CAREGIVING PATTERNS IN ADULT INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS AS PREDICTORS OF COHESION AND COMMUNICATION IN COUPLES WITH CHILDREN DIAGNOSED WITH AN AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER

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Background and aims: Parental couples are greatly impacted when a child is diagnosed with an autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Parents of children with ASD experience lower functioning of the family as a whole, lower family adaptability and cohesion, and a lack of warmth and connection. However, a partner’s ability and willingness to respond sensitively and responsively to a relationship partner are major determinants of relationship quality, stability, and satisfaction. The aim of this study is to examine perceptions of caregiving patterns (proximity and sensitivity) in adult intimate relationships and family functioning (cohesion and communication) of fathers with children diagnosed with an ASD.

Methods: Two hundred (200) fathers of children with ASD between 4 and 7 years of age completed the Caregiving Questionnaire to assess proximity and sensitivity as caregiving patterns and the FACES IV to assess cohesion and communication in the family system.

Results: The project is currently in the stage of data entry. It is expected that higher levels of proximity and sensitivity caregiving (and lower levels of controlling and compulsive caregiving) provided by the father to his partner will be associated with high levels of cohesion and communication in the marital couple.

Conclusions: Findings will be discussed with reference to Family Systems Theory and Attachment Theory.