Parenting on the Spectrum:

A Systematic Scoping Review of Parenting Experiences and the Mental Health of Parents with ASD or Autistic Traits

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INTRODUCTION

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a neurodevelopmental disorder with a strong genetic basis^{1,2}. Autistic traits milder than ASD are termed Broader Autism Phenotype (BAP).

Parents' autistic traits can significantly affect daily tasks, which may include parenting. For example, parents may struggle to communicate with their child or partner, it may also affect parent's mental wellbeing

This systematic scoping review aim to:

- Summarize the effect of parent's ASD or BAP towards parenting experiences, parent-child relationship, family dynamic and psychopathology;
- Systematically map research on this topic;
- Identify gaps in knowledge, to direct areas for future research.

METHODS

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

In order for a study to be included it needed to:

- 1. Provide data on at least one parent identifiable with either BAP or ASD using a standardized, measurement
- 2. Provide quantitative or qualitative data on at least one of the following:
- Mental wellbeing or psychopathology of the parents
- Experience of the parents in parenting with ASD or BAP

Number of

studies

14

- Family issues faced by the parents.
- 3. All study designs were included

TABLE 1: Description of key

USA

ASD

characteristics of included studies

Country research was conducted in

The process can be seen in figure 1.

Records identified through Identification database searching (n=15,244)Embase: 4,319 Duplicates removed Medline: 2,164 (n=6,298)SCOPUS: 4,495 Psycinfo: 3,919 Cochrane library: 347 Records excluded Title and Abstract (n=8,777)Screened (n=8,946) Full-text articles excluded (n=143), with reasons: • 81 = no data on parents with ASD or • 30 = different outcomes Eligibility • 9 = Review with relevant study Full text article assessed for eligibility • 7 = Review with no relevant studies (n=169)• 7 = Unable to get additional data • 7 = unable to locate full text • 1 = non English • 1 = Book Included Hand searching (n=2) Studies included (n=28)

FIGURE 1. Prisma Flow Diagram

FIGURE 2. Main Findings of Each Outcome



- Early parenthood experience
- Sensory processing issue
- Communication problem Difficulty in adjusting
- 5 studies (n= 87,809 mothers)



- Later parenthood experience
- Increased parenting stress and difficulty
- 12 studies (n=197 couples and 481 mothers)



- Parent-child relationship
- More negativity
- Insecure maternal attachment
- 7 studies (n= 157 couples and 88,345 mothers)



- Family dynamic
- Negatively affected
- 6 studies (n=1,072 couples and 102 mothers)



- Parent's mental wellbeing
- Increased rate of depression and anxiety
- Reduced wellbeing
- 14 studies (n= 774 couples, 1,685 mothers)

RESULTS

Of 28 studies 14 were conducted in US. 23 of 28 were cross sectional. Only 4 studies included parents with ASD. Characteristics of included studies are listed on table 1.

Outcomes obtained were grouped into 5 categories: early parenthood experience, later parenthood experience, parent-child relationship, family dynamic and parent's mental wellbeing. The main findings can be seen on figure 2.

Netherlands Australia Japan UK Taiwan Belgium China Italy Canada Study design Cross sectional Cohort Case control Multi method Level of evidence 28 Publication type Journal article 25 Dissertation Year of published studies <2010 >2010-2012 2013-2015 2016-2018 2019-present Parent's characteristic **BAP** 25

CONCLUSION

The impact of BAP and ASD on parenting and psychological wellbeing is an emerging field of interest. Including autistic fathers or those with high BAP This scoping review has highlighted research indicating that the presence of BAP or ASD in parents can impact their parenting experiences, family dynamics and parental wellbeing.

Research implications

Future research may consider:

- scores in studies investigating parenting
- Assessing the effectiveness of parenting interventions specifically targeting autistic parents or • those high in BAP
- Assessing both the difficulties as well as possible advantages of parenting with ASD or BAP

Clinical considerations

Clinicians who support adults who identify as autistic, or show traits of BAP may consider:

- Provide information on support and experiences of other like-minded parents
- Since BAP or ASD may have a role in parents difficulties, ensure both interventions and support materials are appropriately adapted to account for these challenges.



- 1. Johnson, C. P., & Myers, S. M. (2007). Identification and Evaluation of Children With Autism Spectrum Disorders. https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2007-2361
- 2. Kupfer, D. J., Regier, D. A., Narrow, W. E., Schultz, S. K., Kuhl, E. A., Blazer, D. G., & Burke Jr, J. D. (2013). Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (5th ed.). American Psychiatric Association.





