

Research Paper

## The Effectiveness of Parent Counseling in Reducing Parental Burnout Among Caregivers of Children with ADHD and ASD

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### ABSTRACT

Parental burnout is a prevalent issue among caregivers of children with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), driven by the unique caregiving demands these conditions entail. This study evaluates the effectiveness of a two-and-a-half-month parent counseling program in reducing burnout among 12 parents—7 of children with ASD and 5 of children with ADHD. A mixed-methods approach assessed parental burnout through pre- and post-intervention Parental Burnout Inventory (PBI) scores and qualitative interviews. Results indicated a significant reduction in burnout levels, with mean PBI scores dropping from 78.4 to 45.6. Parents of children with ADHD exhibited faster improvements, likely due to the immediate applicability of behavioral strategies. Qualitative insights revealed enhanced understanding of the child's condition, improved emotional regulation, and strengthened parent-child relationships. The findings underscore the importance of tailored counseling interventions in mitigating parental stress and fostering healthier family dynamics.

**Keywords:** Parental burnout, ADHD, Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), parent counseling, neurodevelopmental disorders, stress management, behavioral strategies, emotional regulation, parent-child relationship, psychoeducation

Parenting is a rewarding yet challenging journey, with unique demands for parents of children diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). These neurodevelopmental disorders often require specialized caregiving, significantly amplifying parental stress levels. Parents frequently face challenges such as managing hyperactive behaviors, handling sensory sensitivities, and navigating social stigma. Over time, these stressors can lead to parental burnout—a state of chronic exhaustion, emotional detachment, and feelings of inadequacy.

Parental burnout not only affects caregivers' mental and physical health but also impacts the well-being and developmental progress of their children. Addressing this issue is critical for fostering a supportive environment that benefits both parents and their children. Parent counseling has emerged as a promising intervention, equipping caregivers with tools to manage stress, understand their child's needs, and enhance family dynamics.

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This study focuses on assessing the effectiveness of structured counseling in reducing parental burnout among parents of children with ADHD and ASD. By exploring the intervention's impact on emotional resilience, stress management, and overall parenting satisfaction, this research aims to contribute to the growing body of literature advocating for targeted parental support programs. Ultimately, it underscores the importance of holistic approaches in promoting the well-being of families facing neurodevelopmental challenges.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Parental burnout has gained increasing attention in recent years, particularly among caregivers of children with neurodevelopmental disorders such as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Studies have highlighted that parents of children with these conditions often experience heightened stress levels compared to parents of neurotypical children. This stress is attributed to the unique challenges associated with managing the behavioral, emotional, and social needs of children with ADHD and ASD (Olsson & Hwang, 2001).

Research by Hastings et al. (2005) emphasized that parental stress is often compounded by societal stigma, lack of support, and limited access to resources. Specifically, parents of children with ASD frequently report difficulties in managing repetitive behaviors, sensory sensitivities, and communication barriers, while parents of children with ADHD face challenges such as hyperactivity, impulsivity, and emotional dysregulation. These factors contribute to emotional exhaustion, reduced parenting efficacy, and strained family dynamics.

Interventions such as parent counseling have demonstrated promising results in mitigating these stressors. According to Crnic and Low (2002), counseling programs focusing on psychoeducation, stress management, and behavioral strategies empower parents to better understand and manage their child's condition. Group counseling and peer support also play a significant role, as they help normalize experiences and reduce feelings of isolation (Pakenham et al., 2004).

Despite these findings, there remains a gap in research comparing the specific outcomes of counseling for parents of children with ADHD versus ASD. This study aims to address this gap, providing insights into tailored counseling interventions for these distinct parenting challenges.

### METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a pretest-posttest experimental design to evaluate the effectiveness of parent counseling in reducing burnout among parents of children with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). The methodology included participant recruitment, intervention design, data collection, and analysis.

#### *Participants*

The study involved 12 parents of children diagnosed with ADHD or ASD, recruited through positive vibes special education and rehabilitation center.

The sample comprised:

- Parents of children with ASD: 7 parents
- Parents of children with ADHD: 5 parents

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## *Inclusion criteria*

1. Parent of a child aged 5–12 years diagnosed with ADHD or ASD.
2. No prior participation in structured counseling programs for the past six months.
3. Willingness to attend all counseling sessions and complete assessments.
4. 4. Parents exhibiting moderate to high levels of parental burnout, as assessed by a pre-screening questionnaire.

## *Exclusion criteria*

1. Parents who have participated in structured parent counseling or similar interventions within the past six months.
2. Parents of Children with additional significant physical disabilities, intellectual disabilities, or psychiatric disorders beyond ADHD or ASD, which may require specialized interventions.
3. Parents with severe psychological or medical conditions that may interfere with participation or outcomes.
4. Parents unable to commit to attending the full duration of the counseling program or completing the required assessments.

## *Intervention Design*

The intervention consisted of a structured parent counseling program conducted over 2.5 months. Sessions were held one weekly, each lasting 60 minutes. The program includes:

1. Psychoeducation: Providing knowledge about ADHD and ASD, focusing on behavioral traits, challenges, and caregiving strategies.
2. Stress Management Techniques: Training in mindfulness, relaxation exercises, and time management.
3. Behavioral Strategies: Teaching positive reinforcement, teaching alternate behaviour, designing routines etc.

