

Abstract

Background: Psychiatric morbidity is shown to be prevalent among mothers of preschool children with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) according to overseas literatures and can adversely affect mother-child attachment and their children's long-term developmental outcome. However, little is known about the prevalence and the factors associated with them among Chinese mothers of preschool children with ASD in Hong Kong.

Objectives: To evaluate the prevalence of psychiatric disorders and identify their associated factors among Chinese mothers of preschool children diagnosed with ASD.

Method: This cross-sectional study was conducted at the ASD Multidisciplinary Clinic of the United Christian Hospital from August 2012 to June 2013. All mothers of a consecutive series of preschool children diagnosed with ASD at their first visit to the clinic were recruited. Information regarding the child-related, maternal and environmental factors was collected. Psychiatric diagnoses were made according to the Chinese-Bilingual Structured Clinical Interview for DSM-IV Axis I Disorders,

Patient Research Version. Independent factors associated with psychiatric disorders were determined by univariate and multivariate analyses.

Results: A total of 121 subjects were recruited and the response rate was 93%. The point prevalence of psychiatric disorders as a group was 29.8%. The point prevalence of major depressive disorders, adjustment disorders, anxiety disorders, and bipolar affective disorders were 14.9%, 10.8%, 3.4%, and 0.8%, respectively. 75% of the subjects with psychiatric diagnoses did not receive any psychiatric treatment. A higher level of disruptive behaviours and self-absorbed behaviours in the children (as assessed by the Developmental Behaviour Checklist), a higher level of affiliate stigma (as assessed by 22-items Affiliate Stigma Scale), and a past history of psychiatric disorders were independently associated with current psychiatric disorders in these mothers.

Conclusion: Psychiatric disorders, predominantly affective disorders, are common among Chinese mothers of preschool children with ASD. Identification of independent factors associated with maternal psychiatric disorders can aid in the early detection of cases and planning of early intervention programs to address both child and maternal psychological needs.