

# Parental Mental Health Impacts on a Child's Well-being

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## ABSTRACT

Parent mental health is a crucial factor in shaping a child's overall mental health and well-being. A growing body of research suggests that parental mental health problems, such as depression and anxiety, can have a significant impact on children's mental health. Children of parents with mental health problems are more likely to experience emotional, behavioral, and developmental difficulties, which can persist into adulthood. To address this issue, parent-focused interventions have been developed to improve both the parents and the child's mental health. These interventions aim to provide support and education to parents, helping them to cope with their mental health problems and develop better parenting practices. The interventions may also provide children with a safe and supportive environment, improving their overall mental health and well-being. The literature review summarizes the current state of knowledge on the relationship between parents' mental health and children's mental health, and the impact of parent-focused interventions. The review highlights the need for further research to fully understand the complex relationships between parents' mental health and children's mental health, and to determine the most effective parent-focused interventions for improving both parent and child outcomes.

## **Introduction**

The mental health of parents plays a critical role in the development and well-being of their children. Research has shown that parents with mental health problems can hurt their children's emotional, behavioral, and cognitive development (Reid, 2015). This has led to a growing interest in exploring the relationship between parents' mental health and children's mental health. Additionally, the effectiveness of interventions that focus on improving parents' mental health has also received attention. There is some evidence that parent-focused interventions can improve parents' and children's mental health (e.g., Zwi et al., 2012).

Past literature reviews on this topic have explored various aspects of the relationship between parents' mental health and children's mental health, as well as the impact of interventions on both parents and children. However, there is a need for a comprehensive review that integrates the available evidence on the relationship between parents' mental health and children's mental health and the impact of parent-focused interventions.

This literature review aims to address this gap in the research by synthesizing the available evidence on the relationship between parents' mental health and children's mental health and the impact of parent-focused interventions on both parents and children. By doing so, this review aims to provide insights into the importance of addressing parents' mental health in the context of child development and well-being. The review will also present a critical evaluation of the existing literature, identifying gaps in the research and suggesting areas for future investigation. By bringing together the current knowledge on this topic, the review aims to inform policymakers, healthcare providers, and families about the importance of addressing parents' mental health for the well-being of children.

## Methods

In conducting this literature review, a systematic search of relevant studies was performed. Authors searched for relevant studies in publicly available research databases, including PubMed, PsycINFO, and Google Scholar. The search terms included "children's mental health" and "parent-focused interventions." After running the search terms in each database, authors reviewed article abstracts to determine whether they were relevant to the research question. Only studies that met the inclusion criteria were considered for the review. The resulting studies included in the review were summarized and analyzed to conclude the relationship between parents' mental health and children's mental health and the effectiveness of parent-focused interventions.

## How does parents' mental health affect their children's mental health?

Table 1

Reference	Aim of Study	Study Setting	Participant	Results
Reid, K. M. (2015). The relationship between parents' poor emotional health status and childhood mood and anxiety disorder in Florida children, National Survey of Children's health, 2011–2012. <i>Maternal and Child Health Journal</i> , 19, 1071-1077.	Investigate how parents' mental health relates to child mood and anxiety disorders	2011-2012 National Survey of Children's Health in Florida, USA	1,241 children ages 6-17; 51% male, 48% female; 45% White, 20% Black, 25% Hispanic, 8% Other	Rates of mood and anxiety disorders were significantly higher for children who lived with a parent who had poor emotional health vs. those who lived with a parent who had good emotional health (15.6% vs. 3.6%)
Underwood, L., & Waldie, K. (2017). The effect of paternal depression on depressive symptoms in adolescent offspring. <i>The Lancet Psychiatry</i> , 4(12), 889-890.	Discover the effect of paternal depression on depressive symptoms in adolescent offspring	UK and Australia	UK children aged 3-7 and Australian children ages 8-9	Fathers play a crucial role in children's development and their mental health has a direct and indirect impact on their children's well-being. Family relationships and environment are important factors in paternal depression and family-focused interventions are necessary. Social support for fathers is also key and can improve their mental health and children's outcomes.

