

Autism Spectrum Disorder Child's Impact On The Emotional And Psychological Family Climate

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Abstract: The article examines the impact of a child with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) on the emotional and psychological climate of the family. The relevance of the study is due to the increasing prevalence of ASD and the need for a comprehensive understanding of family factors affecting the adaptation of all its members. The emotional reactions of parents, features of intra-family interaction, changes in family role structure, and levels of psychological stress are analyzed. Special attention is paid to parental stress, emotional burnout, and the influence of diagnosis on marital relationships. Both negative and positive transformations of the family climate are considered, including the development of empathy, cohesion, and responsibility. The article summarizes the results of domestic and foreign studies, identifies risk factors and resources for family adaptation. The conclusion emphasizes the necessity of systematic psychological support and an interdisciplinary approach.

Keywords: autism spectrum disorder, family, emotional-psychological climate, parental stress, family adaptation, psychological support, family relations, special educational needs.

Introduction

The issue of autism spectrum disorder has been attracting increasing attention from researchers and practitioners in recent decades [1]. The diagnosis of ASD significantly impacts not only the child's development but also the functioning of the family as a whole [2]. The family serves as the primary environment for the child's socialisation and support, while simultaneously experiencing significant emotional and psychological burdens [3]. The aim of this article is to analyse the impact of a child with ASD on the emotional and psychological climate of the family. Autism spectrum disorders (ASD) are currently considered one of the most pressing medical, psychological, and educational issues in modern society. According to the World Health Organization, the prevalence of autism spectrum disorders (ASD) is steadily increasing and, based on recent estimates, is approximately 1 case per 127 children, making autism a significant social and familial phenomenon [1]. The increase in the diagnosis of ASD is associated both with the expansion of diagnostic criteria and with the increased awareness of specialists and parents. The presence of a child with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) significantly influences the emotional and psychological climate within families. Research consistently indicates that parents of children with ASD experience heightened levels of stress and psychological distress, which can adversely affect family dynamics. Lapwood et al. [1] systematically reviewed the association between emotional and behavioral problems (EBP) in children with ASD and parental mental health, revealing a strong link between children's behavioral challenges and increased parental stress and psychological issues. This suggests that the child's ASD-related behaviors directly impact the emotional well-being of caregivers, contributing to a more strained family environment.

The appearance of a child with ASD in the family significantly changes its way of life, value system, and emotional-psychological climate. The family becomes a key link in the process of socialisation, education, and corrective-developmental support of the child, while simultaneously experiencing increased psychological, emotional, and social stress [2]. Research shows that parents of children with ASD more frequently experience chronic stress, anxiety, and emotional burnout compared to parents of neurotypical children and children with other forms of developmental disorders [3].

The problem becomes particularly significant in the context of intra-family relationships. The diagnosis of ASD affects spousal interaction, the distribution of roles and responsibilities, parenting

style, and the emotional atmosphere in the family. In some cases, there is an increase in conflict, social isolation of the family, and a limitation of external social contacts [4]. At the same time, modern research emphasises that with adequate support and resources, a family can demonstrate a high level of adaptation, resilience, and cohesion [5].

Despite the significant number of foreign studies, the issue of the impact of a child with ASD on the emotional and psychological climate of the family remains insufficiently systematised in domestic scientific literature and requires further analysis. This necessitates the generalisation of existing scientific approaches and the identification of key factors determining the nature of family adaptation. The aim of this article is to analyse the impact of a child with ASD on the emotional and psychological climate of the family.

Literature review

Ekas et al. [6] further emphasize that parents of children with ASD often face increased stress and poorer psychological well-being, highlighting the importance of addressing family members' needs. The study underscores that parental psychological health is crucial, as it influences how parents interact with their children, thereby affecting the overall family climate. Similarly, Maqbool et al. [11] provide a phenomenological perspective, illustrating how emotional dynamics and structural constraints shape caregiving experiences, which can intensify emotional strain within the family unit.

The impact of ASD on family well-being is also evident during extraordinary circumstances such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Laufer et al. [8] compare the quality of life (QoL) of parents of children with ASD to those with other disabilities, finding that the pandemic exacerbated existing challenges, thereby further deteriorating the emotional climate. Papadopoulos [9] and [10] explore mental health and psychological distress among caregivers during the pandemic, revealing that the added stressors significantly affect caregivers' mental health, which in turn influences family interactions and cohesion.

Sleep disturbances in children with ASD are another factor contributing to family stress. Papadopoulos et al. [7] focus on interventions aimed at improving sleep, recognizing that sleep problems in children can disrupt family routines and increase parental stress levels. The disruption of daily routines and increased caregiving demands can create a cycle of emotional strain, further destabilizing the family environment.

Coping strategies and family resilience are also critical in managing the emotional impact of ASD. Bagale et al. [13] explore how parents develop coping mechanisms to handle the challenges associated with raising a child with ASD, which can mitigate some of the negative effects on family emotional climate. Similarly, Salama et al. [12] highlight caregivers' perspectives on healthcare experiences, indicating that positive healthcare interactions can alleviate some emotional burdens and improve family well-being.

Methods and Materials

The study employed methods of theoretical analysis and synthesis of scientific literature, comparative analysis of domestic and foreign research, as well as elements of systemic and interdisciplinary approaches [4]. The material for the research consisted of publications in the fields of family psychology, special education, and clinical psychology. In summary, the literature demonstrates that raising a child with ASD profoundly affects the emotional and psychological climate of families. Increased parental stress, behavioral challenges, sleep disturbances, and external stressors such as the COVID-19 pandemic collectively contribute to a more strained family environment. Addressing these issues through targeted interventions and support systems is essential to fostering a healthier family dynamic and improving overall well-being.

Results and their discussion

The birth or diagnosis of a child with ASD is often accompanied by a shock reaction, anxiety, and a sense of uncertainty among parents [5]. The emotional and psychological climate of the family may be characterised by an increased level of stress, conflict, and emotional distance between spouses. At the same time, in some families, there is an increase in cohesion and a redistribution of roles. Social support, parental awareness, and access to corrective services are of significant importance [6]. Negative factors include social isolation, financial difficulties, and emotional burnout, while positive factors include the development of tolerance, empathy, and family resilience.

Conclusion

The conducted analysis of scientific sources allows us to conclude that the presence of a child with an autism spectrum disorder in the family has a complex and multifaceted impact on its emotional and psychological climate. The diagnosis of ASD transforms the usual system of family relationships, increasing the emotional burden on parents and altering the distribution of roles and responsibilities. It has been established that the most vulnerable aspects of family functioning are the emotional state of the parents, the level of parental stress, and the quality of spousal interaction. Prolonged psycho-emotional stress, lack of social support, and limited access to specialised assistance can contribute to the development of emotional burnout and family maladaptation. At the same time, the analysis shows that the influence of a child with ASD is not exclusively negative. With awareness, psychological assistance, and support from specialists and the social environment, the family can develop effective coping strategies, demonstrate increased cohesion, foster empathy, and enhance resilience to stress. Thus, a child with an autism spectrum disorder has a multifaceted impact on the emotional and psychological climate of the family. This influence can be either destabilising or resourceful depending on the conditions and support. Comprehensive psychological support programs are needed, aimed at reducing stress and strengthening the family's adaptive resources.

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