

Assessing the Relationship Between Parental Beliefs, Behaviors and Sleep Health in Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders: Evidence from a Mixed-design Study

In Hong Kong, children with ASD is the third SEN category with high number (N=13,280) (Education Bureau, 2023). Their needy support from schools and families are always unique and exhausting. For instance, children with ASD are particularly vulnerable to sleep disturbances and sleep problems often persist from infancy to adulthood (Goldman et al., 2017). Sleep plays a critical role in children with ASD as sleep is highly correlated with many aspects in child development, e.g. the neurobehavioral functioning (Sadeh et al., 2002). The contributing factors to sleep disturbances in children with ASD are multifactorial, including child factors and parent/family factors (Kawai et al., 2023). To help improve sleep and mental health for the families of children with ASD, it is essential to tackle the factors that may lead to their poor sleep. Parents or family members play an important role in managing the children's sleep environment. As reviewed by Fadzil (2021), parents not only provide physical care but also offer emotional support to their children. Parents of children with disabilities need to provide even frequent physical care and intensive emotional care to their children. Parents are generally the ones who provides a conducive sleep environment and instill proper sleep hygiene in their children. Unfortunately, research on the parental factors related to sleep issues in children with ASD remains scarce and understudied. The theory of planned behavior (TPB) (Ajzen, 1991) is a model widely used to predict human behavior. With the mixed methods research design, this study aims at investigating quantitatively and qualitatively the link between parental beliefs and behaviors and sleep in children with ASD. Parental factors including attitude, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control, intention, and behaviors related to implementing sleep health behaviors will be investigated among the parents of ASD students (N=700) and students with typical development (N=700). Structural Equation Model (SEM) will be used for data analysis and interpretation. Furthermore, comprehensive interviews will be conducted among parents (N=40) and healthcare professionals (N=20) to gain a more in-depth understanding of how and why parents beliefs (e.g. norms, attitudes and perceived control) and behaviors affect children's sleep health. This comprehensive approach of investigating parental factors on ASD children's sleep through the lens of the TPB is particularly novel and original. The findings will shed lights on future policy and practice change, particularly in the areas of pediatric health and family support.