Reference	Aim of Study	Study Setting	Participant	Results
<p>Zacher, M., Arkin, M., Rhodes, J., &amp; Lowe, S. R. (2022). The effects of maternal disaster exposure on adolescent mental health 12 years later. <i>Research on child and adolescent psychopathology</i>, 50(9), 1191-1205.</p>	<p>The study aims to investigate the long-term effects of maternal disaster exposure on adolescent mental health 12 years later.</p>	<p>New Orleans</p>	<p>African American mothers, and adolescent children (ages 10-17)</p>	<p>The study results specifically focused on the effects of maternal disaster exposure on adolescent mental health. Results showed that mothers who experienced higher stress during Hurricane Katrina had poorer mental health afterwards, and this had an indirect effect on worse mental health outcomes for their children.</p>
<p>May, T., &amp; Williams, K. (2022). Mother and child mental health over time in children with Autism and/or ADHD in the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children. <i>Development and Psychopathology</i>, 1-11.</p>	<p>Examining the relationship between mother and child mental health over time in children with autism and/or ADHD. The study aimed to understand the effects of these conditions on the mental health of mothers and children and to identify factors that may contribute to their mental health outcomes. The study also aimed to provide insights into the need for targeted interventions to support the mental health of mothers and children with autism and/or ADHD.</p>	<p>Australia</p>	<p>child age 0 to 14 years, between children with ASD, ADHD, or ASD + ADHD.</p>	<p>The results focused on the impact of autism and/or ADHD on mother and child mental health. Results indicated that children with ASD and ADHD experienced greater emotional and behavioral problems over time, and mothers of children with ASD showed increased mental distress over time.</p>

## Results of the First Table

In reviewing multiple studies on the impact of parental mental health on children's well-being, it is clear that there is a significant relationship between the two. Children who live with parents experiencing poor emotional health are more likely to develop mood and anxiety disorders. For example, in the National Survey of Children's Health, 2011-2012 study found that children who lived with a parent who had poor emotional health had significantly higher rates of mood and anxiety disorders compared to children who lived with a parent who had good emotional health (Reid, 2015). Fathers, in particular, have a crucial role in their children's development; one study found that paternal depression is related to adolescent depression (Underwood & Waldie, 2017). Additionally, there is evidence that mother mental health impacts children's mental health; Zacher and colleagues (2022) found that children of mothers who experienced more stress and mental health issues following a natural disaster also had increased mental distress. One study also found an impact of children's mental health on parental mental health. For example, mothers of children with autism spectrum disorder who also experience emotional and behavioral problems experience increased mental distress (May and Williams, 2022).

### *Critical Evaluations of Literature on Relationship between Parent Mental Health and Children Mental Health*

Overall, these studies had some strengths: the use of standardized measures, control for potential confounding factors, longitudinal design, large sample sizes and the use of established research methods. However, there were also limitations to the conclusions that could be drawn such as potential selection bias, limited generalizability, and ethical considerations. For the study that found higher rates of mood and anxiety disorders in children with parents who had poor emotional health (Reid, 2015), a possible limitation to the quality of the study is the potential lack of generalizability due to the sample size and demographics of the participants. Additionally, the measures used to assess parental emotional health and child mental health outcomes may not be comprehensive or standardized, which could affect the reliability and validity of the results.

