

DIFFERENCES IN PARENT BURDEN AND MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS IN YOUTH WITH DD ACROSS AGES

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Background

- Individuals with developmental disabilities (DD) have a significantly higher risk for developing mental health problems than typically developing peers (Emerson & Hatton, 2007).
- Some studies have found that comorbid mental health problems in young people with DD persist as children age (Einfeld et. al, 2006), while others have reported higher rates of certain disorders in younger children (Emerson, 2003).
- Mental health problems can have a negative impact on both the individual with DD, as well as families, and can place additional burden on caregivers (Maes, Broekman, Dosen, & Nauts, 2003).
- Caregivers play a pivotal role in supporting youth with DD, and it is important for us to better understand how the experience of burden may differ depending on the child's age and mental health.

Objective

This poster examines the presence of mental health problems among children, youth, and adolescents with DD and compares the experiences of parental burden in parents across the age groups.

Methods

- GO4KIDDS is a Canadian team project funded by CIHR, exploring the health, wellbeing, and social inclusion of school aged children with severe DD and that of their parents.
- Data was collected from 267 parents raising a child with DD between the ages of 5 and 19 through an online survey (M = 11 years, SD = 3.59).

Measures

- Parents reported on the frequency of overall mental health problems in their children (never, monthly, weekly, daily, hourly).
- Level of parental burden was measured using the Caregiver Burden subscale from the Revised Caregiver Appraisal Scales (Lawton, Kleban, Moss, Rovine & Glicksman, 2000). There were nine items on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), $\alpha = .922$.
- Individuals with DD were divided into three separate age groups for comparisons. See Table 1 for the age range, sample size and percentage of males in each group.

Table 1

Age Group	Age Range	N	% Male
Child	5 ≤ 8.9 years	88	80.7
Youth	9 ≤ 11.9 years	74	63.5
Adolescent	12 ≤ 19 years	100	66.0
Total	5 ≤ 19 years	267	70.2

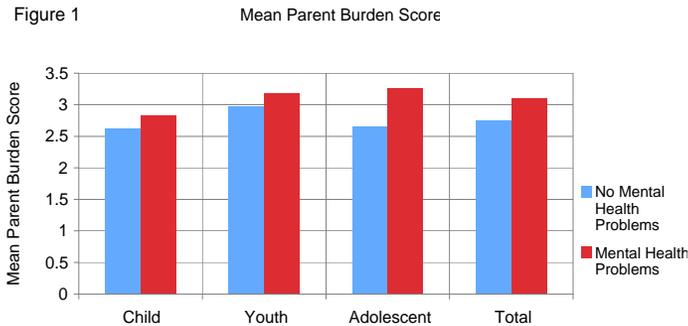
Results

Age Differences in Presence of Mental Health Problems

- To examine the relationship among presence of mental health problems and age group, a chi-squared test of independence was calculated.
- There was no significant differences among age groups in terms of the presence of mental health problems, $F(2,252) = 1.870, p = .156$. Mental health problems were reported in 55% of children, 53% of youth and 66% of adolescents.

Parent Burden and the Effects of Age and Mental Health Problems

- A two way ANOVA was run to examine the effects of age group and the presence of mental health problems on parent burden. The mean parent burden scores for the this ANOVA are presented in Figure 1.



- There was significant main effects for age, $F(2, 247) = 3.10, p = .047$, and for the presence of mental health problems (yes / no), $F(1, 247) = 8.65, p = .004$, but no significant interaction.
- Post hoc analyses revealed that parents of children report significantly less burden than parents of youth or of adolescents (both $p = .02$).
- Individuals with mental health problems had parents who reported significantly more parent burden.

Results

Predicting Parental Burden

- A multiple regression was calculated to test if parent burden could be predicted by child age and frequency of mental health problems. Gender was also added to the model to control for its effect.
- A small but significant amount the variance (adjusted 5%) in parent burden was explained by child gender, age group and frequency of mental health problems, $F(3,248) 5.269, p = .002$.
- Frequency of mental health problems significantly predicted parent burden, ($\beta = .205, p = .001$) while gender ($\beta = -.021, p = .74$) did not. There was a trend for child age ($\beta = .119, p = .06$).

Discussion

- These findings highlight the unique challenges faced by parents as children grow older and approach adulthood.
- Results suggest that parents of youth and adolescents experience higher levels of burden compared to parents of children.
- There was no significant differences in the presence of mental health problems across the age groups. In this study, adolescents, youth and children experienced similar rates of mental health problems. However, rates of mental health problems were much higher than anticipated, particularly for adolescents.
- These mental health problems significantly predicted parental burden. Consistent with past research, mental health problems can impact the family and family well-being can impact child mental health (Hastings, 2002).
- Future research should explore potential protective factors against parental burden and consider how this varies throughout the developmental course.

Acknowledgments

Data for this study were collected as part of the CIHR Team: GO4KIDDS: Great Outcomes for Kids Impacted by Severe Developmental Disabilities, Nominated Principal Investigator: Adrienne Perry, York University. (www.go4kidds.ca)