

Mothers on the Autism Spectrum: Parenting Stress and Family Outcomes

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Why mothers on the autism spectrum?

There is little research on parents who are on the autism spectrum themselves, including their experiences of parenthood (Kaboski, McDonnell, & Valentino, 2017; Dissanayake, Richdale, Kolivas, & Pamment, 2019)

Parenting Stress

– “distress or discomfort [resulting] from demands associated with the role of parenting” (Hayes & Watson, 2013, p. 629)

Family Outcomes

“benefits experienced by families as a result of services received” (Bailey et al. 2006, p. 228):

Outcome 1: understanding the needs and abilities of their children

Outcome 2: awareness of their rights

Outcome 3: helping their child learn and develop

Outcome 4: having support systems

Outcome 5: accessing the community



<https://www.theatlantic.com/family/archive/2017/05/autism-parenting/526989/>

Objectives

Using pre-existing data from the Longitudinal Study of Australian Students with Autism (Roberts et al., 2018), we examined:

- Whether there were **differences in parenting stress** between mothers on the spectrum and mothers not on the spectrum
- Whether there were **differences in achievement of family outcomes** between mothers on the spectrum and mothers not on the spectrum

Parenting Stress
Parent Stress Index
4-Short Form (PSI-SF; Abidin, 1990)

Family Outcomes
Family Outcome
Survey-Revised
(FOS-R; Bailey et al., 2011)

Method

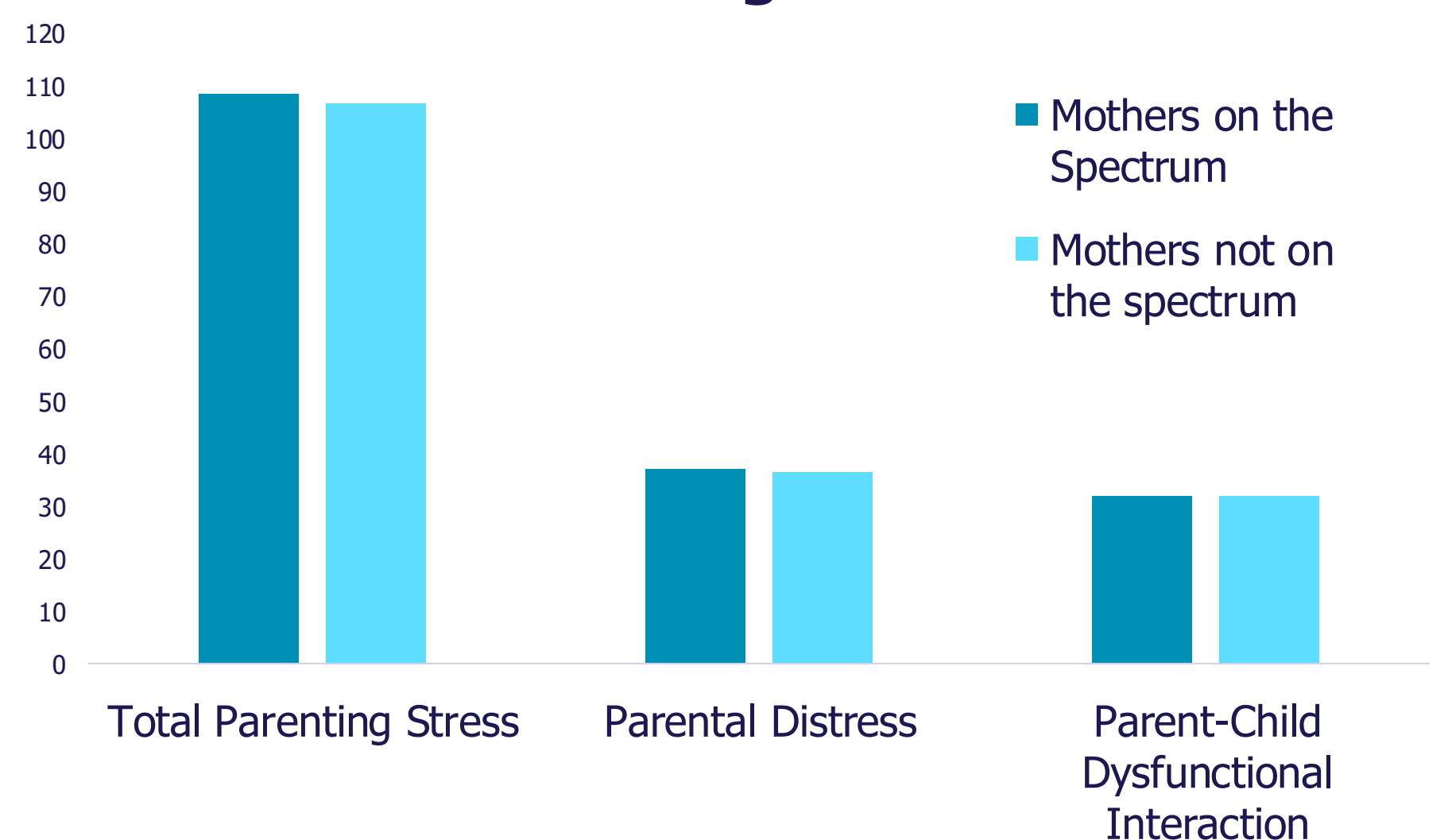
20 mothers on the spectrum and 20 mothers not on the spectrum were **matched on factors related to parenting stress**