## *Data Collection Tools*

Two key instruments were used for data collection:

1. Parental Burnout Inventory (PBI): A standardized tool to measure emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment. Scores were recorded before the intervention and immediately after completion.
2. Qualitative Interviews: Semi-structured interviews explored participants' personal experiences, challenges, and perceived benefits of the counseling program.

## *Procedure*

Participants completed the PBI as a baseline measure before the intervention. Counseling sessions were conducted at a positive vibes special education and rehabilitation center in a supportive, non-judgmental environment. After two and a half months, participants completed the PBI again to measure changes in burnout levels. Additionally, qualitative interviews were conducted with each participant to gain deeper insights into their experiences.

## *Ethical Considerations*

The institutional review board approved the study. All participants provided informed consent, ensuring confidentiality and voluntary participation.

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## *Data Analysis*

Quantitative data from the PBI were analyzed using paired t-tests to assess changes in parental burnout scores before and after the intervention.

## *Limitations*

- The small sample size and relatively short intervention duration may limit the generalizability of findings. Future studies with larger, more diverse populations and longer follow-up periods are recommended.
- By combining quantitative and qualitative methods, this study aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the impact of parent counseling on reducing burnout among caregivers of children with ADHD and ASD.

## **RESULTS**

### *Quantitative Analysis*

The results of the Parental Burnout Inventory (PBI) highlighted significant differences in burnout levels before and after the intervention across both groups of parents. The mean pre-intervention score for the entire sample was 78.4, indicating high levels of parental burnout. This score reflects considerable emotional exhaustion, feelings of depersonalization, and a diminished sense of accomplishment, which are common among parents of children with ADHD and ASD.

After two and a half months of structured counseling, the post-intervention mean score decreased significantly to 45.6, suggesting a marked reduction in burnout. This decline indicates the effectiveness of the intervention in addressing emotional distress and improving the psychological well-being of parents.

The pre- and post-intervention scores for the two groups were analyzed separately to understand the specific impact on parents of children with ADHD versus those of children with ASD. While both groups experienced improvements, parents of children with ADHD demonstrated slightly faster reductions in burnout compared to parents of children with ASD.

### **Parents of Children with ADHD**

The mean pre-intervention score for parents of children with ADHD was 80.2, indicating high levels of burnout. Post-intervention, this score decreased to 47.4, showing a substantial improvement. These parents reported faster emotional regulation and quicker adoption of coping strategies taught during the counseling sessions.

### **Parents of Children with ASD**

The pre-intervention score for parents of children with ASD was slightly lower, at 75.1, but still reflective of significant burnout. Their post-intervention mean score was 43.7, demonstrating a similar level of improvement. However, it was noted that these parents experienced a longer adjustment period in adapting to the behavioral strategies taught in the sessions, which may explain the slight delay in improvement compared to parents of children with ADHD.

Despite the slight differences in the rate of improvement, the findings from the quantitative analysis indicate that the counseling program was effective in reducing parental burnout across both groups.

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## *Qualitative Insights*

In addition to the quantitative data, qualitative interviews provided valuable insights into the personal experiences and perceived benefits of the counseling intervention. Three main themes emerged from the analysis of these interviews:

### **1. Increased Understanding of the Child's Condition**

- A significant benefit highlighted by both groups of parents was the increased understanding of their child's diagnosis and behavior. Parents of children with ADHD and ASD reported that the psychoeducational component of the program was instrumental in demonstrating their child's challenges.
- Parents of children with ADHD noted that learning about ADHD symptoms, such as impulsivity and hyperactivity, helped them reframe their child's behavior as part of the condition rather than personal fault or deliberate misconduct.
- Parents of children with ASD described how learning about sensory sensitivities and communication difficulties made it easier to understand their child's needs and reactions. This enhanced understanding led to greater empathy and reduced frustration when managing challenging behaviors.

### **2. Improved Emotional Regulation**

- Another recurring theme was the improvement in emotional regulation. Many parents reported feeling more equipped to manage their emotions in response to their child's behaviors. The counseling sessions provided practical tools, such as mindfulness exercises, relaxation techniques, and cognitive reframing strategies, which helped parents to de-escalate stressful situations.
- Parents of children with ADHD often find it tough to stay calm when their child acts out or demands attention. Parents learned that they can be more patient and understanding by learning to control their own emotions. This helps them deal with challenging situations more effectively.

Similarly, parents of children with ASD shared that they felt less overwhelmed by their child's meltdowns or repetitive behaviors, as they learned to take a step back and use techniques such as deep breathing and positive self-talk to regain composure.

### **3. Strengthened Parent-Child Relationships**

- The final theme was the improvement in the overall parent-child relationship. Both groups of parents reported that the counseling sessions helped them to adopt more positive and effective parenting strategies, leading to better communication and stronger bonds with their children.
- Parents of children with ADHD noted that behavioral techniques, such as offering praise and rewards for positive behaviors, helped reduce power struggles and fostered a more cooperative relationship.
- Parents of children with ASD reported that implementing visual schedules, sensory breaks, and clear communication strategies created a more predictable and comfortable environment for their child, which, in turn, improved the quality of their interactions.

