Title: Daily stress, Coping, and Well-being in Parents of Children with Autism: A Multilevel Modeling Approach

Abstract

This study used a repeated daily measurement design to examine the direct and moderating effects of coping on daily psychological distress and well-being in parents of children with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD). Twice weekly over a 12-week period, 93 parents provided reports of their daily stress, coping responses, and end-of-day mood. Multilevel modeling analyses identified 5 coping responses (e.g. seeking support, positive reframing) that predicted increased daily positive mood and 4 (e.g. escape, withdrawal) that were associated with decreased positive mood. Similarly, two coping responses were associated with decreased daily negative mood and five predicted increased negative mood. The moderating effects of gender and the 11 coping responses were also examined. Gender did not moderate the daily coping-mood relationship, however, 3 coping responses (emotional regulation, social support, and worrying) were found to moderate the daily stress-mood relationship. Additionally, ASD symptomatology, and time since and ASD diagnosis were not found to predict daily parental mood. This study is perhaps the first to identify coping responses that enhance daily well-being and mitigate daily distress in parents of children with ASD.

Keywords: coping, parenting stress, autism, mood, multilevel modeling