

# Parental Competence and Parental Self-Efficacy in Parents of Children With ASD: Exploring Differences and Overlaps

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**Abstract:** *This review explores the conceptual and practical importance of parental competence (PC) and parental self-efficacy (PSE) in parents of children diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). It delves into how parental self-efficacy (PSE) in parenting is linked to their actual parenting practices that facilitate their child's adaptation and foster a strong bond with the parents. Despite the conceptual similarities between these constructs, they possess fundamental differences in terms of components and methods of measurement. This review underscores a shared goal of PC and PSE in enhancing positive outcomes for children while highlighting key distinctions between them, such as the influence of parental emotional well-being. A thorough evaluation of parental behaviors can assist educators in developing approaches that support optimal child development, underscoring the need for longitudinal and cross-cultural research to deepen our understanding of parenting constructs across different contexts.*

**Keywords:** Parents of children with ASD, Parental Competence, Parental Self-Efficacy, Assessment tools, Differences and Overlaps

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## 1. Introduction

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a neurodevelopmental condition that impacts behavior, communication, social interaction, and learning. It typically emerges within the first three years of life and endures during an individual's lifespan (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2024). Given that caregiving duties for these children with this disorder are frequently seen as a source of stress for parents, they may encounter additional difficulties and suffer from poor mental well-being. Studies indicate that parents of children with this condition commonly endure heightened psychological anguish, evident in elevated feelings of depression and anxiety (John & Hemalatha, 2024).

## 2. Construction of the Concepts

The emphasis on the relations of parents and their children in psychology is permanently presented in subjects deeply associated with the theories within the field of human development (Rubilar & Richaud, 2018). Reparaz and colleagues (2021) highlighted that family education has opened doors to explore two essential investigative pathways: delving into the fundamental traits of parents through an analysis of parenting styles, and uncovering specific parenting strategies encapsulated within the concept of parental competence (PC). There is a significant

overlap in the conceptual framework of Parental Self-Efficacy (PSE), maternal self-efficacy, and parental confidence, all of which are psychological constructs. Defining these constructs clearly and establishing a universally accepted definition for PC or PSE remains a subject of controversy. According to the literature review, there are several limitations manifest in measurement issues, variability in concepts and descriptions of the construct, and the limited studies investigating and exploring cause and effect (Jones & Prinz, 2005).

From our perspective, the interchangeable usage of these concepts not only complicates theoretical clarity but also diminishes the reliability of research findings. This uncertainty impacts the precision of measurement and restricts the capacity to make meaningful comparisons across various studies.

### **3. Parental Challenges in Raising Children diagnosed with ASD**

The parents of children diagnosed with this disorder bear a weight that has depleted their energy, time, finances, and emotional fortitude. Their assertion is that their stress surpasses that of parents with neurotypical children, emphasizing the vital need for assistance. Nurturing a child with this ailment mirrors an intensive, non-stop devotion and unwavering dedication (Ennis-Cole, 2019).

Parents of children with this condition depend on comprehension and assistance from members in their communities and extended families to navigate the multitude of stressors. Various elements contribute to this stress, such as insufficient support, societal judgment, criticism regarding parenting abilities from friends and relatives, financial constraints, and emotional strain (Ennis-Cole, 2019). Families might find themselves socially isolated if they lack access to social opportunities, which could confine them to their homes due to their busy schedules. Additionally, parents of children with ASD often live within highly structured and tightly controlled home environments, potentially restricting their interactions with others and heightening their sense of isolation (Ennis-Cole, 2019).

Organized interventions, heightened awareness, and community-led initiatives are essential for effectively addressing these challenges. Cultivating empathy and fostering a societal comprehension of ways to assist families raising children with ASD are crucial. It is important to recognize that these issues impact parents as well, and addressing these concerns is vital for creating a supportive environment in which children with ASD can flourish.

### **4. Parental Competence (PC) Concept**

The PC is instrumental in enhancing the understanding of family dynamics and responsibilities. As such, this idea holds significance for parental competencies and is pivotal for a child's proper growth. Consequently, it is crucial for PC to incorporate an educational element, as highlighted by Reparaz et al. (2021). The concept of accepted or nonaccepted PC within the parent-child relationship was proposed by Smetana and colleagues (1991). This relationship begins from childhood onward; there are accepted forms of competence as to whether a particular type of behavior is in keeping with the family code or not.

