Title: Predictors of Parent Involvement and Parent-teacher Relationships in Families of Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder

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Introduction: Child characteristics, such as behavior and medical problems, along with family characteristics, such as parenting stress and mental health, may affect the educational experiences of children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Importantly, these child and family characteristics may be associated with two key areas of the family-school partnership – parental involvement and the parent-teacher relationship. These key areas of family-school partnership are associated with positive child outcomes, such as academic and social school success (e.g., Powell, Son, File, & San Juan, 2010; Kohl, Lengua, & McMahon, 2000). For families of children with ASD, research on factors affecting these areas of the family-school partnership is limited. The current study addressed this gap in the literature by examining child and family characteristics predictive of parent involvement in education and parent-teacher relationships in families of children with ASD.

Method: Participants were 75 caregivers and elementary-aged children with ASD (M age = 7.75 years). Data were collected through extensive in-person interviews to assess family demographics and health history, child adaptive behavior (Vineland-II), child behavior (Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire), autism symptoms (CARS-2), parent-teacher relationships (Parent-teacher Relationship Scale-II) and parent involvement in education (Family Involvement Questionnaire-Elementary Version).

Results: Separate multiple regression models were run to examine child and family characteristics predictive of parent-teacher relationships and parent involvement in education. A model with child emotional symptoms, child conduct problems, and child medical/health problems explained 13% of the variance on parent-teacher relationships, with emotional symptoms significantly associated with parent-teacher relationships ($\beta = -.28$, $p < .05$). Family history of mental health and parenting stress explained 19% of the variance on parent-teacher relationships, with parenting stress significantly predicting parent-teacher relationships ($\beta = -.422; p < .05$). Child characteristics did not significantly predict parent involvement in education. The family factors of parenting stress and history of mental health problems predicted parent involvement in education ($R^2 = .27$), with history of parent mental health significantly predicting parent involvement in education ($\beta = -.42; p < .05$).

Discussion: Results indicate that for families of children with ASD, both child and family characteristics are associated with important family-school partnership outcomes. Interventions that target parent well-being may improve both involvement in education and parent-teacher relationships, providing a “double whammy” of benefits, given that parent involvement and parent-teacher relationships have been associated with improved educational outcomes for students. Future research should include measures of student academic achievement and teacher-rated student socio-emotional school performance to strengthen the research on the positive effects of parental involvement and positive parent-teacher relationships for families with a child with ASD.

References/Citations:

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