

ASSOCIATIONS BETWEEN PERCEIVED FAMILY SOCIAL SUPPORT AND THE PSYCHOLOGICAL HEALTH OF CAREGIVERS OF CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW AND META-ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

Perceived social support is a robust predictor of individuals' psychological health. This systematic review and meta-analysis evaluated the relationships between perceived family social support and five dimensions of psychological health of parents and other primary caregivers of children and adolescents with and without developmental disabilities or chronic medical conditions. Five primary and six secondary electronic databases were searched for family support scale studies. Studies were included if the correlations between perceived family social support and one or more measures of the psychological health of parents or other primary caregivers were reported. Thirty-nine published and unpublished research studies including 51 independent samples of participants met the inclusion criteria. The studies were conducted between 1985 and 2020 and included 4,540 parents and other caregivers. Random-effects models found that the sizes of effects were all statistically significant and ranged between $r = -.14$ (95% CI = $-.21, -.09$) for negative life events and $r = .24$ (95% CI = $.07, .43$) for positive psychological well-being. The strengths of the relationships between perceived family social support and psychological health were moderated by caregiver gender, caregiver marital status, and child condition. Family social support was related to the psychological health of female study participants (mothers and grandmothers) but not fathers; married study participants and those living with a partner; and children and adolescents with and without disabilities or medical conditions but not for children and adolescents who were at-risk for family or neighborhood reasons (e.g., poverty, violence). Results showed that perceived helpfulness of family social support was related to the less negative and more positive psychological health of parents and other primary caregivers of children and adolescents with and without developmental disabilities or chronic health conditions but not for parents and other primary caregivers in households of children and adolescents at-risk for poor outcomes for family and neighborhood risk factors.

Keywords: Social support, family support, psychological health, systems theory, meta-analysis.