The Relationship Between Parental Depression and Anxiety and Dysregulation in Preschool Children with and without Autism Spectrum Disorder

Lead by Dr. Tessa Crume
Background

• Our current knowledge on the causes of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) are evolving with additional research.

• Similarly, we are learning about the different expressions of this condition in early childhood.

• Previous research has found that maternal anxiety and depression has been associated with an expression of ASD characterized by:
  • mild language and motor delays
  • dysregulation: a lower ability to manage emotional responses including sadness, anger, frustration or irritability

• Dysregulation can include increased behavioral and emotional problems as well as problems with sleep.

• It is important to understand the relationship between conditions in the parents and different clinical presentations of ASD in the child
  • Increased understanding may strengthen our ability to recognize and understand this condition
  • Identify potential underlying factors that may contribute to ASD
Goal of research

• To identify specific associations between parental anxiety and depression and the presence of dysregulation among children with ASD in SEED.
  • We will also examine the association parental anxiety and depression and the presence of dysregulation among children without ASD in SEED.
• We will evaluate the relationship between both maternal and paternal anxiety and depression
• Further, if a relationship is detected, we will explore specific aspects of externalizing, internalizing and sleep problems
Specific aspects of dysregulation measured in SEED

- Dysregulation in SEED was assessed using a questionnaire called the Child Behavior Checklist for Preschool Children.
- It was completed by interviewing the caregivers (largely mother)
- Analysis of the answers was used to create indicators of the extent to which the children had:
  - Externalizing issues: actions that direct problematic energy towards others. Characterized by impulsiveness, disruptive conduct, aggression, and inattention.
  - Internalizing behaviors: actions that direct problematic energy towards the self. Characterized by anxiety, depression, emotional reactivity, withdrawal.
  - Sleep issues
Findings: Maternal Depression and Anxiety

Prevalence of Maternal Anxiety and Depression and Children with and without ASD in SEED

- Depression: 27.2% (Children with ASD) vs. 18.4% (Children without ASD)
- Anxiety: 16.1% (Children with ASD) vs. 8.1% (Children without ASD)
- Depression or Anxiety: 32.9% (Children with ASD) vs. 21.5% (Children without ASD)
Findings: Maternal Depression and Anxiety

Among mothers of children with ASD, maternal anxiety and depression with more common among:
• non-Hispanic white mothers compared to other ethnic and racial groups
• mothers born in the US compared to mothers born in other countries
• native English speakers compared to mothers that speak another language in the home
• mothers of children with ASD that have intellectual disability

Among mothers of children without ASD, maternal anxiety and depression with more common among:
• non-Hispanic white mothers compared to other ethnic and racial groups
• Mothers with lower levels of education
• Mothers living in poverty
• mothers born in the US compared to mothers born in other countries
• native English speakers compared to mothers that speak another language in the home
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Findings: Relationship between Maternal Anxiety and Depression and Dysregulation in Children

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<tr>
<th>Among Children with ASD</th>
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<td>-Attention problems</td>
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<td>-Aggression problems</td>
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<td>Internalizing</td>
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<td>-Withdrawal</td>
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<td>Sleep problems</td>
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Findings: Paternal Depression and Anxiety

Prevalence of Paternal Anxiety and Depression and Children with and without ASD in SEED

- Depression: 9.7% (ASD), 8.8% (no ASD)
- Anxiety: 5.7% (ASD), 5.6% (no ASD)
- Depression or Anxiety: 12.9% (ASD), 11.6% (no ASD)
Findings: Paternal Depression and Anxiety

Among fathers of children with ASD, paternal anxiety and depression with more common among:
• non-Hispanic white fathers compared to other ethnic and racial groups
• fathers born in the US compared to fathers born in other countries
• native English speakers compared to fathers that speak another language in the home
• fathers of children with ASD that have intellectual disability

Among fathers of children without ASD, paternal anxiety and depression with more common among:
• non-Hispanic white fathers compared to other ethnic and racial groups
• fathers born in the US compared to fathers born in other countries
• native English speakers compared to fathers that speak another language in the home
Findings: Relationship between Paternal Anxiety and Depression and Dysregulation in Children

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<tr>
<th>Among Children with ASD</th>
<th>Among children without ASD</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No associations</td>
<td>Externalizing</td>
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<td>- Aggression problems</td>
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<td>Internalizing</td>
<td>- Emotional reactivity</td>
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Next steps

• To determine if the relationships detected are independent of family income, parental education level, country of origin and intellectual disability in the child.

• Determine if pharmacological treatment for parental depression or anxiety changes the nature of the detected relationship with child dysregulation.

• Determine how our findings could inform early detection or screening for ASD.

• Consider how gender-specific norms for treatment of parental depression could influence our findings.