

Research Article

Marital Adjustment of Parents of Children with Special Needs in Gostivar, North Macedonia

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Abstract

The primary objective of this study is to compare marital adjustment between parents of children with special needs and parents of typically developing children. The research sample, comprising 15 parents from each group, was purposefully selected from Gostivar, North Macedonia. The assessment utilized the MAT questionnaire consisting of 15 items, demonstrating a reliability coefficient (Cronbach's Alpha) of 0.71. Statistical analysis, including a t-test ($t(30) = 3.32; p < 0.05$), revealed significant differences in marital adjustment between the two groups. Furthermore, ANOVA analysis ($\text{sig} = 0.01$) indicated notable distinctions in parental education levels between the two groups. Keywords: marital adjustment, parents of children with special needs, parental education, typically developing children.

Keywords: marital adjustment, parents of children with special needs, parents' education, parents of children with normal development

1. INTRODUCTION

Parenting a child with special needs can be difficult, damaging and confusing endeavor; however, it is a role that can also be accompanied by happiness, triumph, and satisfaction. The stages of grief that parents undergo upon receiving news of a child with special needs mirrors the stages of mourning encountered when losing a cherished family member, Siegel (1996). According to Fortier and Wanlass (1984) the beginnings of family crisis may occur when parents suspect a problem their child may have, and they anxiously undertake a period of observing them. The family as a whole, just as the relationship between spouses, usually experiences stress as a result of the child's obstacles (Solem, 2011). The relationship of the couple gets complicated due to strong and contradictory emotions, which, each partner, as a

parent of a child with special needs, should face. Almost every married couple argues time after time, even more than time after time (Powers, 2000). According to several researchers (Brobst, Clopton & Hendrick, 2009; Hauser-Cram et al., 2001; Olsson et al., 2003; Sicile-Kira, 2004) marital relationships experience and face stress as a consequence of problems created by the child with special needs. Parents experience high level stress in terms of physical, emotional, financial and marital aspect. Marital stress is associated with child problems, economic difficulties, and changes in family functions (Hauser-Cram et al., 2001). The marital relationship can face stress and differences in opinions on created situations (Sicile-Kira, 2004). It is disheartening that some marriages break up. While various factors can contribute to the termination of a marriage, it is evident that having a child with autism introduces significant stress to any relationship. Sometimes, the burden of this additional stress can lead to the breakdown of a marriage (Powers, 2000).

2. Methodology

2.1 Study goals:

The main objective of this research is to investigate potential differences in marital adjustment between parents raising children with special needs and those with typically developing children, as well as to ascertain if there are variations in marital adjustment among parents with varying levels of education.

2.2. Research hypotheses

Based on the theoretical frame of the paper and the two main research variables, the following assumptions are presented for each purpose and research question:

H1. There are statistically significant differences in terms of marital adjustment between parents of children with special needs and parents of children with normal development.

H2. There are statistically significant differences in terms of the martial adjustment and the level of education between both groups of parents.

2.3 Research instrument

For the purpose of this research, the questionnaire for the demographic data and the original version of the instrument Marital Adjustment Test (MAT) Locke, H. J., & Wallace, K. M. (1959) is used. It consists of 15 items assessing and measuring harmony and adjustment between married couples. Based on the reliability coefficient of the test, through the analysis of Alpha Cronbach, presented in table 1, we can conclude that the test had a relatively good reliability with an obtained value of 0.71.

Table 1. Alpha Cronbach of MAT test

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.710	15

2.4 Sample

The investigation takes place in Gostivar, with a purposive sampling method dividing participants into two groups: one comprising parents of children with special needs, and the other consisting of 15 parents of typically developing children. Ensuring similarity in the age of children across both groups, a total of 30 respondents participate, including 22 women and 8 men.

2.5 Limitations of the study

The group of parents with special needs is specific, and not all of them agree to be part of scientific research. For this reason, the sample of the study has total number of 15 parents.

