

Attachment Based Pilot Group Psychotherapy on Promoting Awareness and Coping Skills for Parents of Children with Autism

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Background

With a worldwide trend of an increasing number of children identified with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), more families are faced with the demands of having to care for children with ASD (Lai, Goh, Oei & Sung, 2015). Parents and caregivers of children with ASD are confronted with a more diverse and complex range of challenges (Giallo, Wood, Jellett & Porter, 2013; Krast & Van Hecke, 2012; Lai et al., 2015) and face more stress (Weiss, 2002) than caregivers of typically developing children despite the severity of the ASD.

In highly stressful situations, individuals with insecure attachment were found to experience more distress and seem to be at risk of maladjustment (Mikulincer & Florian, 1998). Parents with insecure attachment styles were associated with less sensitive parenting and more negative support behaviours (Collins and Feeney, 2000; Mill-Koonce et al., 2011). Given that parenting children with ASD is associated with increased stress, it is likely that parents with insecure attachment may experience greater distress than parents with secure attachment when caring for children with ASD. Such disposition, in turn, may further limit their abilities to care for their children with ASD.

Aims & Methods

As such, an 8-week psycho-group therapy was piloted to facilitate parents' acceptance of their children with ASD through increasing awareness of their attachment styles, their coping strategies and facts about ASD. Six participants participated in the group therapy.

Results

Preliminary analyses, based on their written and verbal responses, appear to suggest that parents with insecure attachment styles tended to use ineffective coping strategies (e.g. denial: "remain silent") as compared to more effective coping strategies (e.g. problem-focused "explain my thoughts"). There appears to be a shift in the perspective of their children and") to more acceptance statements (e.g. "Patience"). parenting from deficit focused (e.g. "Stay in his own world).

Conclusion

This study aimed at examining the relationship between parental attachment styles and coping with stressors related to parenting a child with ASD in view of shedding light on a possible new area for ASD interventions. The present research adds on to the existing literature of interventions for ASD by associating the aforementioned two components of parent's individual attachment style and coping method that have yet to be included in the current repertoire of ASD interventions.

References

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