

CAREGIVER BURDEN AND DEPRESSION IN PARENTS RAISING CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

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The purposes of this comparative, descriptive study were to examine mother's and father's perceptions of caregiver burden and depression when raising children with a disability. Specifically, the study sought to determine: (1) the relationship (connection) between depression and caregiver burden; (2) if differences in depression and caregiver burden exist according to parent gender; and (3) if there is a difference in depression and caregiver burden in parents raising children with different kinds of disabilities (autism, Down syndrome, other disabilities). Data from 114 fathers and 120 mothers indicated parents were depressed rarely or some of the time, sometimes experienced caregiver burden, and sometimes felt there was a hassle associated with caring for their child. On the other hand, they felt sometimes and a lot of the time that they were not burdened in caring for their child. Mothers rated themselves higher for depression, frequency of burden, and hassle of burden than fathers. Mother's and father's frequency of burden and hassle of burden were related to depression in the expected direction. Parents of children with autism rated themselves higher for mother's/father's frequency of burden and father's hassle of burden than parents of children with Down syndrome or other developmental disabilities. Findings suggest these parents were handling their situation fairly well. However, interventions including support groups for families raising children with disabilities that allow information sharing, contact with each other, and learning more about their child's condition may help ease caregiver burden and depression, and assist parents choose healthy coping strategies and adjust. Besides providing an emotional outlet for parents, support groups can also provide opportunities for building relationships leading to help with caregiving. In addition, providing respite for these families, especially mothers, may also alleviate the stress and associated impact on well being.

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