Behavioral Problems in Children with Epilepsy, and Parenting Stress and Parenting Styles of their Mothers

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Abstract

Background: The first objective of the present study was to evaluate the psychological and behavioral characteristics of children with epilepsy. The second objective was to study the maternal stress associated with parenting these children; the third was to study their mothers’ parenting styles and finally, studying the relation between these elements.

Method: In the present case-control study convenient sampling was used. Mothers of children aged 3 to 7 years old with an established diagnosis of epilepsy for at least 1 year without other neurological or medical disorders or mental retardation were selected from child neurology clinics in Mashhad, Iran. The diagnosis of epilepsy was made by a child neurologist. Mothers with the history of major psychiatric disorders and chronic medical conditions were excluded from the study. A control group consisting of healthy children from Mashhad kindergartens was formed. The group members were matched with epileptic children terms of age and sex. Eligible participants were 30 epileptic children and 30 healthy children along with their mothers. Strengths & Difficulties Questionnaires (SDQ), Parenting Stress Index (PSI), Parenting Style Questionnaire (PSQ) and a demographic questionnaire were used for data collection.

Results: Mothers of children with epilepsy had higher levels of parenting stress (in both parent and child domains) compared to the other group (P <0.001). Parents with epileptic children scored higher on permissive and authoritarian parenting scales. However, the score was lower for authoritative parenting style in comparison with the scores of the control group. In general, these differences did not reach a significant level (P>0.05). Children with epilepsy had significantly higher scores than normal children in terms of emotional symptoms, conduct problems, hyperactivity, and (hence, the total difficulty score (P<0.05).

Discussion: Educational and psychological programs aimed at enhancing adjustment of parents with their children's epilepsy are greatly needed.

Key words: epilepsy, children, behavioral problems, parenting stress, parenting style