

- 🌀 **Name of the study:** The Relationship Between Perceived Parental Efficacy and the Caregiving System and Perceptions of Mothers of Adolescents with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Regarding Sexuality and Relationships
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Abstract

Human sexuality is a universal human need that finds its expression in all areas of life. Sexual health education continues throughout the life cycle and involves children, parents, the education system, the electronic media, and others. Despite its importance, sexual health education can often pose challenges or trigger embarrassment among parents and educators who deal with adolescents, and especially adolescents with intellectual disabilities. The premise of Belsky's parenting model (1984) is that parenting is influenced by personal traits, abilities and perceptions. A parent's caregiving system, by definition, may prompt support and protection of the child in matters relating to sexuality based on a greater sense of parental efficacy and the desire to be a good parent. The present study examined the relationship between characteristics of caregiving systems of mothers of adolescents with intellectual and developmental disabilities and parental efficacy, and the relationship between these variables and mothers' attitudes toward the sexuality and relationships of their adolescent children.

Parenting abilities as well as attitudes towards adolescent sexuality are constantly challenged when caring daily for a child with intellectual and developmental disabilities. In addition to having general opinions on the subject, it seems that some parents are unaware that their child is sexually active and therefore avoid broaching the subject.

The present study was conducted using a quantitative methodology. The sample included 150 mothers (aged 34-60) of adolescents (aged 12-21) with intellectual and developmental disabilities who learn in the nation-wide special education system. The mothers filled out four questionnaires: a demographic questionnaire; a parental efficacy questionnaire; a caregiving questionnaire (consisting of two dimensions: an anxiety dimension and an avoidance dimension); and a questionnaire about parental attitudes towards their child's sexuality.

The research findings show that the perception of parental competence was found to be associated with a moderately significant negative relationship with the dimension of anxiety in the Caregiving system. In addition, it was found that the perception of parental competence was found to have a moderately significant positive relationship with mothers' attitudes about sexuality and relationships. Moderately significant positive relationships were also found between the perception of parental competence and the sub-dimensions of the attitudes of motherhood, adolescence, intimacy, and singleness. The research findings show that the dimension of avoidance in the caregiving system is associated with a distinct negative relationship with mothers' attitudes about sexuality.

Findings also indicate a significant negative association between the avoidance dimension in the caregiving system and mothers' attitudes on sexuality. In addition, significant and weak negative associations between the sub-dimensions puberty and singleness and the avoidance dimension were found. Moreover, a significant, weak negative association was found between the sub-dimension of intimacy and the anxiety dimension. The research findings did not support our hypothesis pertaining to associations between perceived parental efficacy and the avoidance dimension. In addition, no association was found between mothers' attitudes to sexuality and relationships and the anxiety dimension. The research findings did not support the hypothesis that perceived parental efficacy is a mediating variable; rather they indicate that it is a variable that stands on its own.

The current study contributes to a better understanding of the relationship between parental traits and the way parents cope with their child's sexual health education. This new knowledge will enable educational counselors to develop targeted intervention and prevention programs designed to enrich knowledge in the field of sexual health for people with disabilities; help parents cope with the pressures of raising an adolescent with disabilities; increase parental efficacy; help parents cope with behavior problems; assist in the development of a supportive social network, etc.

Keywords

Belsky's Ecological Model; the caregiving system; parental efficacy; sexuality; adolescents with intellectual and developmental disabilities; educational counseling.

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