**Title**: Changes in Parenting Stress Predicting Empowerment

**Authors** : Mariela Jiménez1, Nicole Nadwodny 1, Alice S. Carter1 , RISE Research Network2

**Introduction**: Parents of children with autism spectrum disorder are found to have higher levels of stress than parents of typically developing children (Hayes & Watson, 2013). Child characteristics related to parental distress include autism severity, social communication deficits, and challenging behavior (Benson 2006; Brei et al., 2015). Existing children’s mental health literature suggests that high levels of parenting stress can act as a barrier to parent engagement in their child’s services (Brannan & Heflinger, 2006). Parent engagement and empowerment are considered to play a key role in child outcomes and parent functioning (Bode et al., 2016). In this abstract, we examine the relationship between parenting stress and family empowerment in a multisite community-based sample. Our aim was to determine if changes in parenting stress across two time-points would predict empowerment in an ethnoracially, socioeconomically, and regionally diverse sample.

**Method**: Participants were N=39 caregivers of toddlers with social communication delays and participated in a larger community-based Hybrid Type I implementation/effectiveness trial of Caregiver Implemented Reciprocal Imitation Teaching administered by Part-C community early intervention providers. They filled out the Parenting Stress Index (PSI) questionnaire at the start of the study (T1) and again 3-4 months later (T2). Participants also filled out the Family Empowerment Scale (FES) questionnaire at T2, which consists of three subscales: Community, Service, and Family. Participants identified as White (n=19), Black (n=9), Asian (n=2), multiracial (n=2), other (n=2), and n=5 did not answer; they identified as Hispanic or Latinx (n=14), not Hispanic or Latinx (n=23), or did not answer (n=2). A majority (n=29) were born in the USA, with 9 born out of the USA, and 1 not answering. Participants filled out the demographics form in either English or Spanish.

**Results**: A multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine whether PSI scores at T1 and T2 predicted FES scores at T2.

FES- Family

In Model 1, PSI T1 significantly predicted FES Family scores, (B=−0.015, t(98)=−7.134 p<0.001 β=−0.614), indicating a strong negative relationship. In Model 2, when PSI T2 was included, only PSI T2 was a significant predictor, (B=−0.019 t(97)=−7.369, p<0.001, β=−0.847), while PSI T1 was non-significant, (B=0.002 t(97)=0.628, p=0.532, β=0.072). These results suggest that increases in stress levels (from T1 to T2) are associated with family empowerment outcomes, with higher gains in stress correlating with lower empowerment within the family.

FES- Services

In contrast, PSI T1 did not significantly predict FES Service scores (B=−0.004 t(98)=−1.636, p=0.106, β=−0.176. In Model 2, when both PSI T2 was included, only PSI T2 was a significant predictor, (B=−0.007, t(97)=−2.108, p=0.038, β=−0.379). These results indicate that recent stress levels (T2) negatively predicted empowerment within the service system, suggesting that higher levels of stress were associated with lower FES Service scores.

The PSI did not significantly predict FES-Community subscale scores.

**Discussion:** These results suggest a relationship between parenting stress and empowerment. Given associations between parenting stress and empowerment on child outcomes and parent functioning, more research is needed to better understand how these constructs are related. Future studies should work to understand the interconnectedness of parenting stress and empowerment to inform clinical practice and disseminate strategies to better support parents of children with developmental delays.

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University of Massachusetts – Boston

2 Wendy Stone - University of Washington, Allie Wainer - Rush University Medical Center, Brooke Ingersoll - Michigan State University