
Coping Strategies in Community Integration: The Case of Hong Kong Parents of Preschoolers with Autism

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Background

- The normalization principle (Nirje, 1993)
 - “Making available to the mentally retarded patterns and conditions of everyday life which are as close as possible to the norms and patterns of the mainstream of society”
 - Rooted in the concepts of **equality**, **quality of life** and **human rights**

Background

- Previous research on community integration
 - Adolescents with mental retardation were less likely to engage in community activities (e.g. shopping, watching movies, etc.) (Bramston, Bruggerman, & Pretty, 2002)
 - Watching television and listening to the radio are the most common leisure activities for individuals with mental or physical disabilities (Modell, Rider, & Menchetti, 1997)

Background

- Previous research on community integration of children with developmental disabilities
 - Mostly focused on integration in the classroom settings (Beckman et al., 1998)
 - Research on integration in other community settings (e.g. transportation, shopping places, health care settings, recreational activities) were lacking

Background

- Community involvement may be especially important among young individuals with special needs as their identities were still forming (Kampert & Goreczny, 2006)
- Social skills developed at a young age were important throughout life (Modell & Valdez, 2002).

Background

- Marked difficulties encountered by children with ASD and their parents in community activities due to their unique features (Rutter & Schopler, 1987)
- Families of children with ASD reported more stress than families of children with other etiology (Sanders & Morgan, 1997).

Purpose

- To investigate what ***coping strategies*** parents of preschoolers with autism used to cope with community integration
- To get to know how these strategies were related to parents' ***perceptions*** of community integration and their ***willingness*** to take their children out for community activities

Participants

- 380 Hong Kong parents of children with ASD
- 22 special preschool centers operated by Heep Hong Society
- Response rate: 81.80%
- Ratio between boys and girls in their children with autism: 9 to 1
- Mean age of children: 4.45 years old ($SD = .97$)

Participants

Relationship with the child

Mother	Father	Grandparents and others
82.3%	16.6%	1.1%

Educational background

Primary or below	Secondary	Tertiary or above
7.1%	64.9%	28.0%

Job

Full-time job	Part-time job	No job
45.1%	9.2%	45.7%

Measures

- Willingness in the participation of community activities
 - Four self-constructed items (e.g., “It is my pleasure to take my child to community activities.” “I enjoy going out with my child.”)
 - 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (disagree strongly) to 4 (agree strongly)
 - Cronbach’s alpha = .86

Measures

- Emotions in the participation of community activities
 - Adapted from the Emotional Functioning Scale (Diener, Smith, & Fujita, 1995)
 - 5 clusters of emotions and each cluster consists of three emotions
 - Joy (positive emotions)
 - Fear, Anger, Shame, and Sadness (negative emotions)
 - 7-point scale ranging from 1 (never) to 7 (always)
 - Cronbach's alphas
 - Positive emotions = .73
 - Negative emotions = .91

Measures

- Importance of community activities
 - 25 community activities generated from the pilot study (which parents identified as frequent, important, but difficult)
 - Classified into 5 domains (Wehman, 2006):
 - Shopping (e.g. shopping at wet market)
 - Restaurants (e.g. dining at Chinese restaurant)
 - Transportation and mobility (e.g. taking public bus, riding on elevator)
 - Health and personal care (e.g. seeing dentist, having hair cut at barber shop)
 - Leisure and recreation (e.g. going to library, watching movie in cinema)

Measures

- Importance of community activities
 - 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (not important) to 4 (very important)
 - Cronbach's alphas:
 - Shopping =.77
 - Restaurants =.81
 - Transportation and mobility =.83
 - Health and personal care =.64
 - Leisure and recreation =.74
 - Five domain scores =.90

Measures

- Difficulty in the participation of community activities
 - 25 community activities as with the previous section
 - 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (not difficult) to 4 (very difficult)
 - Cronbach's alphas:
 - Shopping =.79
 - Restaurants =.85
 - Transportation and mobility =.81
 - Health and personal care =.70
 - Leisure and recreation =.71
 - Five domain scores =.87

