EMOTIONAL REGULATION AMONG PARENTS OF AUTISTIC CHILDREN: A DESCRIPTIVE STUDY IN PAKISTANI POPULATION

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ABSTRACT

Background: Emotional Regulation may help to prevent parents of children with disabilities from psychological anguish and to support their child's healthy development. **Objective:** To identify the variables that influence parents of Autistic children to employ both adaptive and maladaptive ER techniques. **Methodology:** It was a cross-sectional survey design in nature because the research collected the data from the respondents at a single point of time, the researcher adopted non-probability purposive sampling technique due to being an unknown percentage of Autistic population in Pakistan. The sample size was 57. By adding 20% of drop out the estimated sample size was 70. Parents with at-least 1 autistic child, Age range was 20 years to 50 years, Divorced and Widowed was excluded. Data was collected on a structured questionnaire IIPB protocol. The questionnaire was already pilot tested and had been used in almost 60 countries across the world. **Results:** Among 70 parents, out of which 35(50%) were Fathers and 35(50%) were Mothers. The Mean Age of participants was 34.5±5.69. Emotional Regulation in parents was found out to be 39.24±16.79. The minimum emotional regulation was 7.00 and maximum score was 66.00. One of the sub-types of Emotional regulation, Reappraisal had a mean score of 23.40±10.35 with minimum score 4.00 and maximum score was 40.00. Suppression was another sub-domain of emotional regulation with mean score of 15.84±7.13 minimum score was 2.00 and maximum score was 27.00. **Conclusion:** It was concluded that reappraisal and emotional regulation was more frequently employed by both parents.

INTRODUCTION

Emotions/ emotional manifestations result in behavior, whenever intrinsic or extrinsic processes are altered, this process is known as emotion regulation (ER). [1] These methods are described in a variety of ER approaches, such as suppression and reappraisal. [2] Adaptive emotion regulation (ER) techniques may

help parents manage the stress that comes with raising a kid with a disability. ER may help to prevent parents of children with disabilities from psychological anguish and to support their child's healthy development. [3]

Autistic/ Autistic Spectrum Disorders (ASD) is defined by recurrent and limiting behaviors, as well as the social and communication impairments, which vary in intensity among individuals. [4]In a study done in 2022 by Zeidan and colleagues, illustrated that the number of participants in the samples, which ranged from 465 to 50 million, was fairly substantial, and with the median of 100/ 10,000, occurrence ranged 1.09/ 10,000 to 436/10,000. Similar to the previous study, the majority of research studies were conducted in America and Northern-Europe, but there are more research studies from places that weren't previously well-represented, such as Africa as well as the Middle East. [5-7]

According to Morris et al., parental ER is regarded as a straight technique by which parents may affect their children's socio-emotional functioning. Parental ER has been linked to a number of developmental outcomes in children who are generally developing, particularly psychopathological disorders and socio-emotional functioning. [8] However, it is unclear how parents of children with autism spectrum disorders emergency room visits might affect the main symptoms of their children. Autistic children's parents may endure extreme stress due to their children's autistic symptoms, emphasizing the importance of emotional regulation. [9]

Parents of such adolescents struggle more to manage many stressful situations in day-to-day life. Parental demands rise, they are put under greater financial burden to pay for necessary medical bills, they must devote more time to the child, and this all adds to the psychological stress and weight on parents.[10]

Mothers continue to bear an overabundance of the responsibility for raising a disable child, making them more susceptible to stress linked to child care and more likely to exhibit depressive, anxious, health issues, social isolation, and low self-esteem. The emotional makeup of parents may also be influenced by the genetic etiology of ASD [11]

To the best of the researcher's knowledge, the experience of fatigued parents with autistic children has never been examined from their point of view. There hasn't been much research done in Pakistan on the stress that parents of autistic children experience. As a result, it is challenging to determine how much parenting an autistic child affects parents. In order to better understand how parents of autistic children regulate their emotions, the current study will give voice to worn-out parents from the perspective of the Pakistani population.[12]

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The study was descriptive, cross-sectional survey. The data was collected from the respondents at a single

point of time without manipulating any variable/variables in existing phenomenon. Non-probability purposive sampling technique due to being an unknown percentage of Autistic population in Pakistan. Sample size was estimated through the following formula:

n = z 2 (E)(1-E)/c2

Where:

z = standard normal deviation set at 95% confidence level[13]

E = Acceptable error

C= confidence interval (confidence interval (0.95). The sample size was 57. By adding 20% of drop out the estimated sample size was 70

Inclusion / Exclusion Criteria

- Parents of both gender were included [14]
- Parents with at-least 1 autistic child. [14]
- Age range was 20 years to 50 years. [14]
- Divorced and Widowed was excluded. [14]
- Age of the Child/Children range between 4 year- 26 years were included. [14]

IIPB protocol was used as a tool for data collection comprise statements regarding emotional regulation strategies and comprise seven points Likert scale e.g. strongly agree, agree, somewhat agree, neutral, somewhat agree, disagree, and strongly disagree.

RESULTS

Among total 70 parents, out of which 35(50%) were Fathers and 35(50%) were Mothers. 56 (80%) parents had 1 autistic child, 9 (12.9%) had 2 autistic children, 3 (4.3%) parents had 3 autistic children and 2 (2.9%) had 4 autistic children. The Mean Age of participants was 34.5±5.69. The minimum age was 21 years and the Maximum age was 49 years. The Parents with autistic children minimum 1 and maximum 4 kids, however, mean and SD count of autistic children were 1.30±.688. Emotional Regulation in parents was found out to be 39.24±16.79. The minimum emotional regulation was 7.00 and maximum score was 66.00.