## How do parent-focused interventions impact children's mental health?

Table 2

Reference	Aim of Study	Study Setting	Participant	Results
Bayer, J., Hiscock, H., Scalzo, K., Mathers, M., McDonald, M., Morris, A., ... & Wake, M. (2009). Systematic review of preventive interventions for children's mental health: what would work in Australian contexts?. <i>Australian &amp;</i>	systematically review the existing evidence on the effectiveness of different types of preventive interventions for promoting positive mental health and preventing mental illness in children in the Australian context.	Australia	children aged 0-8 years.	The results suggest that a whole-of-early-childhood framework could be developed to effectively intervene in early childhood. This framework could involve universal screening at birth to identify families under stress and offer home-

Reference	Aim of Study	Study Setting	Participant	Results
<p><i>New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry</i>, 43(8), 695-710.</p>				<p>based support. Universal screening at ages 2-3 could identify families who could benefit from a targeted program of individualized family support or a group parenting program. At ages 5-7, children could receive a classroom child-directed program, with links to parenting groups in the local community for families in need.</p>
<p>Zwi, M., Jones, H., Thorgaard, C., York, A., &amp; Dennis, J. A. (2011). Parent training interventions for Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) in children aged 5 to 18 years. <i>Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews</i>, (12).</p>	<p>To determine whether parent training interventions are effective in reducing ADHD symptoms and associated problems in children aged between five and eighteen years with a diagnosis of ADHD, compared to controls with no parent training intervention.</p>		<p>5-18 years old with ADHD</p>	<p>Parent training may have a positive effect on the behavior of children with ADHD. It may also reduce parental stress and enhance parental confidence. However, the poor methodological quality of the included studies increases the risk of bias in the results. Data concerning ADHD-specific behavior are ambiguous. For many important outcomes, including school achievement and adverse effects, data are lacking. Evidence from this review is not strong enough to form a</p>

Reference	Aim of Study	Study Setting	Participant	Results
				basis for clinical practice guidelines. Future research should ensure better reporting of the study procedures and results.
<p>Sciberras, E., Efron, D., Patel, P., Mulraney, M., Lee, K. J., Mihalopoulos, C., Engel, L., Rapee, R. M., Anderson, V., Nicholson, J. M., Schembri, R., &amp; Hiscock, H. (2019). Does the treatment of anxiety in children with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) using cognitive behavioral therapy improve child and family outcomes? protocol for a randomized controlled trial. <i>BMC Psychiatry</i>, 20(1), 543.</p>	<p>determine the effectiveness of cognitive behavioral therapy in treating anxiety in children with ADHD and assess its impact on child and family outcomes. The study will use a randomized controlled trial design to compare the outcomes of children receiving cognitive behavioral therapy to those receiving standard care or another treatment.</p>	<p>Australia</p>	<p>8-12-year-olds</p>	<p>The results of the study will determine the effectiveness of using cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) to treat comorbid anxiety in children with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). The outcomes will be evaluated in terms of improvements in anxiety symptoms as well as broader functional outcomes such as the impact on the child's daily life and family functioning. The study will provide valuable information on whether CBT is a useful treatment approach for children with comorbid ADHD and anxiety.</p>
<p>Jugovac, S., O’Kearney, R., Hawes, D. J., &amp; Pasalich, D. S. (2022). Attachment-and emotion-focused</p>	<p>Examining the effectiveness of attachment- and emotion-focused parenting interventions in reducing child and</p>	<p>Studies conducted in the USA, Australia, Italy, Germany,</p>	<p>5542 children ages 0-18, Sixty-five percent of children's ethnicity was unknown, with the majority known being White (13%) and African American (10%). Fifty-nine percent of parents’ ethnicity</p>	<p>Parenting interventions focused on attachment and emotions showed positive effects on both externalizing and in-</p>

