Symposium: Intervention issues in the early years for students with autism and intellectual disability

Enhancing parental well-being and coping through a family-centred, short course for Iranian parents of children with an autism spectrum disorder

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Aim: Parents of children with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) generally experience high levels of stress and report poorer emotional well-being and family functioning compared to parents of children with other disabilities. This paper reports the impact of a seven session course with two groups of parents of children with ASD (N = 37).

Method: In addition to providing information about ASD, emphasis was placed on families sharing their experiences and learning from one another. A pre-post, cross-over design was used to evaluate the specific impact of the course using standardised, self-report scales.

Results: Although there were variations across the parents, in general they were significantly less stressed, had better emotional well-being and family functioning and made more use of problem-focused coping strategies. The changes were replicated with a second group and were sustained up to 15 weeks after the course ended, and some changes were maintained up to 12 months later.

Conclusions: The positive impact was attributed mainly to an increase in the informal supports among the parents and their feelings of empowerment. A resource pack has been developed to enable the group sessions to be easily repeated and for facilitators to be trained in its use.

Enhancing family connections via technology (Google SketchUp) for children with autism spectrum disorders

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Aim: The aim of this presentation is to examine how the use of technology can enhance inter-generational connections for high functioning children with autism spectrum disorders (ASD). Method: We used a qualitative design to examine inter-generational relationships facilitated by an intervention employing Google SketchUp, a freeware 3D design program. Seven high-functioning boys (ages 8–17) with ASD participated in computer workshops. We capitalized on the boys’ strengths in visual-spatial skills and problem solving within an interactive face-to-face setting. Our interdisciplinary team structured the workshops to facilitate computer skill development as well as social interaction and peer mentoring. Qualitative analysis involved thematic analysis of transcripts from parent and grandparent focus groups.

Results: The two key themes that emerged were 1) reframing expectations (parental efficacy and creating a safe environment) and 2) building intergenerational bridges among parents, children, siblings and grandparents.

Conclusions: These findings indicate that technology can build on the strengths of children with ASD and promote social engagement of the children with their families and with each other.

An early intervention based family support program at an on-campus Child Development Support Centre in Japan

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Aim: The aim of the present study was to develop a creative program curriculum named Early Family Support Program (EFSP) for families with children who have developmental delays and/or have identified developmental disabilities at an on-campus Child Development Support Centre (CDSC) in Japan. Method: The staff of CDSC employed various methods (interviews, questionnaires and local service provider database check) to analyse and understand the specific needs of these local families and their children with developmental delays and/or disabilities.

Results: The results of this study show a high demand for early intervention-based family programmes at the local community, with specific needs for family-oriented early intervention methods and professionals on the field. This could be addressed through a specifically developed childhood and family support service called EFSP by a local university based centre.

Conclusions: The support system for children with special educational needs should employ a complex multimodal team of experts from different professional fields such as early childhood educators, clinical psychologists, speech-language pathologists, occupational therapists, and physiotherapists, among others. These professionals with their own field of expertise will form a supporting-net, evaluate, assess, advise and care during the infant and early childhood period.

Symposium: Intervention issues in the early years for students with autism and intellectual disability (continued)

Mothers of children with an intellectual disability: Universal breadwinner model vs universal caregiver model

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Aim: According to Nancy Fraser (2000), a universal caregiver model is more progressive for gender equity than universal breadwinner and caregiver-parity models. The universal breadwinner model means that both parents are employed; while the universal caregiving model implies that the father’s hours of caregiving are equal or higher to those of the mother. This study aims to examine the hypothesis that the universal caregiver model would have more positive effects than the universal breadwinner model on the quality of life of mothers with children with intellectual disabilities (ID).

Method: A face-to-face interview survey was conducted in 2011 in Hsinchu area of Taiwan with 876 working-age mothers of a child with ID, including 574 mothers living with a husband.

Results: Mothers from the dual breadwinner group were more likely to have a higher level of QoL than mothers who were not breadwinners, whose husbands were not breadwinners or who came from couples without a breadwinner. However, the difference in mothers’ QoL between the two groups – universal breadwinners and universal caregivers – was not significant. Thus, the hypothesis was not supported.

Conclusions: The hypothesis and the models require further elaboration (e.g. time might not be the only best indicator to measure universal caregiving).

What should I do now? Exploring family roles and relationships when a child has a disability- The grandparent’s perspective

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Aim: Through listening to the grandparents’ perspective, this study sought to identify whether the roles and relationships grandparents had with their grandchild with a disability were somehow different to those they had with their other grandchildren and their wider family.

Method: Interviews were conducted with a total of 22 grandmothers and grandfathers who had at least one grandchild with a disability, aged under the age of 17 years. The children’s disabilities included De Georges’ Syndrome, spina bifida, autism, and cerebral palsy.

Results: The expectations, perceptions, and experiences of the grandparents were openly explored. These provided important insight into the challenges which had arisen for them and for their families. These challenges changed the nature of their identity and roles as a grandparent, and in some cases their role within the wider family and community.

Conclusions: Grandparenting a child with a disability has been described as a roller coaster ride of emotions. However, despite this journey, this paper will identify the important contribution grandparents make to the lives of their grandchildren including those with disabilities.