One of the sub-types of Emotional regulation, Reappraisal had a mean score of 23.40±10.35 with minimum score 4.00 and maximum score was 40.00. Suppression was another sub-domain of emotional regulation with mean score of 15.84±7.13 minimum score was 2.00 and maximum score was 27.00. Pearson Chi-Square of gender and emotional regulation, p-value ≥ .005 showed that there was a difference between the mean values strongly significant. 7 parents said that they never need emotional

regulation, while 4 parents said that they need it rarely. Whereas, 7 parents said that they required emotional regulation occasionally. Although, 18 parents required emotional regulation sometimes. Similarly, 15 parents needed emotional regulation often. There were other 10 parents who wants emotional regulation most of the time and only 9 parents need emotional regulation always.

Table-1: Frequency distribution of gender and Total No. of Autistic Children

		Frequency	*Percent (%)*
Gender	***Fathers***	*35*	*50.0*
	Mothers	*35*	*50.0*
Total No. of Autistic Children	***1***	*56*	*80*
	2	*9*	*12.9*
	3	*3*	*4.3*
	4	*2*	*2.9*

Table-2: Descriptive statistics of age (years), total No. of autistic children, emotional regulation, reappraisal and suppression

	Mean	*SD*	*Min*	*Max*
Age (Years)	***34.50***	***5.70***	***21.0***	***49.0***
Total No. of Autistic Children	*1.30*	*0.688*	*1*	*4*
Emotional Regulation	*39.24*	*16.79*	*7.00*	*66.00*
Reappraisal	*23.40*	*10.35*	*4.00*	*40.00*
Suppression	*15.84*	*7.13*	*2.00*	*27.00*

Table -3: Comparison of Emotional Regulation and Gender

		Emotional Regulation							***Total***
		Never	***Rarely***	***Occasionally***	***Sometimes***	***Often***	***Most of the times***	***Always***	
Gender	***Fathers***	*6*	*2*	*0*	*5*	*8*	*8*	*6*	*35*
	Mothers	*1*	*2*	*7*	*13*	*7*	*2*	*3*	*35*
Total		*7*	*4*	*7*	*18*	*15*	*10*	*9*	*70*

p-value = 0.005

DISCUSSION

The current study was to evaluate the need of emotional regulation adopted by the parents of autistic children due to depression, stress and emotional exhaustion. There was a sample of 70 parents out of which 35 were fathers and 35 were mothers.

This research study showed that mean age of participants came out to be 34.5±5.69. The min-age was 21 years while the max-age was 49 years. The previous study done in 2020 explained that Mother age (years) 37.5±7.2 and Father age (years) 42.7±8.7.[15]

In the current study emotional Regulation in parents was found out to be 39.24±16.79. The minimum emotional regulation was 7.00 and maximum score was 66.00. One of the sub-types of Emotional regulation, Reappraisal had a mean score of 23.40±10.35 with minimum score 4.00 and maximum score was 40.00. Suppression was another sub-domain of emotional regulation with mean score of 15.84±7.13 minimum score was 2.00 and maximum score was 27.00. 11 parents had very low reappraisal approach, 17 parents had low reappraisal, 24 had moderate level of reappraisal and 18 parents had high level of reappraisal. A previous study showed that mother's emotional regulation's showed that mothers with ASD kids used positive reappraisal less frequently than those mothers of kids with intellectually disabled ($q = 4.03$, $p = .02$, Cohen's $d = 0.68$).[15]

This existing study showed that nevertheless, 18 out of 35 parents occasionally used emotional regulation techniques. Similarly, 15 parents want emotional regulation often. There were other 10 parents who want emotional regulation most of the time and only 9 parents need emotional regulation always.

CONCLUSIONS

It was concluded that reappraisal as a sub-type of emotional regulation was more frequently employed by both parents. This study also suggests that as the age of the parents increases the reappraisal, suppression and emotional regulation strategies were habitually implemented by parents of autistic children.

STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS

1. This study adds to the existing global knowledge to present a latest holistic worldwide view on epistemological, social, and pragmatic stances. This helps in devising effective caring strategies for parents' relevant distress.
2. The major difficulties/ hurdles in accessing parents of autistic children as well as in data collection were; some parents were shy, some had complex of being less/ uneducated, some were unavailable due to their prolonged professional /other engagements, and few hesitated / avoided sharing their opinions, as they perceived that having an autistic child is a social stigma. Most of the autistic child(ren) were accompanied by caregiver (either some relative or maid) who were not the appropriate respondents for the study.
3. There was no mechanism to identify or minimize the effect of so many other moderating, mediating or confounding stressors that the respondents may have been facing in other areas of their lives (e.g.,

work stress, extended family conflicts, neighbors' conflicts, and diversity and variance of beliefs, religious impact, community intervention programs and other key life events).

4. The fact that the current study was cross-sectional and correlation, which prevents us from drawing inferences about the causal pathways connecting psychological discomfort, emotion regulation, and parenting, is one of its limitations.

IMPLICATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

1. Testing a longitudinal, mediational model of the relationship between psychological distress, emotion control, and parenting in many populations, particularly clinically at-risk populations, may be beneficial for future research.
2. The relationship between parental emotion control and their capacity to understand the thoughts and reasons behind their children's behavior, as well as how these affective and cognitive processes may jointly contribute to sensitive parenting behavior, may be examined in future research.

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