



Background and Aim

- Previous research suggests that parents of children with ADHD often experience communication problems and conflict in their relationship.
- The aim of the current study was to explore parents' subjective experience and identify main processes by which caring for a child with ADHD may generate distress in the parental relationship.

Method

Design: This was an interview-based qualitative study.

Participants: Twenty-four parents with a child suffering from ADHD were recruited from relevant charities based in the UK and interviewed for about 45 minutes.

Research instrument: A semi-structured interview schedule was used. Parents were asked how they experienced caring for their child and the potential impact of the child's condition on their couple relationship. All interviews were audio-taped and transcribed.

Analysis and Findings

- Thematic analysis of the transcripts identified three main themes.
- Theme A referred to the stress experienced by the parent due to the child's behaviour. Subthemes identified different sources of stress (e.g. communication difficulties, anti-social behaviour).

... he has no friends. He can't communicate with anybody or get on with anybody, he just uses the aggression, like, the violence, and it is violence... I have to try and pin him down, but sometimes I can't because he's a lot stronger than me. An awful lot stronger...

Findings

Theme B referred to the experience of serious restrictions in intimate time for the couple as a result of their child's increased needs.

...He was sleeping in the bed with my husband, and there was no room for me, because when he's asleep he's like fighting every night and, you know he doesn't sleep calmly, so I end up sleeping on the furniture, in the girls bedroom, all over the place, you know.

Findings

Theme C referred to the experience of the child's needs as a source of conflict in the parental relationship.

...It's very detrimental to the relationship, it's very detrimental, and I can see um... from our part we have stayed together but I can see if I wasn't the person I was, I feel I was the stronger one in the relationship, if I wasn't the one always looking for answer and help and support, then I think we, we would have split up by now...

Conclusions

Findings may have identified specific interpersonal processes that are disrupted in couples caring for a child with ADHD.

Parents' inability to devote time to each other may be the most important.