

Caregiver Coping Skills & Children with Disabilities



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RESEARCH PROBLEM, QUESTION & HYPOTHESIS

Raising a child with a disability adds more stress and if not handled with using effective coping mechanisms, negative outcomes can arise.

How do primary caregivers of children with disabilities cope with related stress?

We predict that of emotion-oriented, avoidance-oriented, distraction-oriented, and task-oriented coping styles, that distraction-oriented and task-oriented will be the most effective coping styles while emotion-oriented coping will be the least effective

DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

Stress – “a condition or feeling experienced when a person perceives that demands exceed the personal and social resources the individual is able to mobilize” (The American Institute of Stress, n.d.).

Emotion-Oriented Coping – Emotional responses, self-preoccupation, and fantasizing reactions (Lyons et al, 2010)

Avoidance-Oriented Coping - Social diversion, strategies to avoid a stressful situation by seeking out others (Lyons et al, 2010)

Distraction-Oriented Coping - engaging in a substitute task (Lyons et al, 2010)

Task-Oriented Coping - strategies that attempt to solve a problem, reconceptualize a problem or minimize the effects of a problem (Lyons et al, 2010)

PURPOSE OF STUDY

To examine the relationship between the coping mechanisms of caregivers who have children with disabilities and the amount of stress they experience using a sample of caregivers of children in a Midwestern Pre-Kindergarten school which specializes in children with disabilities.

- 1) To develop a reliable survey instrument which measures the effectiveness of the various coping styles.
- 2) To increase awareness of the effectiveness of coping mechanisms for future practical application of teaching caregivers of children with disabilities how to cope with stressful situations.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Family Systems Theory by Bowen explains that as one family member's emotional state changes it will impact others within the family unit (Kerr, 2003).

As applied to our study, caregivers of children with disabilities experience added responsibilities resulting in additional stressors. If caregivers do not cope with the stressors it can cause increased anxiety and depressive symptoms. These negative emotions can then create other barriers in the child excelling to their highest potential.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Churchill, Villareale, Monaghan, Sharp, and Kieckhefer (2010) found that the better the coping skills the parent had; the less likely they were to experience depressive symptoms.

Lyons, Leon, Roecker Phelps, and Dunleavy (2010) found that distraction coping mechanisms seemed to be the most effective while those who used emotion-oriented and those who didn't use distraction coping tended to predict the amount of familial problems.

Lloyd and Hastings (2009) found that the more hope the individual felt, the better psychological well-being was experienced.

Gerstein, Crnic, Blacher, and Baker (2009) found that mothers experienced higher levels of stress and an increased amount of stress during the preschool years compared to the fathers.

Trute, Worthington, and Hiebert-Murphy (2008) found that grandparents were more helpful than other family members.

Pearson Correlation Matrix

Variables	TKD	RSD	SWD
FME		.806**	
SWM			.829**
FMD	.916**		

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Frequency Distribution

Variables	SD	D	SLD	SLA	A	SA	Total
ADS	0.0%	10.0%	0.0%	70.0%	20.0%	0.0%	100.0%
FME	0.0%	10.0%	0.0%	20.0%	30.0%	40.0%	100.0%
TKA	0.0%	0.0%	10.0%	30.0%	40.0%	20.0%	100.0%
BSS	30.0%	40.0%	10.0%	10.0%	0.0%	10.0%	100.0%
RSR	10.0%	0.0%	0.0%	30.0%	40.0%	20.0%	100.0%
SWM	10.0%	10.0%	0.0%	20.0%	40.0%	20.0%	100.0%
AVS	20.0%	50.0%	10.0%	10.0%	10.0%	0.0%	100.0%
SCC	40.0%	30.0%	0.0%	20.0%	10.0%	0.0%	100.0%
FMD	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	40.0%	40.0%	20.0%	100.0%
TKD	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	30.0%	50.0%	20.0%	100.0%
RSD	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	10.0%	50.0%	40.0%	100.0%
SWD	10.0%	0.0%	0.0%	60.0%	20.0%	10.0%	100.0%
AVD	70.0%	30.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
NRC	10.0%	30.0%	10.0%	30.0%	10.0%	10.0%	100.0%
NCS	40.0%	20.0%	10.0%	30.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%

ADS = Child's disability causes numerous added stressors

FME = Relying on family or friends to talk to relieve stress

TKA = Doing activities to relieve stress

BSS = Bottling up stress

RSR = Resolving a small part of the stressor to relieve the stress

SWM = Thinking of a situation that is worse to relieve stress

AVS = Avoiding the stressful situation

SCC = Seeking counseling to relieve stress

FMD = After talking with family or friends the stress level drops

TKD = After doing an activity the stress level drops

RSD = After resolving a small part of the stressor the stress level drops

SWD = After thinking of a situation that is worse the stress level drops

AVD = When avoiding the situation the stress level drops

NRC = In need of respite care services

NCS = In need of counseling services to cope successfully

METHODS

Participants: Primary caregivers of children with disabilities from a Midwest pre-K program.

Research Design: Non-random pilot study, cross-sectional, purposive and snowball sampling design.

Procedure: Administered surveys to lead teachers of each classroom. Informed consent, confidentiality, and right to withdraw were explained at the beginning of the survey.

Data Analysis Plan: Analyzed data using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), frequencies, mean comparisons, correlations, and Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Analysis.

RESULTS

- 90% of participants agreed that their child's disability causes numerous added daily stressors.
- 70% of caregivers did not seek counseling and feel that they did not need counseling services.
- The Cronbach's reliability analysis of this study was calculated to be .304. This would increase to .432 if the variable BSS was deleted.
- 100% of participants agreed to some extent that task-oriented coping was effective.
- 70% of participants strongly disagreed and 30% disagreed that avoidance-oriented coping was effective.
- There was a high correlation between variables FMD and TKD, FME and RSD, SWM and SWD at $p < .01$ (see table).
- Our data supported our hypothesis in terms of distraction and task-oriented coping to be the most effective coping styles.

IMPLICATIONS

For Educators: Implement discussion on how to alleviate stress when raising a child with or without a disability. Every caregiver faces stressful situations but those with children with disabilities are likely to experience more stressors. Emphasize the importance and effectiveness of having a hobby to part in during stressful times (distraction-oriented coping).

For Future Research: Large and random sample to be able to generalize, and/or a longitudinal study. Task-oriented coping was shown to be the most effective and should be studied further to develop more strategies to decrease the stress level. Explore how caregiver stress directly affects the development of the child with a disability.

CONCLUSION

Caregivers raising children with disabilities face added daily stressors due to their child's dependence and added needs. If these stressors are not dealt with using an effective coping mechanisms these stressors could lead to negative outcomes such as depression and/or anxiety. If more research is done on this topic, educators can help spread the knowledge of how to cope effectively. Which can then drastically change the lives of these caregivers. Given the appropriate tools and resources a caregiver can obtain the knowledge and opportunities to decrease the amount of stress they experience due to the added responsibilities. In the long run knowing how to cope with these stressors can then benefit the family as a whole.

“Counseling for caregivers is not something overtly offered as an important service – it's not talked about much.”

– Participant #2