

A PRISMA Systematic Review: Parent Sensitivity in Autism Spectrum Disorder and Its Relationship With Child and Parent Characteristics

Authors : Gabrielle Veloso, Melanie Porter, Kelsie Boulton, Adam Guastella

Abstract : The aim of the current systematic review was to examine child and parent factors and their associations with parent sensitivity towards children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Eight bibliographic databases were used to identify peer-reviewed journal articles examining these associations via quantitative analyses, with parent sensitivity measured via validated and reliable observation coding systems. Thirty-one studies were finalized as having met full criteria for inclusion. The review found agreement across studies that parent sensitivity was positively associated with the child's initiations and responsiveness toward their parent, with more frequent parent-directed behaviors providing greater opportunity for parents to act and react in sensitive manner. There was also substantial evidence that parent sensitivity predicted later growth in child language ability and child social skills. Other factors such as child attachment, parent insightfulness toward their child, and parent resolution of the diagnosis were also identified across a number of studies as being positively associated with parent sensitivity, however, interpretations of these findings were limited by the absence of covariates identified in the literature as explaining much of the variance in parent sensitivity. With respect to non-significant associations, the literature reliably found that parents showed sensitivity toward their child with ASD, regardless of child age, ASD symptomology, concurrent child social skills, and concurrent child cognitive abilities. The robust associations found in this review and their potential explanations can serve as a jump off point in identifying an understanding protective and risk factors for families of children with ASD. With regard to future directions in research, assessment of the studies' methodological quality identified points for improvement with respect to the measurement of parent sensitivity, as well as the consideration of several important methodological confounds that may be controlled for in statistical analyses.

Keywords : ASD, autism, parenting, parent sensitivity

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