Measures

- Use of coping strategies
 - 24 coping strategies as generated from the focus group of the pilot study
 - 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (never) to 4 (always)
 - Principal-component factor analysis
 - six items were removed from further data analyses (1 had factor loading less than .35 on any of the 4 factors and 5 had factor loading more than .35 on more than 1 factor)
 - 4 factors emerged, accounting for 40.63% of the variance

Factor 1: Use of active strategies

Coping Strategies	Factor 1	Frequency
Share feelings with other parents	.589	2.60 (.94)
Enroll my child in community integration training programs	.552	3.06 (.91)
Seek help and support from professionals	.542	2.73 (.99)
Prepare preventive measures so as to minimize possible difficulties (e.g., bring books or food that my child likes, explain the activities to my child in advance)	.522	3.37 (.83)
Cultivate good habits in my child since early days	.522	3.15 (.76)
Take my child out more often so as to strengthen his/her experience	.513	3.50 (.66)
Participate in training activities so as to equip myself with better skills	.493	2.91 (.93)
Use some simple skills (e.g., explain the reasons, be firm, praise my child)	.477	3.48 (.68)
Seek help and support from family	.458	2.88 (.98)
Leave the scene immediately	.433	2.30 (.94)
Ignore the negative comments from the public	.423	2.12 (1.02)

Factor 2: Use of avoidant strategies

Coping Strategies	Factor 2	Frequency
Take my child out less often	.553	1.64 (.79)
Blaming myself for my inability to guide and teach my child	.525	2.20 (.93)
Give in to my child and satisfy his/her demands	.480	2.60 (.77)
Go to places that not many people visit	.424	2.45 (1.03)

Factor 3: Use of complaints

Coping Strategies	Factor 3	Frequency
Lodge complaints to the people and authorities in concern	.577	1.41 (.74)
Attribute my child's problems to the bias of the public	.395	1.43 (.68)

Factor 4: Use of positive self-talk

Coping Strategies	Factor 4	Frequency
Talk to myself that I am able to handle the problem	.516	2.69 (.91)

Results

Variables	Mean	Range
1. Willingness	3.36 (.60)	1.00 – 4.00
2. Positive Emotion	4.58 (1.20)	1.00 – 7.00
3. Negative Emotion	2.81 (1.09)	1.00 – 6.25
4. Importance	3.01 (.59)	1.00 – 4.00
5. Difficulty	1.90 (.56)	1.00 – 3.48
6. Active Strategies	2.91 (.47)	1.00 – 3.91
7. Avoidant Strategies	2.22 (.57)	1.00 – 4.00
8. Complaints	1.43 (.57)	1.00 – 4.00
9. Positive Self Talk	2.69 (.91)	1.00 – 4.00

Note: Numbers in parentheses are standard deviations

Results

■ Importance and Difficulty of Community Activities

Domain	Activity	Importance	Difficulty
Shopping	Shopping at toy store	2.54 (.94)	1.81 (.86)
	Shopping at super market	3.14 (.87)	1.67 (.80)
	Shopping at wet market	2.65 (1.04)	1.99 (1.00)
	Shopping at shopping mall	2.91 (.96)	1.83 (.90)
	Shopping at shoes store	2.88 (.94)	1.95 (.97)
	Shopping in average	2.82 (.69)	1.85 (.67)
Restaurants	Dinning at fast food restaurant	2.96 (.92)	1.81 (.89)
	Dinning at Chinese restaurant	2.95 (.89)	1.88 (.93)
	Dinning at café	3.00 (.91)	1.87 (.92)
	Restaurants in average	2.97 (.78)	1.85 (.80)

