

FUNCTIONAL SOCIAL SUPPORT AND PSYCHOLOGICAL HEALTH AND FUNCTIONING: A META-ANALYSIS OF STUDIES OF PARENTS OF CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS WITH IDENTIFIED DISABILITIES

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ABSTRACT

Parents raising children and adolescents with identified disabilities differ in terms of their responses and adaptations to their children's developmental disorders. One factor hypothesized to be related to differences in parent and family responses to rearing a child with identified disabilities is social support from social network members. This study investigated the relationships between functional social support and parent, family, and child psychological health, functioning, and behavior. The studies in the meta-analysis included measures of two to six different types of socially supportive functions. The study included 27 studies (29 independent samples) of 3440 parents (including grandmothers raising grandchildren) conducted between 1986 and 2022. The outcome measures included five parent health-related outcomes (general health, depression, stress, burden, and well-being), family functioning, and child behavior. The zero-order correlations between the social support and parent, family, and child outcomes were the sizes of effect between measures. Results indicated that functional social support was related to less negative and more positive parent psychological health, more positive family functioning, and less negative child behavior. The sizes of effect between the social support and outcome measures were moderated by one social support and two parent characteristics variables. The more types (dimensions) of functional social support measured in a study, the more attenuated was parents' poor psychological health. Functional social support was also found to be more important among both older study participants and unmarried study participants. Results also showed that the relationships between the social support measures and study outcomes were much the same among parents of children with different identified disabilities. The results, together with findings reported in other meta-analyses, were consistent with hypothesized relationships of an applied family social system model. Implications for future research are described

Keywords: Social support, support functions, systems theory, parent psychological health, family functioning, child behavior, meta-analysis.