

DISCRIMINATION OF FAMILY ENVIRONMENT AMONG PARENTS OF CHILDREN WITH DIABETES AND PARENTS OF CHILDREN WITH AUTISM

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Introduction: Living with a child with a chronic disease can affect family life in various domains.

Objectives: To investigate the relationships of family systems in two different populations: parents of children with autism and parents of children with diabetes.

Aim: To examine whether there is a meaningful differentiation on family functioning between families of diabetic and of autistic children.

Methods: This cross-sectional study included 105 parents of autistic children (36 men - 69 women, mean 41 years, SD = 6,5) and 83 parents of children with diabetes (18 men - 65 women, age 41 years, SD = 7). The measuring tools used were: a) Family Environment Scale (FES). A discriminant analysis (DA) was performed. Predictor variables were age and environmental characteristics of families.

Results: Significant mean differences were observed for all the predictors on the DA. While the log determinants were quite similar, Box's M (202, 558) indicated that the assumption of equality of covariance matrices was violated ($p=.000$). However, given the large sample, this problem is not regarded as serious. The DA revealed a significant association between groups and all predictors, accounting for 72, 3% of between group variability. Closer analysis of the structure matrix found only three significant predictors, namely conflict (-.507), achievement orientation (.618) and active-recreational orientation (.418). The cross validated classification showed that overall 77, 0% were correctly classified.

Conclusion: These findings indicate that these groups were not characterized by unique underlying factors and that may inform the development of a common family support system.