



Background

Parents of children with ADHD report more parenting stress than parents of comparison children (McCleary, 2002). While parents of adolescents with ADHD rate their relationships with their adolescent as being more conflictual than do parents of comparison adolescents (Robin, 1990), it is unclear how much stress parents of adolescents with ADHD experience.

Adolescents with ADHD, however, are more likely than other adolescents to exhibit behaviours that are likely to elicit parenting stress including oppositional and risk taking behaviours (Barkley, 2004). While these adolescent behaviours may be associated with increased parenting stress, this may not always be the case. Some parents may regard certain adolescent behaviours, such as difficulty sustaining attention and disorganization, as stressful while other parents may not.

Thus, when examining the factors that contribute to parenting stress, it is necessary to examine parental attributions. Attributions are the explanations of why a behaviour or event has occurred (Weiner, 1985). Studies (e.g., Heatherington, McDonald, Tolejko, & Funk, 2007) showed that increased mother-adolescent conflict is associated with global (behaviours that have a negative impact across multiple contexts) attributions about the other's behaviour.

This study will investigate the association between parenting stress and parental attributions for parent-adolescent conflict in youth with and without ADHD. It is expected that parents of adolescents with ADHD will make more negative (global) attributions about the causes of conflict with their youth, and that these negative attributions about conflict will predict higher levels of parenting stress.

Method

Participants

- 34 to 65 year-old parents of 36 adolescents between the ages of 13 to 18 with and without ADHD were recruited through schools and community sources.
- Marital Status: Control: 11(78.6%) married / common law, 3 (21.4%) separated / divorced ADHD: 14 (66.7%) married / common law, 5 (23.8%) separated / divorced, 2 (9.5%) single

Measures

- Issues Checklist (IC; Robin, 1975) is a 44-item list of the issues discussed with their adolescent in the last 4 weeks and the level of anger experienced. A 45th item "Internet/ Computer use" was added to reflect changes in youth's habits.
- The Parent-Adolescent Attribution Questionnaire (PAAQ) was developed by the first author of this study and was administered with the IC as a single measure. Parents rated their beliefs (1 to 4 scale) about the causes of the identified conflict situations reflecting 6 attribution dimensions: internal, external, stability, globality, intentionality, blameworthy, and selfishly motivated.
- The Stress Index for Parents of Adolescents (SIPA) is a measure of parenting stress across three domains: adolescent, parent, and adolescent-parent relationship. The adolescent domain measures parenting stress as a function of the characteristics of the adolescent (e.g., mood, motivation). The parent domain measures parenting stress as a function of the effect of parenting on a parent's other life roles (e.g., relationship with their friends and their spouse, their feelings of competence). The adolescent-parent relationship domain measures the perceived quality of the relationship the parent has with the adolescent (e.g., degree of communication, amount of affection).

Results

Parent Attributions for Conflict

Do parents of adolescents with ADHD make more global attributions than parents of adolescents without ADHD?

Two 2 X 2 (ADHD status x gender) Univariate Analyses of Variance (ANOVAs) were conducted. Contrary to what was expected, results show that the attributions for conflict of mothers ($F(5, 28) = 1.38, p = .271, \eta^2 = .40$) and fathers ($F(5, 25) = .983, p = .451, \eta^2 = .20$) of adolescents with ADHD did not differ from the attributions of comparison mothers and fathers.

However, results from a 2 x 2 (ADHD status x gender) ANOVA showed that both mothers ($F(1,32) = 22.91, p < .001, \eta^2 = .44$) and fathers ($F(1,29) = 6.71, p = .016, \eta^2 = .21$) of adolescents with ADHD reported a higher number of conflicts with their youth than did parents of adolescents without ADHD.

Parenting Stress

Do parents of adolescents with ADHD experience more stress in the adolescent domain than parents of comparison adolescents?

Results from two 2 X 2 (ADHD status X gender) ANOVAs showed that mothers ($F(1, 34) = 39.41, p < .001, \eta^2 = .57$) and fathers ($F(1, 30) = 16.90, p < .001, \eta^2 = .39$) of adolescents with ADHD report more parenting stress in the adolescent domain than mothers and fathers of adolescents without ADHD.

Do parents of adolescents with ADHD experience more stress in the adolescent-parent relationship domain than parents of comparison adolescents?

Results from two 2 X 2 (ADHD status X gender) ANOVAs showed that mothers of adolescents with ADHD report more parenting stress in the adolescent-parent relationship domain ($F(1, 34) = 8.00, p = .01, \eta^2 = .21$) than comparison mothers. In contrast, fathers ($F(1, 30) = 3.01, p = .09, \eta^2 = .10$) of adolescents with ADHD do not experience more parenting stress in the adolescent-parent relationship domain compared to fathers of comparison youth.

