# Parental Perceptions of the Transition to Adulthood for Their Children with Special Needs

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## INTRODUCTION

We examined the concerns that parents of children with special needs have regarding their child's transition from juvenile services to adult care. Specifically, we examined how demographic factors are related to parental stress levels, parental coping, and parental concern about their child with disabilities.

We were especially interested in whether the age of a child with disabilities and/or the amount of services received by that child predicted these parental outcomes. The concerns that most parents have about their child's future success may be exacerbated if their child has cognitive, social, emotional, and/or physical deficiencies.

Understanding parent concerns is essential to providing appropriate care for the family as a whole. Through an anonymous survey on PsychData, we examined how child age, family demographics, and the amount of services received are related to parental stress, concern, and coping.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The main question guiding this study was:
• Does the age of the child, the amount of services the child receives, and/or the level of help the parent perceives the child to need with everyday tasks predict parental stress, coping, or concern?

## PARTICIPANTS

Seventy-seven parents (88% mothers) completed the survey answering about their experiences with their child with special needs (64% male, 36% female, mean age 14 years). Of those that completed the survey, 87% were married (80%) or cohabitating with a partner (7%), with the rest of the respondents indicating they were single (8%) or widowed or estranged. A variety of special needs and services were reported, with an average of 3.7 different services received per child.

## MAJOR FINDINGS

Multiple regression analyses were used to test if child age, amount of services the child received, and the amount of help the parent perceived the child to need significantly predicted Parental Concern, Parental Stress, and Parental Coping.

*Summary of Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Parental Concern about Their Child with Special Needs (N = 68)*

| Variable | Model 1 | | | Model 2 | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | $B$ | $SE\ B$ | $\beta$ | $B$ | $SE\ B$ | $\beta$ |
| Child's Age | .032 | .020 | .192 | .034 | .015 | .200* |
| Amount of Services Received | | | | .118 | .047 | .225* |
| Child Need for Help | | | | .800 | .107 | .645** |
| $R^2$ | | .04 | | | .552 | |
| F for change in $R^2$ | | 2.518 | | | 36.86*** | |

*Note:* All variables were centered at their means using forced entry method.

*p < .05. **p < .01, ***p<.001

## MAJOR FINDINGS, CONT.

*Summary of Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Parental Stress (N = 68)*

| Variable | Model 1 | | | Model 2 | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | $B$ | $SE\ B$ | $\beta$ | $B$ | $SE\ B$ | $\beta$ |
| Child's Age | .023 | .017 | .161 | .017 | .007 | .120* |
| Amount of Services Received | | | | .059 | .024 | .135* |
| Child Need for Help | | | | .900 | .053 | .870*** |
| $R^2$ | | .026 | | | .839 | |
| F for change in $R^2$ | | 1.762 | | | 161.605*** | |

*Note:* All variables were centered at their means using forced entry method.

*p < .05. **p < .01, ***p<.001

*Summary of Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Parental Coping (N = 68)*

| Variable | Model 1 | | | Model 2 | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | $B$ | $SE\ B$ | $\beta$ | $B$ | $SE\ B$ | $\beta$ |
| Child's Age | -.020 | .009 | -.253* | -.025 | .008 | -.312* |
| Amount of Services Received | | | | -.004 | .026 | -.016 |
| Child Need for Help | | | | .333 | .059 | .570*** |
| $R^2$ | | .064 | | | .382 | |
| F for change in $R^2$ | | 4.503* | | | 16.463*** | |

*Note:* All variables were centered at their means using forced entry method.

*p < .05. **p < .01, ***p<.001

## INTERPRETATIONS

In all three models, the predictors accounted for a significant amount of the variance (55% for Parental Concern, 84% for Parental Stress, and 38% for Parental Coping). The amount of help a parent perceived their child to need made the biggest contribution in all three models.

## LIMITATIONS

● The sample was relatively small and homogenous in terms of child age and family demographics.
　○ The lack of responses from caregivers of children younger than 5 years old makes it difficult to generalize these findings to parents of younger populations.
　○ The primarily married sample makes it hard to generalize these findings to single parents, who may face additional challenges.
● Convenience sampling was utilized to reach more parents, therefore some sampling bias may exist.

## FURTHER DISCUSSION

These findings indicate that, in this sample, the age of the child, the amount of services the child receives, and how much help the parent perceives the child will need with routine tasks, personal needs, and participation in activities predict parental stress, coping, and concern.

How much help the child needs (as perceived by the parent) made the biggest contribution in all three models, therefore future research should continue to examine the relationship between the child's ability to function more independently and parental outcomes in regard to stress, coping, and concern for their child's future.

Future research should investigate:
● How actual need for help is associated with parental perceptions of that need
● How stress, concern, and coping are related to child age and family structure using a sample that is more diverse, specifically including more parents of children under 5 years of age and more non-partnered participants..
● How the quality and frequency of the services received may be associated with parental stress, coping, and concern.

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