Title: Exploring help-seeking and Stigma related to Autism Spectrum Disorder among Parents in India

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Introduction: Early identification and treatment of autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a pressing global concern, and parent help-seeking is critical first step towards this goal. At the present time, little is known about ASD-related help-seeking outside of Western countries. To address this gap, the current study examines help-seeking among parents of young children in India. Within Indian culture, disability is often seen as a tragedy. Social exclusion and familial isolation are common, and there is a spiritual belief that a disabled child is a curse from God (Ravindran and Myers, 2012; Dhar, 2009). The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between ASD-related help-seeking and dimensions of stigma among parents of young children in India.

Methods: An online survey was conducted of parents from India (N=113) who had a child aged 0-2 without a diagnosis of ASD. Participants completed an online survey through Amazon’s Mechanical Turk (MTurk) service and the online survey questionnaire was designed using Qualtrics survey software. The survey included measures of help-seeking propensity, perceived stigma, stigmatizing beliefs, positive aspects, and fear of disclosure. Respondents were asked to rate their agreement to questions using a 7-point scale (1=strongly disagree to 7=strongly agree). Items from these pre-existing scales were adapted to include ASD-specific language. Linear regression was used to examine variable relationships.

Results: Using ordinary least squares (OLS) regression, we regressed help seeking onto participants’ self-reported perceptions of stigma, stigmatizing beliefs, positive aspects, and fear of disclosure. The predictors in the model accounted for significant 18% of the variance in the dependent variable of help seeking; F (4, 108) = 4.719, p < .005. Significant predictors in the model included stigmatizing beliefs and perceived positive aspects. Specifically, stigmatizing beliefs were negatively associated with help seeking (b = -.325, p < .005) while perceived positive aspects was a positive predictor in the model (b = .221, p < .05). Fear of disclosure (b = .06) and perceived stigma (b = .53) were non-significant predictors in the model.

Discussion: The goal of this study was to examine associations between help-seeking and dimensions of stigma (perceived stigma, stigmatizing beliefs, positive aspects, and fear of disclosure). The results suggest that greater stigmatizing beliefs are associated with a lower likelihood of parents’ seeking help. In contrast, positive aspects were a positive predictor of help seeking. These findings suggest that addressing stigmatizing beliefs among parents in India is a potential strategy for increasing ASD-related help-seeking in India.

References/Citations: