



# Hardiness as a Factor of Resilience in Parents of Children with ASD

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## Introduction:

- Individuals with ASD experience difficulties related to a range of core and associated features of the disorder that impact them in various ways daily.<sup>1</sup>
- Parents of children with ASD exhibit higher levels of parental stress, which is associated with outcomes like anxiety and depression, which might result in less effective and/or appropriate parenting practices<sup>2</sup>. *Thus, it is important to identify parent-related factors of resilience that might mitigate some of stress related to caring for a child with ASD.*
- A possible factor of resilience not yet examined as it relates to parenting stress is that of hardiness, or “dispositional resilience”. Components of hardiness include:
  - Control** over life events
  - Commitment** to relationships and meaningful events
  - Challenge**, or perceiving *events* as a challenge rather than a threat.<sup>3</sup>

*The present study investigates the relationship between parental stress and hardiness in a sample of parent-child dyads with ASD.*

## Method:

- Participants:** Participants ( $N = 35$ ) were parents of children diagnosed with ASD. (See Table 1)
- Procedure:** Data were collected from an outpatient clinic in the southeast United States. Parents of children who presented for a diagnostic evaluation completed a battery of parent-report measures. Parents were given the option to allow their measures to be used for research as well as clinical purposes and assured that this decision had no bearing on the clinical assessment. Research and clinical assistants were available to answer questions as needed.
- Measures**
  - Parental Stress.** The Parental Stress Scale (PSS) measures the degrees to which respondents endorse parental stress. Higher scores indicate more parental stress.<sup>4</sup>
  - Hardiness.** The Hardiness-45 scale measures dispositional resilience. Higher scores indicate more hardiness.<sup>5</sup>
  - Severity of Autism Symptoms.** The Autism Spectrum Rating Scale (ASRS) measures symptoms associated with ASD. The Total T-Score was used to represent ASD symptom severity.<sup>6</sup>
  - Child Behavior.** The Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL) yields standardized scores of behavioral and emotional functioning in children.<sup>7</sup>

Table 1

### Sample Demographics

Child Variables	Mean (SD)
Age	5.24 (2.81)
Autism Symptom Severity*	69.08 (6.96)
Internalizing & Externalizing Behavior**	64.04 (9.99)
Parent Variables	
Parental Stress	31.96 (9.30)
Total Hardiness	25.35 (2.10)

\*ASRS T-Score (Elevated range)

\*\*CBCL T-Score (Borderline range)

Table 2

### Bivariate Correlations Among Study Variables ( $N=36$ )

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Parental Stress	-					
2. Total Hardiness	-.42*	-				
3. Commitment	-.47**	.92**	-			
4. Control	-.26	.92**	.86**	-		
5. Challenge	-.22	.30	-.01	.07	-	
6. ASD Symptom Severity	.31*	-.29*	-.24	-.14	-.03	-
7. Child Behavior Problems	.36*	-.22	-.29*	-.26	.08	

\* $p < .05$  \*\*  $p < .01$

Table 3

### Results of Stepwise Multiple Regression

Step	Predictor	$\beta$	$p$	$F$	$p$	$R^2$	$\Delta R^2$
1				2.51	.10	.13	.13
	Autism Symptom Severity	.31	.75				
	Child Behavior Problems	.07	.18				
2				5.49	<.01	.42	.29
	Autism Symptom Severity	.24	.44				
	Child Behavior Problems	.15	.21				
	Hardiness Commitment	-.74	<.01**				
	Hardiness Control	-.48	.06				
	Hardiness Challenge	.22	.12				

DV = Parental Stress

## Results:

- Descriptive Statistics:** Children presented with clinically elevated levels of ASD symptoms and borderline clinical levels of internalizing and externalizing behavior problems. Parents reported average levels of parental stress compared to samples of parents of children with various neurodevelopmental disorders reported in the literature.<sup>8</sup> However, they reported less hardiness than normative samples.<sup>9</sup>
- Bivariate Correlations.** *Correlations represented in Table 2.*
- Regression Analyses:** A multivariate stepwise regression analysis was performed to examine relations between parental stress and factors of hardiness – control, commitment, and challenge. The overall regression model was significant ( $F(5, 30) = 4.71, p < .01$ ). ASD symptom severity and child behavior problems were independently associated with the outcome variable, and thus were considered covariates in the present analysis. They were included in Step 1 of the model to allow the effects of these factors to be controlled for statistically. Study variables of interest – control, commitment, and challenge – were included in the Step 2 of the model. The inclusion of these independent variables resulted in a change in  $R^2$  to .40 and a significant  $F$  change ( $p < .01$ ), as well. When estimated simultaneously and even after accounting for the child’s autism symptom severity and possible behavior problems, the hardiness domain of *commitment* emerged as a significant predictor of parental stress ( $\beta = -1.67, p = .03$ ).

## Discussion:

- In the present study we assessed the protective factor of hardiness and how it serves as a buffer for parental stress. Results from the multiple regression analyses suggest that the three dimensions of hardiness were an important constituent in predicting levels of parental stress.
- Furthermore, *commitment* was associated with the least amount of parental stress.
- With these results in mind, it is important to note that social support is a large contributor to improving parental stress.
- These findings further suggest the utility of incorporating hardiness into parent supports in the ASD population, but given the broad phenotype of ASD, this makes it more difficult for individuals to connect and get support and/or treatment.
- Future research is needed to assess the longitudinal effectiveness of incorporating hardiness into parent supports.