

A Qualitative Study of the Effect of Sibling and Parental Relationships on Coping Mechanisms in Families of Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder

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Abstract : The objective of this study was to describe and analyse the mutual relationship between the coping mechanisms used by the families of a child with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and family dynamics and the effect sibling interactions have on the dynamics and coping mechanisms in an urban setup. In-depth interviews were conducted for 25 families, with 4 members each in the Delhi NCR area in India. The families who were interviewed had a younger child who had received a diagnosis of ASD between the ages of 5-12. The in-depth questionnaires contained open-ended questions and the interviews were conducted separately for the mother, father and the typically developing sibling. The key findings of the study suggested that lack of communication was a common factor in most families (n=19) leading to other difficulties like stress and relationship dysfunction. It also fostered a fallacious perception of the relationship dynamics in the family in most of the interviewed families and changed depending on the family member being interviewed. In families where the typically developing elder sibling had a good relationship with the autistic child, the family dynamics were found to be more stable, and the overall family well-being was better maintained. The coping mechanisms employed by the families were also more positive and tended to work better if the typically developing sibling maintained a positive and interactive relationship with the parents and the autistic child. The type of coping mechanisms had a major impact on the relationship between the parents and in dictating the dynamics of the family of the child with ASD. Spirituality, professional help, family support and household help emerged to be the most effective coping mechanisms for the families, with spirituality emerging to be the most positive and effective coping mechanism in the families interviewed.

Keywords : autism spectrum disorder, coping mechanism, family dynamics, parental relationships, siblings

Conference Title : ICPBCS 2017 : International Conference on Psychological, Behavioral and Cognitive Sciences

Conference Location : Boston, United States

Conference Dates : April 24-25, 2017