In summary, the qualitative insights revealed that the counseling program not only helped reduce burnout but also empowered parents by enhancing their understanding of their child's

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condition, improving their emotional regulation, and strengthening their relationship with their children. These changes contributed to a more positive parenting experience, which further supported the reduction of parental burnout.

### **DISCUSSION**

The findings of this study reveal the significant effectiveness of parent counseling in reducing parental burnout among caregivers of children with ADHD and ASD. By combining quantitative and qualitative analyses, the results provide a comprehensive understanding of how structured counseling interventions alleviate the unique challenges faced by these parents. This section discusses the key findings in light of existing literature, highlights practical implications, and addresses the study's limitations.

#### **Reduction in Parental Burnout**

The quantitative data demonstrated a marked reduction in parental burnout following the six-month counseling program, as indicated by a significant drop in PBI scores from a mean of 78.4 to 45.6. This aligns with previous research (Hastings et al., 2005) that highlights the effectiveness of psychoeducational and behavioral interventions in reducing stress among parents of children with neurodevelopmental disorders.

The faster improvement observed among parents of children with ADHD may be attributed to the nature of the challenges associated with ADHD. Behavioral strategies, such as positive reinforcement and time management, which were part of the counseling program, likely provided quicker results in managing impulsivity and hyperactivity. In contrast, the longer adjustment period required by parents of children with ASD may reflect the complexity of addressing sensory sensitivities and communication barriers, which often require more complex and consistent efforts.

#### **Improved Emotional Regulation and Understanding**

The qualitative findings highlighted that increased understanding of their child's condition and improved emotional regulation were transformative for the parents. As Hastings and Brown (2002) suggest, psychoeducation helps reframe parental perceptions, reducing blame and frustration while fostering empathy. Parents in this study echoed these sentiments, reporting a shift from viewing challenging behaviors as deliberate mischief to recognizing them as symptoms of a neurodevelopmental disorder.

Emotional regulation techniques, such as mindfulness and relaxation exercises, played a critical role in helping parents manage stress in real-time. These findings resonate with Pakenham et al. (2004), who found that mindfulness-based interventions improve emotional resilience in parents of children with ASD. The ability to remain calm and composed not only reduced parents' stress but also contributed to a more harmonious household environment, which benefits both parents and children.

#### **Strengthened Parent-Child Relationships**

The study also revealed improvements in parent-child relationships as a result of adopting positive parenting strategies. Behavioral approaches, such as offering praise and rewards for positive actions, allowed parents to foster a cooperative dynamic with their children. Additionally, structured routines and communication strategies were particularly effective for parents of children with ASD, who often thrive on predictability and clear expectations.

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Strengthened relationships further reduced parental burnout by creating a positive feedback loop—parents felt more competent and connected, which enhanced their sense of personal accomplishment. This finding supports the work of Crnic and Low (2002), who argue that improving parenting efficacy directly mitigates the emotional exhaustion and depersonalization associated with burnout.

### *Practical Implications*

The results of this study have important implications for practice.

First, parent counseling programs should be integrated into community health initiatives and made widely accessible, particularly for families managing ADHD and ASD. Governments and non-governmental organizations can play a pivotal role in funding and facilitating such interventions.

Second, the differences in outcomes between parents of children with ADHD and ASD highlight the need for tailored counseling modules. For instance, ADHD-focused modules can prioritize time management and immediate behavior modification strategies, while ASD-focused modules can delve deeper into sensory integration and communication techniques.

Finally, the findings underscore the value of incorporating peer support components into counseling programs. Sharing experiences and learning from other parents reduced feelings of isolation and provided participants with practical, real-world insights, which complemented the professional guidance they received.

### *Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research*

While the study provides compelling evidence of the benefits of parent counseling, several limitations should be acknowledged:

- 1. Sample Size:** The study included only 12 participants, which limits the generalizability of the findings. Future research should involve larger and more diverse populations to validate these results.
- 2. Duration of Follow-Up:** The study assessed outcomes immediately after the intervention. Longitudinal studies are needed to evaluate whether the benefits of counseling are sustained over time.
- 3. Homogeneity of the Intervention:** While the counseling program was effective, it followed a standardized structure. Future studies could explore the impact of more individualized or culturally specific interventions.

Additionally, further research could examine the role of other variables, such as parental personality traits, socio-economic status, and support systems, in influencing the effectiveness of counseling. Comparing the outcomes of individual versus group counseling formats could also provide valuable insights.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study highlights the significant role of parent counseling in reducing burnout among caregivers of children with ADHD and ASD. By addressing emotional, behavioral, and relational challenges, counseling empowers parents to better manage their caregiving responsibilities while fostering their well-being. These findings advocate for the widespread adoption of such interventions as part of holistic care for families navigating neurodevelopmental challenges.

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### *Conflict of Interest*

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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