Reference	Aim of Study	Study Setting	Participant	Results
parenting interventions for child and adolescent externalizing and internalizing behaviors: A meta-analysis. <i>Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review</i> , 1-20.	adolescent externalizing and internalizing behaviors. The study aims to analyze the existing literature to evaluate the impact of these interventions on various behavioral outcomes and provide a comprehensive summary of the results.	Sweden, Norway, Netherlands, and Iran	was unknown, with the majority known also White (29%) and African American (6%).	ternalizing behaviors in children and adolescents. It suggests that addressing parents' mental health issues can have a positive impact on their children's well-being. The interventions showed improvements in child behavior problems, parental stress, and the quality of the parent-child relationship. The results suggest that interventions aimed at improving parental mental health can have a beneficial impact on the development and behavior of their children.
Cooklin, A. (2013). Promoting children's resilience to parental mental illness: Engaging the child's thinking. <i>Advances in Psychiatric Treatment</i> , 19(2), 160-168. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1192/apt.bp.111.009084">https://doi.org/10.1192/apt.bp.111.009084</a>	explore strategies for enhancing resilience in children who have a parent with mental illness. The study may focus on the role of engaging the child's thinking and perception in promoting resilience and reducing the negative impact of parental mental illness on the child's well-being.	England and Wales	350 young carers	The study presented a range of responses to the needs of children of parents with mental illness. It focused on small interventions that could enhance the children's development of resilience, which mental health staff can implement or assist other professionals with. The study emphasized that most children and young people of parents with mental

Reference	Aim of Study	Study Setting	Participant	Results
				<p>illness are unlikely to be receptive to offers of psychotherapy or counseling but may engage in offers of a clear explanation of their parent's illness. The explanation can help the child to separate from over-identification with the ill parent and develop an understanding of the process of the illness. The study described the content of possible explanations and the various contexts in which the child could receive this help.</p>
<p>Jewell, C., Wittkowski, A., &amp; Pratt, D. (2022). The impact of parent-only interventions on child anxiety: A systematic review and meta-analysis. <i>Journal of Affective Disorders</i>.</p>	<p>evaluate the effectiveness of parent-only interventions in reducing child anxiety. The study is likely a systematic review and meta-analysis, which means that the authors conducted a comprehensive search of the literature to identify studies that investigated the impact of parent-only interventions on child anxiety. The results of these studies were then</p>			<p>This study found that parent-only interventions were effective in reducing anxiety symptoms, with large effect sizes but small sample sizes. There was no significant difference between parent-only interventions and other active interventions in terms of effectiveness. No significant treatment effects were found for child-rated outcomes. There was no clear evidence</p>



Reference	Aim of Study	Study Setting	Participant	Results
	<p>combined and analyzed using statistical methods to determine the overall effect of parent-only interventions on child anxiety.</p>			<p>for a superior type, duration, or format of intervention.</p>
<p>Karst, J. S., &amp; Van Hecke, A. V. (2012). Parent and family impact of autism spectrum disorders: A review and proposed model for intervention evaluation. <i>Clinical child and family psychology review</i>, 15, 247-277.</p>	<p>review the impact of autism spectrum disorders (ASD) on parents and families, and propose a model for evaluating interventions designed to support them. The focus of the study was to examine the challenges and stressors experienced by families of individuals with ASD and to identify effective intervention strategies that can support them in their caregiving role. The goal was to provide a framework for evaluating the impact and effectiveness of interventions aimed at improving the well-being of parents and families affected by ASD.</p>			<p>The article highlights the severe and widespread difficulties faced by caregivers of children with ASD, and how these difficulties can have a reciprocal negative effect on the children themselves. However, current evaluations of interventions for ASD often neglect to consider the impact of treatment on caregivers and families. The article recommends that measures for evaluating the outcomes of interventions for ASD should be modified or created to include factors such as parent-child interaction, family satisfaction, negative effects of treatment, and changes in parenting cognitions like self-efficacy. Studies that evaluate parent and child outcomes con-</p>

Reference	Aim of Study	Study Setting	Participant	Results
				currently and inter-dependently are needed to gain a more comprehensive understanding of how changes in parent and child functioning throughout and following treatment affect one another.
<p>Jeong, J., Franchett, E. E., Oliveira, C. V. R. de, Rehmani, K., &amp; Yousafzai, A. K. (2022). Parenting interventions to promote early child development in the first three years of life: A global systematic review and meta-analysis. <i>PLoS Medicine</i>, 19(2), e1003602. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmed.1003602">https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmed.1003602</a></p>	<p>to conduct a comprehensive systematic review and meta-analysis of existing research on parenting interventions aimed at promoting early child development in the first three years of life. The study aimed to synthesize the available evidence on the effectiveness of different parenting interventions, including their impact on various aspects of child development such as cognitive, socio-emotional, and language development. The goal was to provide insights into the best practices and effective approaches for supporting parents and promoting early child development.</p>			<p>The results suggest that parenting interventions are effective in improving early child development (ECD) outcomes and enhancing parenting outcomes in various income settings. The study highlights the importance of increasing the implementation of these interventions globally to support parents and promote optimal development for young children.</p>

## Results of the Second Table

### *Parent-Focused Interventions Show Promise in Improving Children's Mental Health: A Review of Multiple Studies*

One study (Jugovac et al., 2022y) found that parenting interventions focused on attachment and emotions had positive effects on both externalizing and internalizing behaviors in children and adolescents. These interventions improved child behavior problems, parental stress, and the quality of the parent-child relationship, suggesting that improving parental mental health can benefit children's development and behavior. The study also emphasized the importance of targeting the entire family system to address mental health issues and provided small interventions to enhance the development of resilience in children of parents with mental illness. Another study (Jewell, Wittkoski, & Pratt, 2022) found that parent-only interventions were effective in reducing anxiety symptoms, with no significant difference in effectiveness compared to other active interventions. Parenting interventions are effective in improving early child development outcomes and enhancing parenting outcomes in various income settings, emphasizing the need for increased implementation globally to support parents and promote optimal development for young children. One study evaluated the effectiveness of parent training on the behavior of children with ADHD and found that it may have a positive effect on behavior and reduce parental stress and enhance parental confidence, although the quality of the included studies was poor (Zwi et al., 2011). Finally, another study aims to determine the effectiveness of using cognitive-behavioral therapy (Jeong et al., 2022.) to treat comorbid anxiety in children with ADHD, with outcomes measured in terms of improvements in anxiety symptoms and broader functional outcomes. In the results, parenting interventions focused on attachment and emotions were found to have positive effects on the behavior of children and adolescents, and addressing parents' mental health issues can improve their children's well-being. Parent-only interventions were effective in reducing anxiety symptoms, but there was no significant difference between parent-only interventions and other active interventions in terms of effectiveness. The study highlights the importance of increasing the implementation of these interventions globally. To address the bi-directional relationship between parent and child mental health, Bayer and colleagues (2009) proposed a whole-of-early-childhood framework for early intervention to identify families under stress and offer home-based support or targeted programs of individualized family support or group parenting programs, with links to parenting groups in the local community for families in need. Family-focused interventions and social support can help parents improve their mental health and positively impact their children's outcomes. A whole-of-early-childhood framework may be developed to intervene in early childhood, including universal screening at birth, ages 2-3, and 5-7 to identify families under stress and offer appropriate support. Parent training for children with ADHD may have positive effects, but the poor methodological quality of studies increases the risk of bias in results. Lastly, cognitive-behavioral therapy may be effective in treating comorbid anxiety in children with ADHD and can improve anxiety symptoms and functional outcomes for the child and family.

### *Critical Evaluation of Literature on Parent-Focused Interventions*

One strength of the studies in Table 2 is their focus on parent-focused interventions, which have shown promising results in improving children's mental health outcomes. However, these studies also have some limitations, such as the lack of information about the specific interventions used and potential issues with standardization and comprehensiveness in the measures used to assess outcomes. One limitation to consider is the lack of information about the specific interventions used to address parents' mental health issues in this study (Mendenhall & Mount, 2013). Without this information, it may be difficult to replicate or compare the interventions used in this study with those used in other studies. Another limitation is the potential lack of standardization or comprehensiveness in the measures used to assess child behavior problems, parental stress, and parent-child relationship quality before and after the interventions. This could affect the reliability and validity of the results. It is also important to consider whether the study controlled for

potential confounding factors, such as socioeconomic status or parenting style, which could impact the relationship between the parenting interventions and the outcomes measured.

