

AUTISTIC CHILDREN: THEIR IMPACT ON MULTI-DIMENSIONAL PARENTING STYLE

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I. INTRODUCTION

Autism significantly affects a person's family, personal relationships, school life, sleeping, eating habits and general health. Parenting autistic child is not an easy task. Hence the present study is an attempt to explore the impact of autistic children on the parenting styles and parents on whole. Parenting styles of these autistic children are studied with four positive and negative dimensions ie. Love - Hate, Acceptance - Rejection, Encouragement - Discouragement, Conservatism - Progressivism. A total of 120 parents including both father and mother has been studied ie. 30 fathers - 30 mothers of autistic children and 30 fathers -30 mothers of normal children. Multi-Dimensional Parenting Scale by N.S Chauhan and Dr. C.P Khokhar is used to measure parenting behavior in terms of 'mothering' and 'fathering'. Analysis of Variance is used to examine the role of main variable as well as the interaction effect. The results show that mothers have a higher mean score in positive as well as the negative dimensions compared to fathers. Parents of autistic children show higher score on love, encouragement, acceptance and overall scores compared to parents of normal children. All parents wish for a healthy baby but some parents though not by their choice are gifted with special children. Some parents cope up with such a situation and some experience psychological stress (Montes G, Halterman JS, 2007). Autism is a developmental disability which typically appears during the first three years of life. People with autism or Asperger Syndrome are particularly vulnerable to mental health problems such as anxiety and depression especially in late adolescence and early adult life (Tantam & Prestwood, 1999). Children and adults with autism typically have difficulties in verbal and non-verbal communication, social interactions and leisure or play activities. In some cases, aggressive and self-injurious behavior may be present. Family is our first world. A world where we develop ourselves in various aspects of life, so that we can survive in the outer world called society. Support of family in different phases of life is like a boon. Parenting as a 'role ship' of institution of family, relates to the upbringing of the child. The degree of moral support by parents is definitely a key factor that affects a child's performance (Anshum Gupta and Nidhi Singhal, 2004). Bestowal of love, acceptance, encouragement, freedom to work and progressivism are ways of dealing that constitute the normal parenting. Parenting based on faulty reality value assumptions and ending in discouragement, rejection, hate, dependence and conservatism is undesirable and can be termed as deviant. Mothers are always characterized by friendship with less of punishment while Fathering appears

as a bridge by which the child reaches the outside world. It fosters both an emotional and a psychological support to the child. Hence the objective of my research is to measure the different dimensions of parental behavior in terms of 'mothering' and 'fathering' of autistic as well as normal children. Parenting is judged on four positive dimensions like Love, Acceptance, Encouragement and Progressivism and four negative dimensions like Hate, Rejection, Discouragement and Conservatism.

II. METHOD

A. Sample:

A total of 120 parents i.e. 30 fathers and 30 mothers of autistic children and 30 fathers and 30 mothers of normal children were chosen for the research study from Ahmedabad city. Fathers and mothers were equally included in the sample size. The age bar for parents was 25-55. Those who could read, write, understand were only incorporated in the study. Their personal details were also recorded.

B. Tools Used:

To measure parental behavior in terms of 'mothering' and 'fathering' Multi-Dimensional Parenting Scale (MDP - SCALE) (1985) prepared and standardized by Dr N.S Chauhan and Dr C.P Khokhar was used. It is an important scale of a multidimensional nature. This 5-point rating scale was administered for about 20 minutes. The Scale has 56 items for seven areas of parenting. The psychological meaning of eight dimensional terms used is as follows:

C. Positive Dimensions:

- Love- a strong feeling of attachment
- Encouragement- act of giving hope and support
- Acceptance- act of regarding a person favorably and putting up with
- Progressivism: a forward- looking attitude favoring new ideas

D. Negative Dimensions:

- Hate: a strong aversion attitude including anger
- Discouragement: causing to lose confidence and enthusiasm
- Rejection: assumption of a negative attitude or not approval towards other
- Conservatism: trait of holding traditional values and opposing change

E. Procedure:

Total sample of 120 was selected 60 of normal and 60 autistic children's parents for the research study. Various authorities of centers in Ahmedabad taking care of autistic children were met. Then, the parents were contacted and selected for the study. The personal details of the subjects

were also recorded. Rapport was established with subjects as well an assurance of confidentiality of their responses was given. In case of any queries, they were explained properly. The scale was given to the subjects instructing them to answer without break. The completed answer sheets were collected and it was checked that no statement is left unanswered. Interpretation and scoring was done according to the test manual.

III. RESULTS

Summary Table of ANOVA between Parents and Type of Children for Positive Dimensions:

Source of Variation	df	Love	Acceptance	Encouragement	Progressivism
Ass	1	2.05	0.23	1.14	0.64
Bss	1	4.54	10.21	6.12	1.14
Ass *	1	0.13	0.89	2.30	0.00
Bss					
Wss	116				

Summary Table of ANOVA between Parents and Type of Children for Negative Dimensions:

Source of Variation	df	Hate	Rejection	Discouragement	Conservatism
Ass	1	85.64	17.49	71.96	115.35
Bss	1	19.82	18.31	88.36	102.42
Ass *	1	62.74	35.35	92.63	122.47
Bss					
Wss	116				

IV. DISCUSSION

Main findings of the present study with respect to all positive and negative dimensions are as follows: The results prove there is no significant difference between the scores on Love dimension between Fathers and Mothers. This clearly hints that though mothers are said to be more emotionally responsive to their child's condition fathers also tend to love with the same degree. Thus, interaction between sex of parent and type of children (autistic/normal) does not lead to any significant difference in love they feel towards their child. The difference in mean Love scores between parents of Autistic children and of Normal children comes out to 2.17 which shows parents of autistic children have a higher mean ie. There is difference between parents of Autistic children and parents of Normal children. It is natural for parents of autistic children to be more concerned about them and to love them more intensely. The findings also show both sexes of parents encourage their children to the same degree. Parents of Autistic children encourage children to a greater degree than parents of Normal children. Mothers and Fathers do not differ significantly in their score of acceptance of child. Also parents of Autistic children are more accepting of their child

than parents of Normal children. In terms of progressivism dimension both sexes of parents share a similar degree of positive attitude in dealing with their children. On the other hand, the data shows that mean progressive score of parents of Normal children is 0.41 higher than that of parents of Autistic children ie. There is significant difference between parents of Autistic children and parents of Normal children. The difference in the mean scores between fathers and mothers on Hate dimension comes out to be 8.80. Mothers show high mean score. This result is rather surprising because mothers are believed to be more affectionate than hateful. Perhaps when their love is not reciprocated they may feel anger especially in the case of autistic children. With passage of time it may increase to hate. Parents of Autistic children show less hateful behavior than parents of Normal children. It may be due to their sympathy for the kids. The outcome of study also reveals an astonishing fact about mothers. Mothers tend to be more discouraging than fathers, while they are popularly believed to be very encouraging to their children. Further study is needed to find out the reasons with probably a larger group. Parents of Autistic children are less discouraging than parents of Normal children. The reason may be because they are aware of the difficulties faced by their child. The Mothers are more rejecting than Fathers and parents of Autistic children are less rejecting than those of Normal children. The aftermath of Conservatism dimension reveals Mothers are significantly more conservative in their attitude than Fathers. Parents of Autistic children are significantly less conservative than those of Normal children.

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