3. FINDINGS

According to Table 2, we find that parents of children with special needs have the presence of the marital adjustment variable with a mean of 97, while parents of children with normal development 106,06. According to Levene’s test in the table with sig 0,23 it shows that the groups are homogeneous and can be compared. The results of the t-test $t(30) = 3.32; p < 0,05$, indicate that there is a difference between the groups and our hypothesis is accepted.

Table 2. Descriptive table of marital adjustment

Group Statistics					
	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
PM	PN	15	106.16	11.841	1.349
	PNV	15	97.00	9.502	2.026

Table 3. Levene’s coefficient about marital adjustment between two groups

Independent Samples Test										
		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Marital adjustment	Equal variances assumed	1.422	.236	3.329	30	.001	9.156	2.750	3.698	14.614
	Equal variances not assumed			3.761	41.512	.001	9.156	2.434	4.242	14.070

According to table 4, based on ANOVA analysis with sig=0.01, we find that there are statistically significant differences regarding the parents' education level of children with special needs and those with normal development. For more in-depth analysis on among which groups there are differences, see the results of the Scheffe's post hoc test. Based on post hoc analysis, we find that there are significant statistical differences at the level 0.05 between the percentage of parents of normal children and parents of children with special needs with 9 years (elementary) and higher education.

Table 4. ANOVA regarding the parents' education level of both groups of children

ANOVA					
ASQ					
	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	1632.039	2	816.019	4.684	.010
Within Groups	34320.356	28	174.215		
Total	35952.395	29			

4. Conclusion and discussion

The results of this study support those of other studies on this issue which emphasize intensifying arguments and conflicts in marital relationships as a result of a child with autism and other created problems (Hauser-Cram et al., 2001; Higgins et al., 2005; Powers, 2000; Sicile-Kira, 2004), as well as reinforces them even more. Due to the ongoing involvement of mothers with the child and fathers occupied with longer work hours, the study revealed that parents have less time for each other, leading to challenges in spending quality couple time. This is confirmed by at least two other studies (Chawarska et al., 2008; Hutton & Caron, 2005). The stressful situation within the couple, characterized by persistent disagreements and conflicts, along with the struggle to find time for one another, can, in certain instances, prompt spouses to contemplate separation or even initiate divorce proceedings. According to Fortier and Wanlass (1984) the beginnings of family crisis may occur when parents suspect a problem their child may have, and they anxiously undertake a period of observing them. The relationship of the couple gets complicated due to strong and contradictory emotions, which, each partner, as a parent of a child with special needs, should face. In a study carried out at the University of Tirana by Artur Rada "Children with autism and the social aspect (Impact on the family)" (2013), it was found that the child with limited abilities is often the object of arguments and conflicts in couples related to care, care schedules, treatment to be received, as well as costs. Arguments and conflicts in couples also occur due to economic and financial issues that arise in the family.

The study emphasizes the challenges faced by parents in accepting disabilities due to cultural and societal factors, a sentiment echoed by service providers. Consistent with prior

research (Powers, 2000; Siegel, 1996), it also suggests that while having a child with disabilities can strain marital relationships, it can also strengthen them, as supported by Siegel (1996). This positive impact is attributed to parents' shared belief in mutual reliance to address their child's needs, as found in other studies (Chawarska et al., 2008; Powers, 2000). However, research on marital adjustment among parents of children with developmental disabilities yields conflicting results. Some studies indicate lower marital adjustment in these parents compared to those with typically developing children (Kersh, Hedvat, Hauser-Cram, 2006; Risdal & Singer, 2004), while others suggest no significant difference in marital quality (Holmbeck et al., 1997; Tsibidaki, 2013). Similarly, a study in Istanbul comparing marital adjustment between parents of children with developmental disabilities and those with typical development found no significant differences. Moreover, no notable gender differences were observed in Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS) scores. These findings offer valuable insights for future research, facilitating deeper exploration of the relationship between these parental groups.

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