

Researchers find link between maternal satisfaction and involvement of autistic children in daily activities

16 February 2016



Mothers of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) often experience stress and suffer from sleep deprivation. Sacrifices almost always follow as they abandon professional careers and personal ambitions, believing that care for their children "comes first."

But is maternal abandonment of aspirations and interests really beneficial for the ASD child? A new Tel Aviv University study finds that a mother's positive attitude to involvement in [everyday activities](#) and a sense of competency in the performance of parental tasks accounts for a significant proportion of her [children's](#) successful participation in day-to-day activities.

The research was led jointly by Dr. Orit Bart and Dr. Michal Avrech Bar of the Department of Occupational Therapy at the Stanley Steyer School of Health Professions at TAU's Sackler Faculty of Medicine, and conducted by TAU master's student Limor Shelef. It was published in

the journal *Research in Autism Spectrum Disorders*.

Like mother, like child

"The study has shown that when a mother feels competent and productive, she performs better as a mother," said Dr. Bart, who has been conducting ASD research for 10 years. "This satisfaction is as important for children as it is for [mothers](#) themselves. If a mother engages every day in a variety of personal and professional occupations and gains a sense of personal satisfaction from that engagement, this alone positively affects her child's participation in everyday activities.

"Our intention was to determine what might improve ASD children's participation in everyday activities from showering and brushing teeth to after-school activities and playing with friends," Dr. Bart said. "We focused on a unique perspective—the relationship between the mother's participation and her child's participation."

Dr. Bart and Dr. Avrech Bar, whose specialty is motherhood and maternal health, created a model of child participation that included first and foremost the severity of autism and then several variables connected to the mother, i.e. maternal "self-efficacy" (i.e., how competent she feels as a mother).

The researchers invited 30 mothers of children with ASD and 30 mothers of children aged 4-6 with typical development to participate in the study. The mothers completed questionnaires regarding their children's participation in life, their own active participation in life, and their sense of maternal self-efficacy. While the severity of autism was found to be a predictor in 20 percent of child participation, a significant proportion—30 percent—was found to correlate with a mother's robust participation in life

and high sense of self-efficacy.

Take time for yourself

"Our conclusions are clear," said Dr. Avrech Bar. "Mothers need to focus on themselves, to take care of themselves—their own careers, education, and leisure. Don't give up your own interests and occupational aspirations. This might adversely affect your own health and well-being and your child's. There is a clear lesson here: If you participate meaningfully in life, it is likely that your child will participate too."

The researchers are currently preparing a family-centered approach to ASD intervention that includes close attention to mothers' self-efficacy and participation in a variety of activities to promote their children's participation.

"Today the mother is still the main caregiver but this is starting to change," said Dr. Bart. "Intuitively, I believe this kind of research may benefit fathers as well."

Provided by Tel Aviv University

APA citation: Researchers find link between maternal satisfaction and involvement of autistic children in daily activities (2016, February 16) retrieved 24 January 2021 from

<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2016-02-link-maternal-satisfaction-involvement-autistic.html>

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