

Abstract of the doctoral thesis

Title: Determinants of adaptation to child's disability and parental feelings of parents of children with autism spectrum and parents of children with epilepsy

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Aim: The main objective of the study was to determine factors associated with parents' adaptation to a child's disability and to determine the role of the parental feelings for the adaptation to the child's disability (autism spectrum or epilepsy), using the assumptions of the double ABCX model. In addition, the study aimed to verify the similarities and differences in factors determining adaptation to the child's disability between parents of children with autism spectrum (ASD) and parents of children with epilepsy; between mothers and fathers of children with disabilities; and between parents of children with and without disabilities.

Participants and procedure: The participants included 273 parents (145 mothers and 128 fathers), of those 103 parents of children with autism spectrum, 32 parents of children with epilepsy and 138 parents of children without a disability. Each participant had of at least one child aged 2 to 6 years. The study was conducted in one stage, using self-report questionnaires: demographic survey, Autism Spectrum Rating Scales ASRS, Berlin Social Support Scales BSSS, Mini-COPE Inventory, SUPIN Positive and Negative Affect Schedule, Perceived Stress Scale PSS-10, Beck Depression Inventory BDI-II, Satisfaction with Life Scale SWLS, and Parental Feelings Inventory PFI (the Polish adaptation of PFI was developed for the purposes of this study).

Results: The study showed significant similarities between parents of children with autism spectrum and parents of children with epilepsy in terms of the studied variables. The only one difference between these groups was the level of parental happiness (higher level for parents of children with ASD). Comparative analyzes of mothers and fathers of children with disabilities, as well as parents of children with disabilities and parents of children without disabilities turned out to be more complex, pointing to both similarities and differences between the compared groups. All variables included in the model (except the need for social support) turned out to be significantly related to the level of adaptation of parents of children with disabilities. It has been shown that the proposed model is not universal in terms of gender, pointing to similarities in the variables significant in the models of adaptation to the child's disability in mothers and fathers (severity of disability symptoms, parental anxiety/sadness, need for social support, positive affect), as well as to differences - perceived social support and negative affect were also important for mothers, and parental anger and the maladaptive coping strategies turned out to be important for fathers. In addition, it was shown that affects (positive and negative) mediate the relationship between the severity of disability symptoms in the child and the level of parents' adaptation both in the case of mothers (full mediation) and fathers (partial mediation). In the case of fathers, parental anxiety/sadness and maladaptive coping strategies are also partial mediators.

Conclusions: The obtained results provide extremely interesting information on the conditions of the parents' adaptation to a child's disability, pointing to the need for further research in this area, with particular emphasis on the positive aspects of parenthood. The obtained results are also important for clinical practice in the context of planning interventions aimed at parents of children with ASD and parents of children with epilepsy. They allow to take into account factors significantly related to adaptation to a child's disability, including protective factors. They also point to the need to support both mothers and fathers of children with disabilities, as well as families of children with autism spectrum and families of children with epilepsy.

Key words: double ABCX model, parenting, adaptation, autism spectrum, epilepsy

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