

Chapter 8

A Family's Experiences of Raising a Child Diagnosed With ADHD: Family Functioning and Organization, Sources of Support and Quality of Life – A Case Study

Kyriaki Tasiou

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8144-8090>

University of the Aegean, Greece

Eleni N. Nikolaou

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1840-3433>

University of the Aegean, Greece

ABSTRACT

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) affects people diagnosed with it and their families in many ways. Parents of children with ADHD are likely to face challenges in various aspects of parenting their children. This chapter describes a case study of a family of a child diagnosed with ADHD living permanently in Kos. The purpose of this study was to explore through in-depth structured interviews how parents perceive and manage the functioning and organisation of their family, the impact of the child's ADHD behaviour on their daily life, the sources of support they receive and their quality of life. The dominant themes identified were that parents perceive the disorder to affect family functioning and quality of life and seek support in order to cope with the difficulties of daily life. Understanding parents' own experiences is of paramount importance to clinical practice because the way a family functions and the sources of support available to them can have a significant impact on the child and the whole family system.

INTRODUCTION

Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) describes a disorder with a genetic and neurological

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background (Olivier et al., 2009) and a significant impact on people's daily lives. The three main sub-categories of the disorder according to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Health (DSM-V) are ADHD with a predominantly inattentive type, ADHD with a predominantly hyperactive/impulsive type, and ADHD (combined type) (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Children with ADHD often exhibit behaviour that parents find difficult to manage and as a result experience more distress compared to parents of children without some kind of disability (Ringer, 2019). This behaviour described as age-inappropriate occurs mainly in childhood possibly persisting through adolescence and adulthood (Sonna, 2005; Sue et al., 1994).

The environment plays a key role in the development of symptomatology (Howe, 2010). Parents who love, accept and protect their children essentially adopt a parenting style that reduces the distance between them. Communication, cooperation and involvement, warmth and tolerance towards the child with ADHD (Stamatis & Nikolaou, 2020) can be enhanced when there are clear parental roles, unity, consistency, discipline measures, appropriate parenting model and understanding of ADHD (Angenent, 1985). Parents of children with ADHD have been found to have reduced feelings of competence and satisfaction with their parenting style (Mash & Johnston 1983; Shelton et al., 1998). The impact of ADHD on the family unit permeates family functioning, reducing the quality of life of both children and their parents (Andrade et al., 2016; Dey et al., 2019).

The coexistence of additional problems such as those of self-regulation, emotional outbursts, lack of motivation, low self-esteem, difficulty in problem solving, hyperactivity, poor inhibition and poor impulse control are likely to be present, which contribute to the parent's difficulty in managing such behaviours (Aberson et al, 2007; Barkley, 2005; Rief, 2005; Tannock, 1998). In fact, given that Polanczyk et al. (2007) estimate that the prevalence rate of the disorder in children is close to 5.29% worldwide, there are many parents who have difficulties in raising their children with ADHD. The challenges faced by parents of children with ADHD prove to be significantly greater than those faced by parents of children without the disorder (Anastopoulos et al., 1992).

In order to understand the complex nature of ADHD, it is crucial to "listen" to the views and experiences of the parents themselves who are most affected by it (Firmin & Phillips, 2009). From parents, may emerge perspectives that are important for the implementation of supportive measures for the child (Podolski & Nigg, 2001).

Parents of Children With ADHD

Parenting involves attitudes, practices, or parenting styles (Cummings & Cummings, 2002). ADHD is a heterogeneous disorder resulting in parents having a variety of experiences to demonstrate (Taylor, 2009). Harrison & Sofronoff (2002) highlight how crucial the parental role and family functioning is to the future outcomes of the child with ADHD.

Pahlavanzadeh et al. (2018) set out to explore the needs of 27 caregivers of children with ADHD. They reported anxiety, inadequate information about the disorder, conflicting family environment, communication problems, reduced performance in parental and non-parental roles, discipline actions, marital conflict, parental resentment, and financial burdens as key problems as well as negative emotions and fear of stigmatization due to ADHD resulting in hiding the disorder and avoiding seeking care. They also reported parental depression, aggressive and inappropriate behaviours due to children's behaviours resulting from ADHD. The need for appropriate adjustment skills, anger management, problem solving, social and family support, clarity in child management was also shown.

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