levels of hardiness than parents of children with other disabilities or parents of typically developing children.
- Depression and hardiness related in families raising CWD, even after controlling for other variables.
Limitations

• Cross-sectional design
• Correlational findings do not suggest causation
• Sample
  – Convenience sample
  – Similar demographics
    • Caucasian
    • Upper middle class
    • Two-parent families
    • From same geographic area
Future Research

- Use a larger, more ethnically and socioeconomically diverse sample with different kinds of disabilities
- Gather longitudinal data
- Evaluate intervention programs to help decrease depression and increase hardiness
Nursing Implications

• Provide parents, especially mothers of children with autism, with strategies to help them cope with depression

• Design interventions that help foster hardiness in parents raising children with autism or other disabilities
  – Increasing hardiness may decrease depression
Questions?

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