

# Parenting behaviour in families of toddlers with ASD:

## a questionnaire and observational study

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**Introduction.** Fortunately, theories about the causes of autism spectrum disorder (ASD) have progressed from a psychogenic explanation to a more detailed understanding of the neurobiological basis of the disorder. However, the consequence of this evolution was that parenting behaviour among parents of children with ASD remained out of the picture and has never been properly investigated, notwithstanding the specific challenges that parents of children with ASD encounter in raising their children. With this study we want to examine the structure and internal consistency of the Parental Behaviour Scale – short version for toddlers (PBS, Van Leeuwen, Rousseau, Hoppenbrouwers, Wiersema, & Desoete, 2011) and of a new scale to measure parenting behaviours potentially more relevant to toddlers with ASD. We also want to compare general and more specific parenting behaviour among parents of toddlers with and without ASD (Study 1). Furthermore, we want to gain insight into parenting behaviour by means of observations (Study 2).

**Methods.** For Study 1, the participants consisted of an experimental group of mothers or fathers of a child with ASD between two and six years old and a control group of parents of typically developing (TD) children. We used questionnaires to measure parenting behaviours. For Study 2, the participants consisted of an experimental group of mothers and their child with ASD between two and six years old and a control group of mothers and their TD child. We studied parenting behaviour in the home situation and made use of unstructured and structured play tasks.

**Results.** Preliminary results of Study 1, based on the provisional scales of the questionnaires, showed different scores on several subscales for the two groups (e.g. less 'Discipline' and less 'Stimulating the Development' in the experimental group). Based on preliminary results of the observation study, there seems to be little difference in parenting behaviour between both groups.

**Discussion.** These studies will not only result in the development of new instruments to investigate parenting behaviour among parents with a child with ASD, but also in the development of instruments useful for the evaluation of prevention and intervention programs regarding parenting a child with ASD.