- Child challenging behaviour
- Number of child autism characteristics
- Child adaptive functioning
- Family income
- Child age
- Maternal age

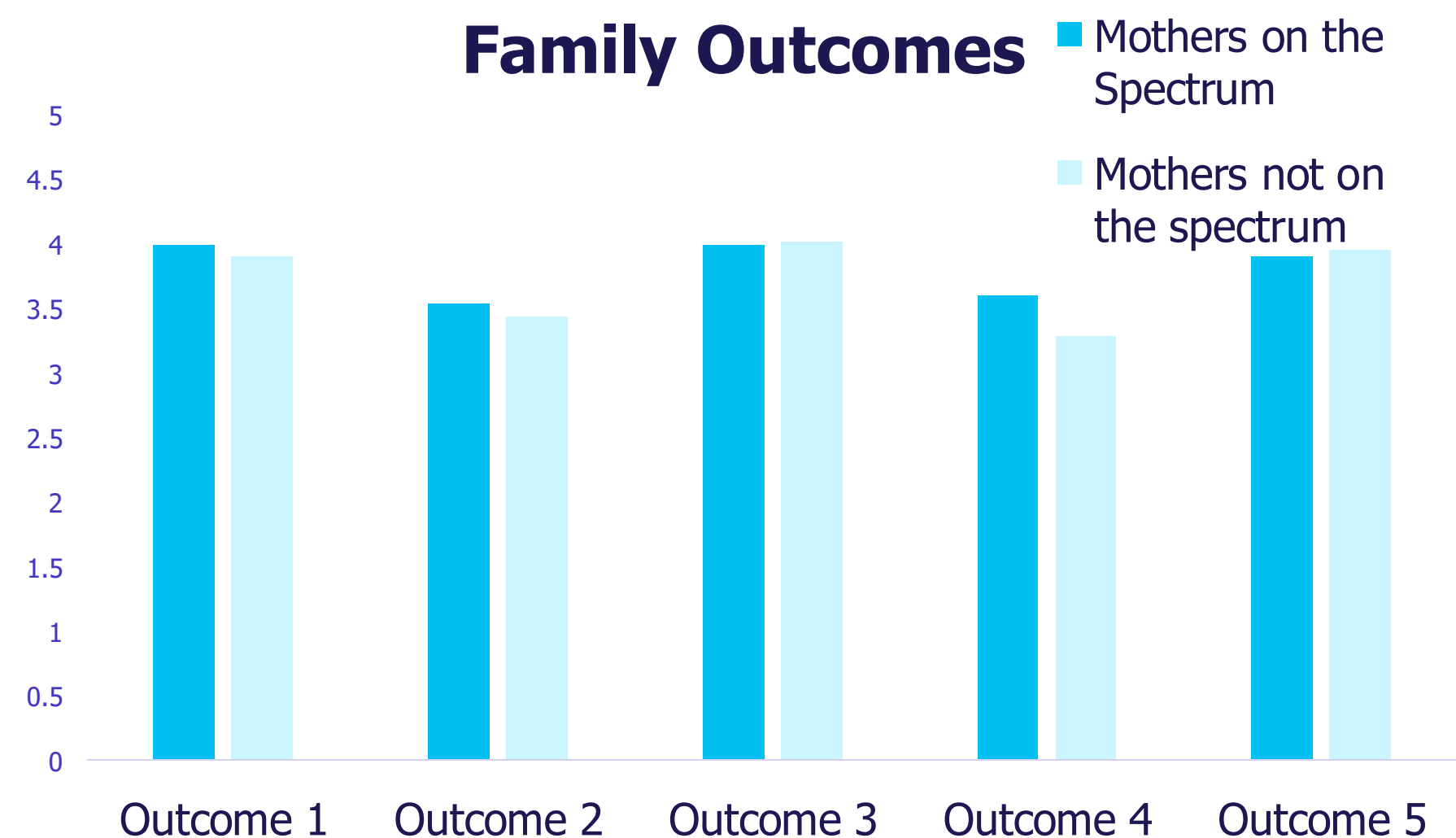
Results

No significant differences between groups in parenting stress or achievement of family outcomes

Parenting Stress



Family Outcomes



Conclusions

- Mothers parenting a child on the spectrum should be provided with support regardless of parental diagnosis
- Future studies should include measures of parent autism characteristics and endeavor to include both mothers and fathers
- We should be careful to not make assumptions about parenting stress or family outcomes of mothers on the autism spectrum
- Future research is important to understand the relationship between parental diagnosis on the spectrum, wellbeing, and parenting to inform intervention and support

For more information

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