



MT. HOPE FAMILY CENTER

RESEARCH SPOTLIGHT

Background Information:

Fetal alcohol spectrum disorders (FASD) are neurodevelopmental disabilities that affect 2-5% of children in the U.S. Most research to date is on deficits and challenges in children with FASD. No research has yet looked at strengths of children with FASD and how they positively influence their families. Strengths-based research is important in order to understand the whole person, not just their challenges.

What is the Families on Track study?

We asked 30 relative and adoptive caregivers of children with FASD about their children's strengths and positive influences. We also asked them about their stress and satisfaction as a parent, and their children's functioning. Children were aged 4-8, and caregivers were mostly female (87%), married (73%), and white (93%). We looked at children's strengths and positive influences on their family. We also looked at whether strengths and positive influences were related to caregiver and child functioning.

Here's a quick summary of what we found:

Children's strengths fell into four categories, and every caregiver was able to identify at least one strength. The most common was social motivation, or being loving, caring, and helpful. The others were positive effort and persistence, including resilience and overcoming challenges, individual talents and skills like creativity and sports, and positive moods and personality characteristics, like being happy and curious.

Children's positive influences on their families also fell into four categories. These were tangible contribution, like helping around the house, and emotional contribution, such as loving others and being loved. Caregivers also reported that the children brought social and family togetherness and helped them with personal and parental growth.

Caregiver report of child strengths and positive influence was not related to any measures of functioning. This included caregiver stress and satisfaction as a parent. It also included child behavior problems, adaptive functioning, and emotion regulation.

Why does this research matter??

It's very important that we research strengths in addition to challenges. Not only are we missing a lot of information about FASD, we are presenting a more negative picture of people with FASD than what is actually true. A balance of strengths and challenges is important for research with people with FASD, as well as research in general.

This study also shows that strengths and positive influences are not associated with measures of child and family functioning. This means that the measures we normally give families can't tell us anything about strengths. We have to ask about strengths and positive influences separately.

This study was a mixed-methods study. This type of design gives us rich and nuanced information. Collecting both quantitative and qualitative research is important because they give us different types of information.

WANT TO LEARN MORE? READ:

The Strengths and Positive Influences of Children With Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders by Carson Kautz-Turnbull, Tangeria Adams, and Christie Petrenko, in press at the American Journal on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities