

FAMILY FUNCTIONING AND PARENT MENTAL HEALTH IN FAMILIES OF COLOR
WITH CHILDREN WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER
DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC
AND RACIAL PROTESTS

by

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ABSTRACT

The current study examined family functioning and parent mental health in families of color with children with ASD during the COVID-19 pandemic and racial inequality protests of summer 2020 compared to White families. Because of the limited research regarding families of color with children with ASD, this study attempted to add to the sparse literature and to increase understanding of the specific experiences of families of color with children with ASD. The results suggest that mothers of color with children with ASD had lower relationship satisfaction in April and June, 2020 and mothers in minority families reported a higher frequency of “major” conflicts in their relationships, indicating that they may not be receiving adequate support from their partners. The results were inconsistent with my hypothesis regarding parenting mental health, as I found that minority mothers of children with ASD reported lower perceived stress compared to White mothers. These results could be due to extended family support systems in families of color. The findings have implications for the development of services directed to families of children with ASD, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic (e.g., remote respite care). The only significant difference found concerning police encounters was that mothers in minority families were more concerned about their child with ASD interacting with police in the future. These findings indicate that because men of color are targeted at higher rates by the police, they are more at risk for having negative interactions with the police as these children of color get older.

Family Functioning and Parent Mental Health in Families of Color with Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder During the COVID-19 Pandemic and Racial Protests

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a complex developmental disorder that is characterized by a broad range of behaviors including challenges in social interactions, impaired speech and nonverbal communication, and repetitive and restricted patterns of behaviors (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). The vast range of deficits and behavioral issues associated with ASD lead families with children with ASD to experience greater amounts of stress compared to families of neurotypical children (Bayat & Schuntermann, 2013). Furthermore, families of color with children with ASD may experience additional stressors due to disparities in diagnoses and access to resources compared to White families (Zelege, Hughes, & Drozda, 2019). While research has focused on the stressors placed on families of children with ASD, there is a paucity of research examining family functioning and parent mental health in families of color with children with ASD.

An additional factor that may exacerbate the stress families with children with ASD experience is the COVID-19 pandemic. The current pandemic has led to disrupted routines and increased anxiety, which for some individuals with ASD, can result in an increase in challenging behavior (Autism Speaks, 2020). Additionally, in times of crisis, individuals with ASD may feel more isolated, requiring increased support from their families (Autism Speaks, 2020). Consequently, families with children with ASD may experience increased rates of stress during the pandemic. Recently, in addition to worries associated with the current pandemic, families of color in the United States face additional stressors due to the public outrage regarding police brutality against people of color, which has accentuated racial injustices and led to nationwide racial inequality protests. Because of the limited research regarding families of color with

children with ASD, this study will attempt to add to the sparse literature and to increase understanding of the specific experiences of families of color with children with ASD. The current study examined family functioning and parent mental health in families of color with children with ASD during the pandemic and racial inequality protests compared to White families.

Families with Children with ASD

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the prevalence of children diagnosed with ASD in the United States is approximately one in 54 children (CDC, 2020). The increase of children being diagnosed with ASD has led to ample research regarding parental mental health and family functioning in families with children with ASD. Parents of children with ASD face numerous challenges, which can include obtaining a diagnosis, finding adequate treatment, insurance, and educational programs, as well as dealing with the economic burden of paying for services (Whitman, 2004). Consequently, parents coping with these and many other challenges associated with raising a child with ASD report greater levels of depression, anxiety, parenting stress, and lower quality of life compared to parents of neurotypical children (Bitsika, Efremidis, & Sharpley, 1997; Pisula & Porębowicz-Dorsmann, 2017). The lower emotional and psychological well-being found in parents with children with ASD may also be heightened by the problem behaviors associated with children with ASD (Benson & Kersh, 2011). Specifically, research has found that stress and depression in parents with children with ASD are increased due to the tantrums and behaviors associated with excessive self-stimulation in children with ASD (Stuart & McGrew, 2009). Sharpley, Bitsika, and Efremidis (1997) found that along with high rates of depression and anxiety parents of

children with ASD experience, 80% of the parents reported being “stretched beyond their limits.”

Parents of adolescents with ASD face additional stress due to the high prevalence of bullying victimization in adolescents with ASD. Adolescents with ASD report significantly higher rates of bullying than the general adolescent population (Van Schalkwyk et al., 2017). Moreover, previous research has found that adolescents with high functioning ASD are more likely to be bullied than adolescents with low functioning ASD (Zablotsky et al., 2014). This puts adolescents with high functioning ASD at an increased risk of being bullied in school, which may contribute to parental stress and anxiety. Parental stress and anxiety may also be increased as adolescents with ASD transition from high school to college or the workforce.

In addition to the psychological distress parents experience, research shows that parents of children with ASD reported lower family functioning as a whole and lower functioning as individual family members (Pisula & Porębowicz-Dorsmann, 2017). The challenges of managing ASD symptoms and co-morbid mental health problems when raising a child with ASD puts additional stress on the family system (Saini et al., 2015). Consequently, compared to families of neurotypical children, the increased stress of the family system can result in lower marital satisfaction and higher divorce rates among parents with children with ASD (Hartley et al., 2010; Langley, Totsika, Hastings, 2017). Raising a child with ASD can also put financial burdens on the family due to healthcare, treatment, and therapists. Families raising a child with ASD spend approximately three to five million dollars more than families with a typically developing child, and the cost increases the more severe the symptoms (Lord & Bishop, 2010). Consequently, all these risk factors parents with children with ASD face can be exacerbated in families who may not have the resources to care for their child’s needs.

Families of Color with Children with ASD

There is a dearth of research examining the impact of ASD on families of color. The lack of research could be attributed to the lower rates of ASD diagnoses in children of color. The prevalence of ASD is higher among White children compared to Black or Hispanic children (CDC, 2018). However, according to the CDC (2018), the ethnic gap has narrowed since 2012, particularly between Black and White children. The increase in diagnoses among Black children appears to reflect increased awareness and screening in communities of color. However, the diagnosis of ASD among Hispanic children continues to lag significantly behind that of non-Hispanic children (CDC, 2018).

A key factor in later diagnoses of ASD in children of color is that parents may not attribute ASD symptoms to a disorder (CDC, 2018; Mandell & Novak, 2005). For example, parents may attribute delays in language acquisition or social skills to a child's temperament or being shy and may be less likely to seek treatment (Mandell & Novak, 2005). Another reason parents of color may be less likely to attribute ASD symptoms to a disorder is because some communities of color continue to contend with the stigma associated with disabilities such as ASD (Burkett et al., 2015). Additionally, due to historic racism in the healthcare system, the Black community holds a sense of distrust towards the healthcare system and is skeptical of White doctors' ability to identify their children's needs (Burkett et al., 2015; Byrd & Clayton, 2001). Furthermore, some children of color with ASD experience diagnostic delays due to a lack of health care access (Burkett et al., 2015). With respect to Hispanic children, according to Ferguson and Vigil (2019), the differences that increased the likelihood of delayed ASD diagnosis between Hispanic and non-Hispanic White children with ASD included religious views, acceptance of the diagnosis, knowledge of developmental milestones, and finding

resources. Some parents may be unaware of when or where to access health services and may only seek services when a condition becomes a crisis, rather than seeking preventative care (Liptak et al., 2006).

Altogether, the aforementioned factors contributing to delayed ASD diagnosis, such as lack of parental awareness and healthcare in communities of color could contribute to increased stress levels in parents of color. Previous research indicates that one of the main challenges for families of color is access to diagnostic and intervention services (Zelege et al., 2019). Parents' limited access to necessary support services for their children with ASD could also contribute to heightened stress levels. Although little research has studied parent mental health in families of color with children with ASD, past research has shown that extended family plays a significant role in offering support to help reduce stress in families of color (Wilson, 1989). Extended family member support may also be beneficial for families of color with children with ASD to help improve parent mental health by mitigating stressful situations.

Challenges Due to the COVID-19 Pandemic

Families with children with ASD have a cumulative amount of stress, which may be compounded by the current global pandemic. The novel coronavirus COVID-19 has impacted millions of families across the globe by abruptly altering the routines of families as businesses and schools closed, forcing countless people to adjust to working from home, while many others experienced job or wage loss. Families with children with ASD face additional barriers in navigating the pandemic. Children with ASD may lose access to support services, such as speech pathologists, therapists, and teachers (Autism Speaks, 2020). The closures of many businesses providing care or specialized educational programs due to the pandemic, mean that individuals with ASD are receiving reduced therapy and education services. With support services

diminished due to the pandemic, parents may encounter increased occurrence and severity of challenging behavior in children with ASD. The pandemic also causes an unexpected change of routine for individuals with ASD, which is a significant obstacle for the individual and their families. A common feature of children with ASD is a fixation with routines, and disturbances in routines related to the pandemic might provoke major emotional and behavioral disruptions (Eshraghi, 2020). Depending on the severity of their ASD, children with ASD might struggle to comprehend the drastic changes to their lives due to the pandemic.

In addition to adjustment issues in children with ASD, their parents may also experience personal challenges such as having to work from home or losing their job. Parents of children with ASD could become overwhelmed with the demands of taking care of their children without the support of specialists. Similar to parents with neurotypical children, it can be more challenging for parents of children with ASD to explain to their children why they must stay at home and follow the mask mandate in public without attempting to remove it. Parents' increased responsibilities with children with ASD during the pandemic can contribute to heightened stress levels. Researchers have found that the challenges parents are facing during the pandemic has led to increased amounts of stress and depression in parents, consequently affecting their children's mental health (Russell et al., 2020), which may be exacerbated in children with ASD.

Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic has affected people of color at much higher rates compared to White people (CDC, 2020). There have been reportedly higher rates of hospitalizations and deaths in both Latinos and Blacks compared to Whites, and Black people are dying at rates two times higher than White people (CDC, 2020). The factors that increase people of colors' risk of getting sick and dying from COVID-19 are underlying conditions that impact health, including access to affordable health care, socioeconomic status, and increased exposure

to COVID-19 due to their frontline and essential occupations (CDC, 2020). All of these risk factors could cause an increased amount of stress on families of color, particularly parents with children with ASD who have an increased amount of responsibilities regarding their child's health and care.

Challenges Due to the Racial Protests

In addition to the COVID-19 pandemic, the United States has also been impacted by national protests against police killings of people of color ignited by the death of George Floyd. The stress of the pandemic, in addition to the current social and political climate, may exacerbate stress in families, particularly families of color. Researchers have found that along with elevated levels of distress and anger, Black community members reported higher rates of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms and depression than White community members following the exposure to violence during the protests in Ferguson, Missouri after police fatally shot 18-year-old unarmed Black man, Michael Brown (Galovski, 2016). Therefore, due to the widespread coverage of the killing of George Floyd and the subsequent protests throughout the nation, Black communities may be experiencing increased rates of mental health disorders.

Based on an analysis of public records and the media, the *Washington Post* (2020) found that Black and Hispanic Americans are killed by police at a rate more than twice as high as the rate for White Americans. Due to the disproportionate rates that Black and Hispanic Americans are shot by police compared to White Americans, families of color are faced with additional stress regarding the fear of interactions with the police (Graham et al., 2020). To prepare for interactions with the police, many families of color engage in various forms of preparation for bias as a way to ensure their child's survival during police encounters (Miller & Vittrup, 2020). Additionally, fear of interactions with the police may be heightened in families with children

with ASD, as police officers receive little to no training regarding encounters with individuals in the ASD community (Railey et al., 2019; Salerno-Ferraro & Schuller, 2020). The compounded fear of having a Black or Hispanic child with ASD encounter law enforcement may increase the risk of stress among families of color.

Current Study

Due to the increased stressors in families of color with children with ASD, the current study examined family functioning and parent mental health in families of color (Black and Hispanic) with children with ASD during the pandemic and racial inequality protests compared to White families. Due to the stress of raising a child with ASD being exacerbated by the pandemic and the racial inequality protests in families of color, I hypothesized that families of color with children with ASD would experience higher rates of stress and have poorer family functioning compared to White families. The current study aims to contribute to the limited research regarding parent mental health and family functioning in families of color with children with ASD. By gaining a better understanding of the experiences of families of color with children with ASD, more resources can be provided to communities of color to improve family functioning and parent mental health.

Method

Participants

Participants were mothers of children with ASD ($n = 89$) who were recruited from the community through local schools, flyers, and online advertisements. Eligibility criteria were that children were between the ages of 10 and 17, the parent was married or living with a romantic partner for at least 2 years, children lived with the parents the majority of the time, and both mothers and children could complete measures in English. Children needed to have a community

diagnosis of ASD (e.g., diagnosis received from psychologist, psychiatrist, or other community sources), no diagnosis of an intellectual disability (IQ above 70 and verbal ability score above 70), and have complex language, which was confirmed during their first visit in the lab. Children were 78.3% male. Mothers were 73.9% White, 2.2% Black/African American, and 13% Hispanic/Latino. The majority of the mothers had at least a college degree, employed, and had a household income above \$60,000 per year.

Procedure

The participants in this study were a part of a larger study conducted before the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to the COVID-19 shutdowns, data collection for the previous study was halted, and we decided to survey families during the pandemic. Families from the original study were contacted via email and provided with links to a Qualtrics survey. Participants completed the first survey in April and the second survey in June/July. Once participants completed the survey, they were given a \$25 Amazon electronic gift card.

Measures

Parent Anxiety. Emotional distress and anxiety in parents were determined by using the Patient-Reported Outcomes Measurement Information System (PROMIS): Depression, Anxiety, and Anger Assessment (Pilkonis et al., 2011). The PROMIS Anxiety items assess self-reported fear and anxiousness. The scale addressed how the parent perceived their levels of emotional distress and anxiety in the past 7 days (e.g., “My worries overwhelmed me” and “I found it hard to focus on anything other than my anxiety”). Participants answered questions using a 5-point rating scale (1 = never, 2 = rarely, 3 = sometimes, 4 = often, 5 = always). We summed the items to create a total score and then we converted it to a T-score, allowing us to compare against the general population.

Parent Stress. To assess parents' stress levels, we used the Assessment of Stress and Self-Efficacy for the NIH Toolbox for Neurological and Behavioral Function. Anxiety, Stress, and Coping (Kupst et al., 2015). Sample items to address how parents perceived stress in their lives in the past month included, "How often have you found you could not cope with all the things that you had to do?" and "How often have you felt difficulties were piling up so high that you could not overcome them?" (Kupst et al., 2015). Each participant answered the questions using a 5-point rating scale (1 = never, 2 = almost never, 3 = sometimes, 4 = fairly often, 5 = very often). We summed the items and then converted the total score to T-scores.

Parent Depression. To assess parents' depression levels, we used the 10 dysphoria items from the Inventory of Depression and Anxiety Symptoms (IDAS; Watson et al., 2007). The IDAS is a self-report measure that was designed to assess specific dimensions of symptoms of major depression and related anxiety disorders (Watson et al., 2007). Participants answered the questions based on their levels of dysphoria for the past two weeks (e.g., "I felt inadequate" and "I found myself worrying all the time"). Each participant answered the questions using a 5-point rating scale (1 = not at all, 2 = a little bit, 3 = moderately, 4 = quite a bit, 5 = extremely). The scales are internally consistent and effectively captures the target dimensions compared to other self-report measures of depression and anxiety (Watson et al., 2007).

Family Functioning. To measure family functioning during the COVID-19 pandemic, we used the COVID-19 Household Environment Scale (CHES) (Behar-Zusman et al., 2020). The CHES provides a tool for measuring essential dimensions of family functioning, conflict, and cohesion during the COVID-19 pandemic (Behar-Zusman et al., 2020). To measure family cohesion during the pandemic, parents were surveyed about togetherness in the household compared to before the COVID-19 pandemic. Sources of more family closeness included,

“Spending leisure time together”, “Helping each other”, and “Sharing household tasks” (Behar-Zusman et al., 2020). Additionally, we measured conflicts in the household compared to before the COVID-19 pandemic. Sources of more conflicts included, “Work or employment”, “News or Social Media”, and “Decisions about how people should take care of their health” (Behar-Zusman et al., 2020). Each participant answered the conflict and cohesion measures using a rating scale (1= much less than before, 2= a little less than before, 3 = the same as before, 4 = a little more than before, 5 = much more than before, 8 = does not apply to my household). These questions were only asked in the June/July survey.

Marital Satisfaction. To measure marital satisfaction, we used the Couples Satisfaction Index – 4 item version (Funk & Rogge, 2007). Questions included, “I have a warm and comfortable relationship with my partner” (Funk & Rogge, 2007). During the April survey, participants answered the questions based on their level of marital satisfaction since March 13, 2020, when the U.S. declared COVID-19 a national emergency. For the July survey, participants answered the questions based on their level of marital satisfaction since May 1, 2020. In the April survey, we asked them 2 questions about the frequency of getting into minor arguments and major arguments (e.g., “How often have you and your partner had *minor* conflicts (“spats”, get on each others’ nerves)?” and “How often have you and your partner had *major* conflicts (big fights, “blow-ups”)?”).

Protest and Police Interactions. To measure participants’ experiences during the protests and their interactions with the police, we developed questions for the purpose of this study. Participants were asked to share their thoughts if they answered yes to “Have you or your family been directly impacted by the death of George Floyd and the resulting protests?”. Participants answered questions on a rating scale (1 = No distress to 10 = Extreme Distress) (e.g.,

“How distressed have you felt about the current social and political climate following the death of George Floyd?” “How distressed has your child felt about the current social and political climate following the death of George Floyd?”). Participants were asked how much they agreed with the statements “I support the peaceful protestors,” “I believe police are being unfairly treated,” “I am concerned about my child with autism interacting with the police,” “I am concerned about my child with autism interacting with the police in the future as an adult.” Participants used a rating scale for each statement (1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Somewhat Disagree, 3 = Neither agree nor disagree, 4 = Somewhat Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree.) Additionally, to measure participants’ interactions with the police, participants were asked “How would you describe you and/or your family’s interaction with the police?” using a slider scale (Generally positive experiences [-3], Neither positive nor negative [0], Generally negative experience [3]).

Results

A series of one-way between-subjects analysis of variance (ANOVA) were conducted to examine differences in mental health and family functioning between the mothers based on minority status during April and July 2020 (see Table 1 for descriptive statistics). In April 2020, mothers in minority families reported significantly lower relationship satisfaction (see Figure 2), $F(2) = 5.70, p = .019, d = .66$, and higher frequency of “major” conflicts, $F(1) = 3.81, p = .054, d = .49$, compared to non-minority mothers (see Figure 4). Mothers in non-minority families reported significantly higher perceived stress while controlling for income, $F(2) = 2.95, p = .058, d = .56$ (see Figure 1). In July 2020, results indicated that mothers in minority families reported marginally significantly lower relationship satisfaction compared to non-minority mothers, $F(1) = 3.00, p = .087, d = .40$ (see Figure 3).

In order to determine whether parenting concerns about their autistic child interacting with police in the future based on minority status, a one-way between-subjects ANOVA was performed. Results indicated mothers in minority families were more concerned about their autistic child interacting with police in the future, $F(1) = 3.98, p = .050, d = .50$ (see Figure 5).

Discussion

The COVID-19 outbreak imposed countless changes to the daily lives of families, increasing the risk of developing psychological problems, such as stress, anxiety, and depression (Fasolo et al., 2020; Passavanti et al., 2021). Past research has found that families with children with ASD face greater amounts of stress compared to families of neurotypical children (Bayat & Schuntermann, 2013). The cumulative amount of stress families with children with ASD face may be compounded by the COVID-19 global pandemic. Children with ASD may lose access to support services, such as therapists and teachers, leaving these roles to be filled by their parents. Recently, in addition to worries associated with the current pandemic, families of color in the United States face additional stressors due to the public outrage regarding police brutality against people of color, which has accentuated racial injustices and led to nationwide racial inequality protests. Due to the exacerbated stress families with children with ASD are facing, the purpose of the current study was to examine family functioning and parent mental health in families of color with children with ASD during the COVID-19 pandemic and the racial protests in the summer of 2020.

Consistent with past research regarding the mental health of mothers with children with ASD (e.g., Bitsika & Sharpley, 2017), findings revealed that mothers from both minority and non-minority families reported an increase in anxiety from April to July 2020. The increase in anxiety is most likely related to the uncertainties associated with the COVID-19 outbreak and

increasing concerns regarding a multitude of factors, including health, job security, and maintaining the household. There were no other significant differences in minority and non-minority mothers' depression or anxiety, which suggests the pandemic was affecting them similarly. These findings are consistent with research suggesting that mothers are struggling to cope with the current pandemic (Fasolo et al., 2020).

Our findings were inconsistent with my hypothesis that parents of color would have higher rates of stress. We found that mothers in non-minority families reported higher perceived stress than minority mothers and this was controlling for income. These findings may indicate a sense of resiliency among minority mothers. Past research has found that perceived stress and mental health may be buffered by extended family support networks and social support in minority families (Shavitt et al., 2016). Although little research has studied parent mental health in families of color with children with ASD, past research has shown that extended family plays a significant role in offering support to help reduce stress in families of color (Wilson, 1989). Extended family member support may also be beneficial for families of color with children with ASD to help improve parent mental health by mitigating stressful situations.

For our findings regarding family functioning, we found that mothers in minority families reported lower relationship satisfaction in both April and July 2020, indicating that it does not appear that the marital relationship is improving as lockdowns progressed. One reason for lower relationship satisfaction in minority families could be traditional machismo in Mexican American culture, which has been considered detrimental to marital satisfaction (Pardo et al., 2013). Traditional machismo in Mexican American culture could play a factor in less involvement and support from fathers due to traditional gender roles. Paternal involvement can have positive effects on family functioning by providing more resources and support, which may

not be provided by traditional machismo fathers (Pardo et al., 2013). This lack of paternal involvement and support from their husbands could cause mothers to feel overloaded with housework and childcare, which may lead to lower marital satisfaction. Additionally, past research has found that stress associated with parenting a child with ASD can result in lower marital satisfaction and higher divorce rates (Hartley et al., 2010; Langley, Totsika, Hastings, 2017).

A significant difference found in family functioning was that mothers in minority families reported a higher frequency of “major” conflicts with their partners. This was found during the April 2020 survey, during the early part of the lockdown. Since a survey was used, and mothers were not interviewed, we cannot identify why minority parents had a higher frequency of “major” conflicts. Perhaps the arguments were about their children, financial issues, or household responsibilities, which may have been exacerbated during the pandemic. These “major” conflicts may also be associated with the reasons for lower marital satisfaction in minority families, including the mothers who may not be receiving support from their spouses. Additionally, the challenges of managing ASD symptoms and challenging behavior problems when raising a child with ASD puts additional stress on the family system, which may lead to increased conflicts (Saini et al., 2015).

I did not find significant differences between the minority and non-minority groups in how they perceived the social justice protests in the summer of 2020. This finding does not support my hypothesis that families of color would experience more stress due to the racial protests compared to White families. Regarding the questions about police encounters, neither minority nor non-minority parents reported current concerns about police interactions. However, our findings did indicate that mothers in minority families were more concerned than White

mothers about their child with ASD interacting with police in the future. These findings indicate that because men of color are targeted at higher rates by the police (*Washington Post*, 2020), they are more at risk for having negative interactions with the police as these children of color get older. In addition to the fear of interacting with the police as a person of color, the fear of police interactions may be heightened in families with children with ASD as police officers receive little to no training regarding encounters with individuals in the ASD community (Railey et al., 2019; Salerno-Ferraro & Schuller, 2020). The compounded fear of having a Black or Hispanic child with ASD encounter law enforcement may indicate why mothers in minority families are more concerned than White mothers with their child interacting with the police in the future.

A major limitation of our study was our limited sample of minority families, particularly African American families, as the racial protests were ignited by African American men being killed by the police. Due to our limited sample size, our findings cannot be generalized to all families of color. Another limitation of our study is our lack of fathers' perspectives regarding their mental health and perceptions of marital satisfaction during the pandemic. Additionally, a limitation of our study is that we used a survey as our measure and were not able to ask follow-up questions as we would in an interview to gain a better understanding of their experiences.

Our findings have implications for the development of services directed to families of children with ASD. For example, services like respite care for parents of children with ASD and support groups focusing on parent mental health and assisting with parenting responsibilities may benefit parents' marital satisfaction and overall family functioning. Past research has found that the number of hours of respite care was positively related to improved marital satisfaction in parents with children with ASD (Harper et al., 2013). This could be a great support service for

families of children with ASD to reduce stress and improve their mental health, particularly during the pandemic when parents have increased responsibilities.

To extend the research of families of color with children with ASD regarding police interactions, future researchers could implement in-depth interviews with these families. This could be instrumental in providing not only supports for these families but awareness to law enforcement on how to properly interact with individuals with ASD, which they currently receive limited training in dealing with individuals with ASD. Indeed, it may be particularly interesting to bring families of color with children with ASD together with law enforcement officers and initiate conversations between them. Families could voice their concerns and law enforcement officers could have their questions answered. This could help to alleviate the concerns voiced by families of color in the current study.

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Table 1*Means and Standard Deviations (in parentheses) of Study Variables*

	Non-Minority	Minority
April 2020		
Perceived Stress	55.63 (11.38)	54.45 (11.59)
Relationship Satisfaction	18.40 (3.90)	16.00 (5.18)
Major Relationship Conflict	1.24 (.64)	1.54 (.71)
June 2020		
Relationship Satisfaction	1.24 (.64)	1.54 (.71)
Future Police Interaction Worry	3.76 (1.41)	4.43 (.93)

Figure 1

Ratings of Perceived Stress in April, 2020 by Minority and Non-Minority Mothers

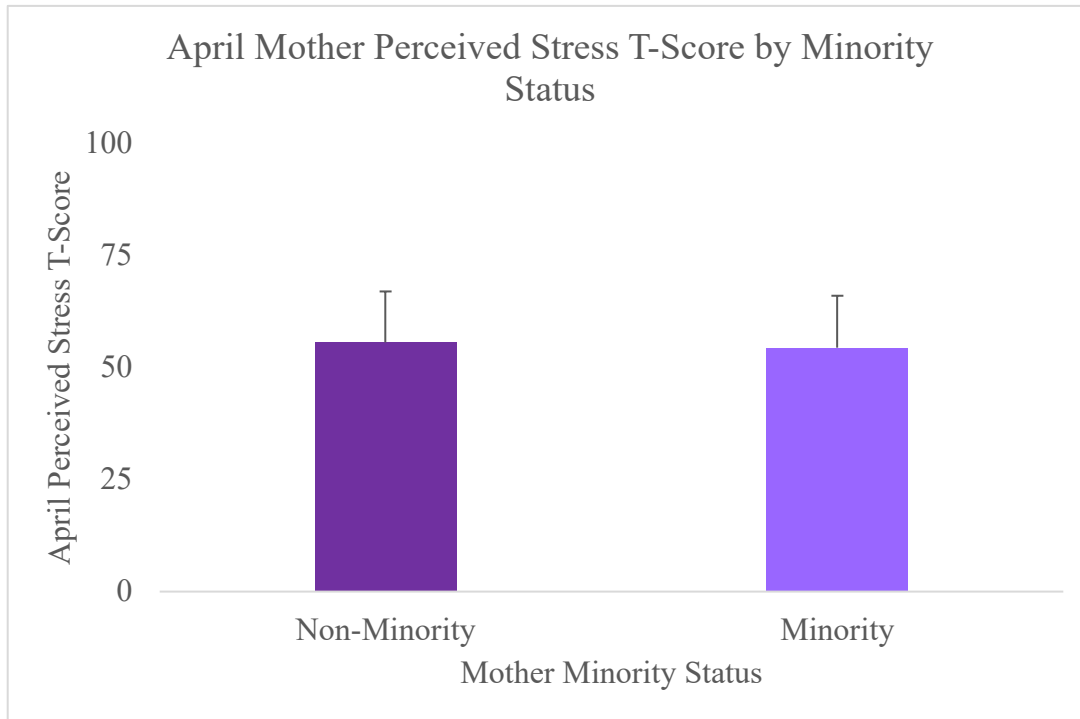


Figure 2

Ratings of Relationship Satisfaction in April, 2020 by Minority and Non-Minority Mothers

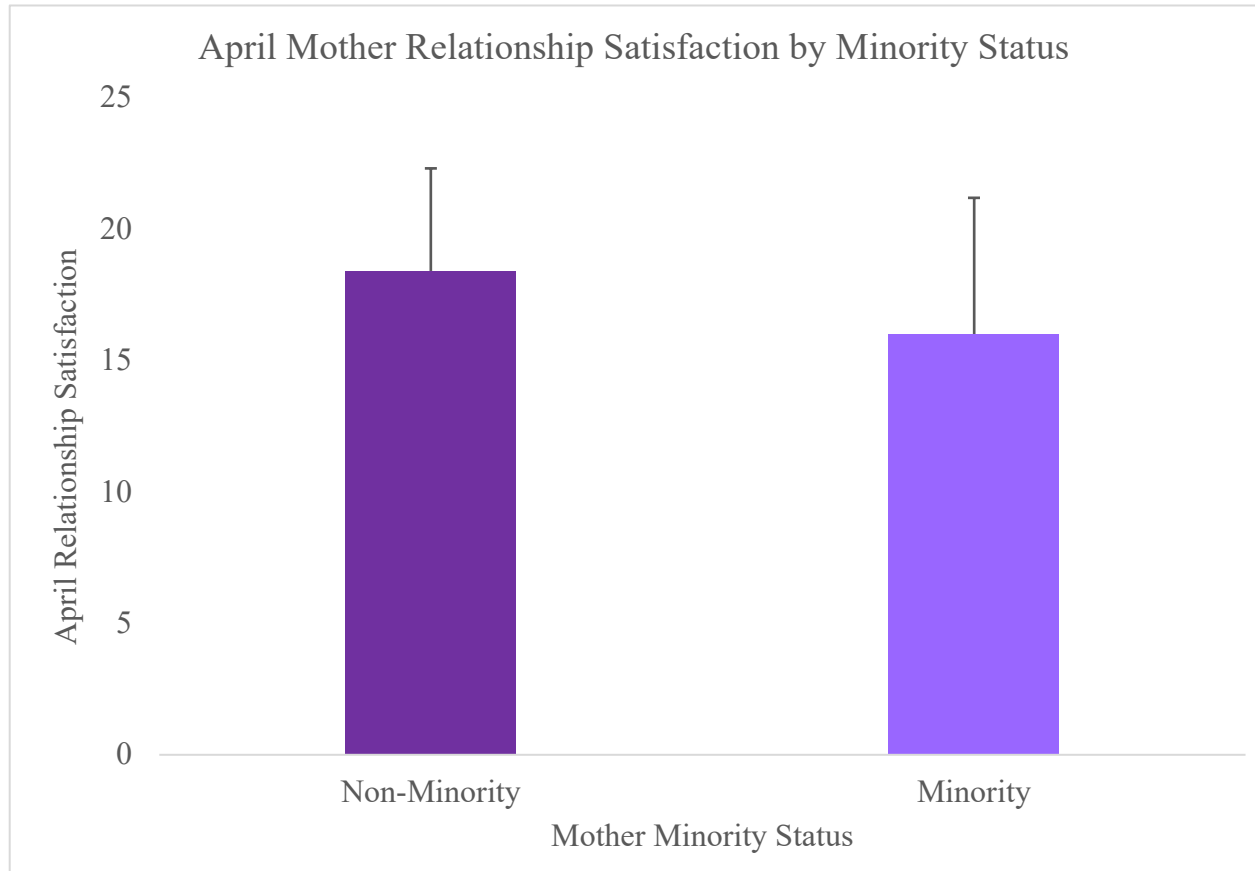


Figure 3

Ratings of Relationship Satisfaction in July, 2020 by Minority and Non-Minority Mothers



Figure 4

Ratings of Relationship Conflict in April, 2020 by Minority and Non-Minority Mothers

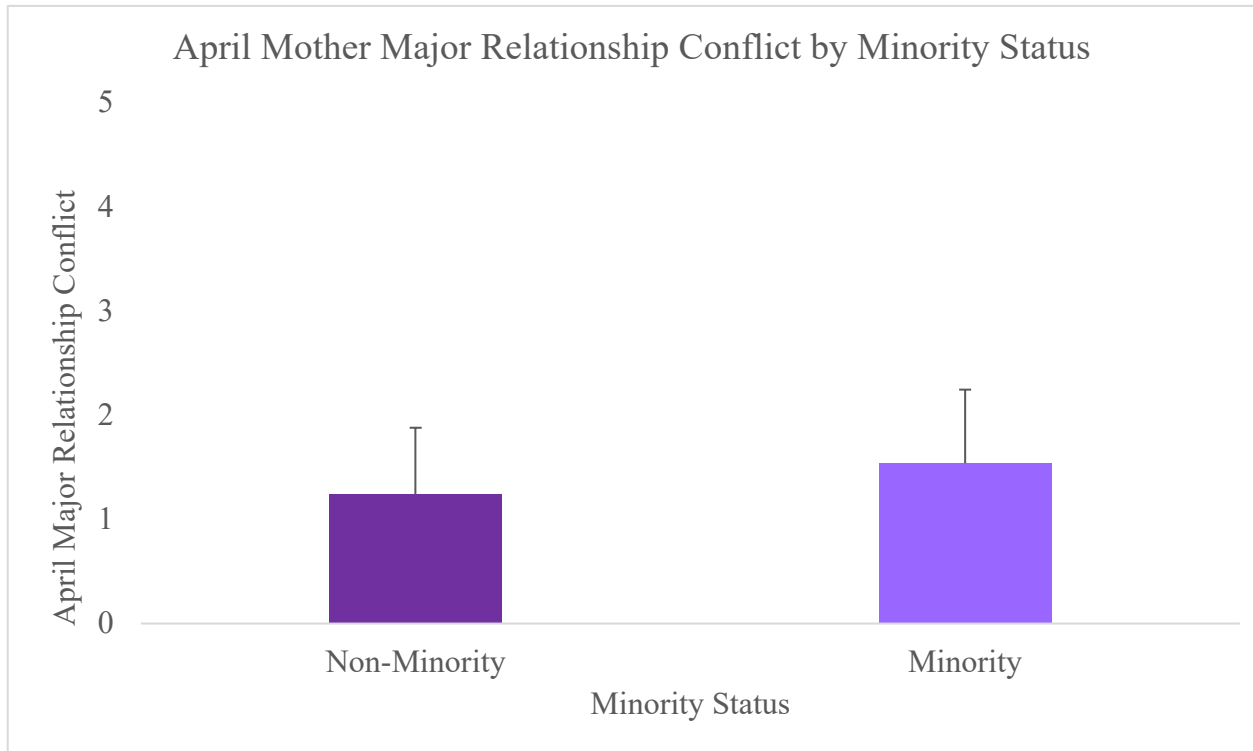


Figure 5

Ratings of Concern about Future Police Interactions in July, 2020 by Minority and Non-Minority Mothers