Additionally, the potential long-term effects of these parenting interventions were not examined in this study, which could limit the overall understanding of their effectiveness. Another study examined interventions for ASD (Karst & Van Hecke, 2012). One critical evaluation is the need to examine how the impact of interventions on caregivers and families was measured in previous evaluations of interventions for ASD. Understanding these measures can help in identifying effective interventions and assessing the impact of future interventions. It is also important to evaluate whether any specific interventions are more effective than others in improving outcomes for caregivers and families of children with ASD. Given the complexity of evaluating interventions on both parent and child outcomes, it is important to consider how measures can be modified or created to better capture the impact on caregivers and families. However, it is also important to consider potential challenges in evaluating the impact of interventions on both parent and child outcomes, such as the difficulty in distinguishing between the effects of the intervention on the parent and the child. There may also be potential negative consequences or trade-offs of prioritizing caregiver and family outcomes in evaluations of interventions for ASD, such as a lack of attention to the needs of the child with ASD. Additionally, it is important to consider how the implementation of these interventions can be increased globally, while also considering potential barriers to implementation or factors that may limit the effectiveness of these interventions in certain contexts or populations.

For the study evaluating the effectiveness of parent training on the behavior of children with ADHD (Jeong et al., 2022), one limitation is the quality of the included studies, such as whether they were randomized controlled trials or observational studies, how they defined and measured parent training and child behavior outcomes, and whether they controlled for potential confounding factors such as medication use or comorbid mental health conditions. For the proposed whole-of-early-childhood framework for early intervention (Bayer et al., 2011), the proposed framework for early intervention may not be feasible or cost-effective in implementing universal screening at different stages of early childhood, the evidence supporting the efficacy of individualized family support and group parenting programs, and how the framework would be integrated into existing healthcare and social services systems.

### *Limitations of Review and Future Directions*

This review has many strengths, including an up-to-date analysis of the evidence on the relationship between parent mental health and children's health and a critique of literature examining parent-focused interventions. However, it is important to note some limitations. For one, results may not be generalizable to all settings. The studies included in this review varied greatly in study settings and populations sampled. Additionally, this review was limited in scope, and other literature on these topics may exist. Furthermore, the quality of the studies included in this review varied. While some studies used experimental designs to understand the impact of parent mental health on children's mental health, many used observational techniques, which are not as rigorous.

Future research should continue to explore the relationship between parental mental health and child well-being and evaluate the effectiveness of interventions in improving outcomes. Based on the studies listed, there are several potential future directions for research on children's mental health and parenting interventions. One direction is to continue exploring the effectiveness of attachment- and emotion-focused parenting interventions for both externalizing and internalizing behaviors in children and adolescents. Further research can investigate the specific mechanisms through which these interventions work and explore their long-term effectiveness. Another direction is to examine the impact of parental mental illness on children's resilience and mental health outcomes. Future studies can focus on developing and testing interventions that engage children's thinking and promote their resilience in the context of parental mental illness. Additionally, there is a need to explore the impact of parent-only interventions on child anxiety and to develop interventions that address both the parent and child's needs. Future research can also investigate the impact of specific mental health conditions, such as autism spectrum disorders, on parents and families and develop models for evaluating intervention effectiveness for specific conditions. Finally, concurrent evaluations of parent and

child outcomes are necessary to gain a comprehensive understanding of the effects of treatment. Parenting interventions for early child development outcomes are effective in various income settings and should be implemented globally to support parents and promote optimal development for young children.

## Conclusion

The reviewed studies demonstrate that parental mental health has a significant impact on their children's well-being. Rates of mood and anxiety disorders were found to be higher in children who lived with a parent with poor emotional health compared to those who lived with a parent with good emotional health. Parent-focused interventions are one promising way to simultaneously improve parent and children's mental health. For example, parenting interventions focused on attachment and emotions showed positive effects on child behavior, parental stress, and the parent-child relationship. This review suggests that interventions aimed at improving parental mental health can benefit the development and behavior of their children.

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