**Predictors of Parenting Stress:
 Number of conflicts and attributions**

Given that parents of adolescents with ADHD experience more parenting stress and have increased number of conflicts with their adolescent, two Hierarchical Regression analyses were conducted in which ADHD status was entered in Step 1 and number of conflicts and global attributions for conflict was entered in Step 2.

Do number of conflicts and global attributions predict parenting stress in the adolescent domain?

Mothers: ADHD status predicted 65.7% of the variance ($R^2 = .66, F(1, 26) = 19.75, p < .001$) in parenting stress in the adolescent domain. When number of conflicts ($\beta = .50, p = .001$) and global attributions ($\beta = .10, p = .42$) were added into the model, the attributions were not a significant predictor of parenting stress, however the overall model predicted an additional 21.7% of the variance in parenting stress the adolescent domain (R^2 change = .217, $F(2,24) = ., p = .003$).

Fathers: ADHD status predicted 55.2% of the variance ($R^2 = .55, F(1, 21) = 9.18, p = .006$) in parenting stress in the adolescent domain. Even though individually, number of conflicts ($\beta = .42, p = .101$) and global attributions ($\beta = .17, p = .42$) were not significant predictors of parenting stress, together they predicted an additional 21.4% of the variance in stress in the adolescent domain (R^2 change = .214, $F(2,19) = 6.82, p = .030$).

Results Cont.

Do number of conflicts and global attributions predict parenting stress in the adolescent-parent relationship domain?

Mothers: ADHD status was not a significant predictor ($R^2 = .36, F(1, 26) = 3.93, p = .058$) of adolescent-parent relationship stress. When number of conflicts ($\beta = .29, p = .250$) and global attributions ($\beta = .14, p = .140$) were added into the model, neither was a significant predictor of maternal stress in the adolescent domain (R^2 change = .095, $F(2,24) = 2.33, p = .251$).

Fathers: ADHD status was not a significant predictor ($R^2 = .12, F(2, 19) = 1.27, p = .314$) of adolescent-parent relationship stress. When number of conflicts ($\beta = .09, p = .783$) and global attributions ($\beta = .30, p = .273$) were added into the model, neither was a significant predictor of maternal stress in the adolescent domain (R^2 change = .120, $F(2,19) = 1.27, p = .314$).

Discussion

• Parents of youth with ADHD do not differ from parents of comparison adolescents in their attributions for conflict. However, parents of youth with ADHD experience increased number of conflicts with their adolescents and have more parenting stress than parents of adolescents without ADHD. This may, to some degree, be due to the increased caretaking demands that these adolescents impose on their parents. Difficulties such as noncompliance, oppositionality, and difficulty with following through on parental instructions (Cunningham & Barkley, 1979) may instigate parent-adolescent conflict. Furthermore, parents of these youth must often resolve and become involved with school, peer, and sibling difficulties which further increase the demands of parenting (Barkley et al., 1991).

• Mothers of adolescents with ADHD experience more stress in the adolescent-parent relationship domain (APRD) whereas fathers do not. On the one hand, previous research has shown that fathers of children with ADHD are more avoidant and less involved in childcare than mothers (Lifford et al., 2008). This may mean that mothers have more interactions with their child, which increases the likelihood that discussions might turn into conflicts. On the other hand, perhaps, mothers' appraisal of their parent-adolescent relationships is different from fathers' because there is something intrinsically different between mothers and fathers. It is possible that mothers view themselves as the primary caregiver which may give rise to a desire for more closeness, improved communication and increased affection, in comparison to fathers. Hence, in light of a similar parent-youth relationship, mothers may experience more stress related to the quality of this relationship than fathers.

• When dealing with high levels of stress, parents of youth with ADHD tend to use maladaptive parenting strategies (McKee et al., 2004). Furthermore, adolescents with externalizing disorders hold more rigid beliefs about parental unfairness (Roehling & Robin, 1986), indicate that their parents engage in more power-assertive discipline (Gerdes et al., 2007), and have more negative perceptions of the parent-child relationship (Gerdes et al., 2003). These difficulties in relating to one another begin in childhood and continue into adolescence. Thus, stress in the APRD may reflect parental desire for closeness after years of strained parent-adolescent interactions and for this reason, stress in the APRD may not be predicted by current levels of conflict, global attributions, and ADHD status as it is the culmination of years of dysfunctional interactions.

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