Results

■ Importance and Difficulty of Community Activities

Domain	Activity	Importance	Difficulty
Transportation and mobility	Crossing a road	3.68 (.67)	1.67 (.89)
	Taking public bus	3.23 (.93)	1.41 (.69)
	Taking taxi	2.51 (1.03)	1.20 (.50)
	Riding on metro	3.14 (.94)	1.53 (.80)
	Riding on elevator	3.16 (.97)	1.38 (.70)
	Taking a flight on airplane	2.42 (1.13)	2.06 (1.11)
	Riding on escalator	3.17 (.93)	1.40 (.66)
	Transportation and mobility in average	3.06 (.67)	1.48 (.51)

Results

■ Importance and Difficulty of Community Activities

Domain	Activity	Importance	Difficulty
Health and personal care	Seeing physician	3.49 (.75)	1.71 (.91)
	Seeing dentist	3.24 (.98)	3.00 (1.21)
	Having hair cut at barber shop	3.02 (1.02)	2.68 (1.23)
	Using public toilet	3.36 (.90)	1.78 (.98)
	Health and personal care in average	3.28 (.66)	2.17 (.82)
Leisure and recreation	Going to library	2.78 (.93)	2.47 (1.07)
	Watching movie in cinema	2.17 (1.04)	2.70 (1.12)
	Taking photographs at studio	2.59 (.96)	2.59 (1.13)
	Playing in playground	3.48 (.78)	1.61 (.82)
	Visiting friends and relatives	3.11 (.91)	1.80 (.90)
	Swimming in beach or public swimming pool	3.03 (.95)	1.84 (.94)
	Leisure and recreation in average	2.88 (.65)	2.13 (.66)

Results

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Willingness	--								
2. Positive Emotion	.39**	--							
3. Negative Emotion	-.31**	-.39**	--						
4. Importance	.16**	.15**	.13*	--					
5. Difficulty	-.30**	-.37**	.44**	.03	--				
6. Active Strategies	.19**	.14**	.10*	.33**	.02	--			
7. Avoidant Strategies	-.29**	-.24**	.46**	.02	.43**	.13*	--		
8. Complaints	-.01	.03	.14**	.04	.05	.13*	.24**	--	
9. Positive Self Talk	.21**	.18**	.02	.17**	-.10	-.36**	-.04	.09	--

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Results

- Coping strategies and willingness
 - Multiple regression [$F(4, 348) = 18.14, p < .001$]
 - Predicted positively by their ***use of active strategies*** ($\beta = .21, p < .001$) and ***positive self talk*** ($\beta = .13, p < .05$); and
 - Predicted negatively by the ***use of avoidant strategies*** ($\beta = -.34, p < .001$)

Results

- Coping strategies and positive emotions
 - Multiple regression [$F(4, 352) = 9.52, p < .001$]
 - Predicted positively by their ***use of active strategies*** ($\beta = .13, p < .05$) and ***positive self talk*** ($\beta = .12, p < .05$); and
 - Predicted negatively by the ***use of avoidant strategies*** ($\beta = -.26, p < .001$)

Results

- Coping strategies and negative emotions
 - Multiple regression [$F(4, 350) = 26.10, p < .001$]
 - Predicted positively by their ***use of avoidant strategies*** ($\beta = .47, p < .001$)

Discussion

- Resilience within parents of children with ASD
- A closer look at the perceived importance and the difficulty encountered by parents of children with ASD
- Coping strategies and its relations with perceived importance and the difficulty encountered by parents of children with ASD
 - ↑ perceived importance
→ active strategies & positive self talk
 - ↑ difficulties encountered
→ avoidant strategies

Implications

- Educational programs for parents
 - Effective strategies in community integration (especially on Health and Personal Care & Leisure and Recreation)
 - Stress coping and emotional management
 - Active coping strategies
 - Positive self talk

Implications

- Educational programs for children with ASD
 - Social stories on preparing children in engaging in important community activities (e.g. on Health and Personal Care & Leisure and Recreation)
 - Role plays

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