Also, PC is defined by Jones and Prinz (2005) as performances of parenting, strategies, and skills that have been counted to encourage confident and adaptive child progress results. While Pridham and colleagues (1998) defined it in four components, such as knowledge, abilities, problem-solving ability, and interest in childcare, highlighting knowledge and skills as being

more essential than other components. The previous definition converges with the definition mentioned by Cardoso, Silva, and Marín (2015), conceptualizing PC as the collection of knowledge, attitudes, and skills that facilitate the performance of the parental task, guaranteeing that the child's advancement and progress reach their full potential. PC is defined as the parenting capacity and ability to successfully raise children by acting on necessary tasks while demonstrating evident knowledge, skills, trainings, attributes, positions, and combinations of these that are associated with confident results in children (Mohammadi et al., 2018).

Several research investigations have characterized PC by its impacts, scrutinizing it through various lenses. However, three core dimensions that these various methodologies ultimately converge on are warmth, acceptance, and a focus on children's basic needs, social cues, and fitting expectations. These dimensions seem to constitute fundamental features of effective parenting across different developmental phases of a child (Suchman et al., 2002). This is confirmed by Jones and Prinz (2005), who have defined PC based on its outcomes. Various examinations have been conducted. Despite the different methods used, all these approaches ultimately align on at least three main aspects, as previously noted.

Furthermore, numerous scholars argue that PC comprises diverse behavioral, affective, and cognitive aspects. A key cognitive component of PC is PSE, referring to parents' self-assessments of competence in their parenting role. Consequently, parents demonstrating strong faith in their parental abilities are more inclined to practice assertive parenting methods (Coleman & Karraker, 2000). In addition, Belsky, Robins, and Gamble (1984) posited that PC is influenced by three primary determinants: parental personal resources, child characteristics, and social stressors and support. They argued that these factors work together in a systematic manner to impact the ability of parents and their children to succeed in their roles.

## **5. Parental Self-Efficacy (PSE) Concept**

The development of the PSE concept arose from the perspective of Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) introduced by Bandura (1977), emphasizing the importance of cognitive processes in individual advancement and growth (Scott et al., 2024). While Jones and Prinz (2005) highlighted diverse effects of PSE on parents, children, and cultural contextual factors appears varied; its influence likely serves as a predictive and explanatory factor for parental control and child performance or potentially indicates a level of risk. Coleman and Karraker (1997) stated that Bandura highlighted the dynamic nature of self-efficacy, emphasizing that it is not a fixed component of an individual's personality. Self-efficacy is perceived as a process that varies based on the specific task, situation, and individual. Individuals can develop efficacy in a wide range of contexts and to varying extents, even within their particular areas of interest. Alsahli (2019) stresses the significance of exploring PSE due to its vital role in nurturing a child's growth and effectiveness. It is crucial to enhance the self-efficacy of children with special needs by involving parents in addressing their challenges. The individual's self-efficacy is closely tied to the surrounding environment. Optimal outcomes often arise when high efficiency aligns with a supportive environment. Conversely, a lack of efficiency coupled with an unresponsive environment can lead to feelings of despondency (A. Scott, 2009). PSE may in turn be a proper and appropriate approach for attempts and efforts of intervention and prevention (Jones & Prinz, 2005).

When going deeper into Bandura's vision, which stated, "One's beliefs in self-efficacy," in relation to parenting, it may be affected positively or negatively by the past experiences of

achievement or disappointment in caring for infants and young children (Bandura, 1977). Therefore, PSE hinders the ability of parents to oversee the several problems that may arise while attempting to help their own children. Several studies have established and verified the connection between PSE and parental mental well-being, as well as children's behavioral issues. In this theoretical framework, PSE ought to encompass a comprehension of parental obligations. Moreover, it should entail a specific degree of assurance in one's capacity to meet the responsibilities of parenthood.

The environment's role has evidently emerged in this framework, elucidating performance in tasks requiring confidence through the interaction of personal factors and environmental stimuli and conduct (Crothers et al., 2020). This is highlighted by Scott (2009), who stated the relation between self-efficacy and the environment a person is in. This relation seemed when high efficiency and a flexible environment work together, the results are often good, while when low productivity and an unresponsive environment come together, people get depressed.

In easier words, how confident a person feels about raising a child, referred to as PSE, affects how prepared they are to be their child's first teacher. Believing in one's abilities, or self-efficacy, is closely linked to how involved parents are in school and educational activities with their children (Bandura, 1997).

## **6. Conceptual Overlap Between PC and PSE and Other Psychological Constructs**

According to Vance and Brandon (2017), suggest that PSE usage in research is often interchanged with various concepts like parental confidence, competence, self-regulation, parental self-esteem, satisfaction, self-sufficiency, and self-management. Montigny and Lacharite (2005) raised concerns about this practice, noting that when different concepts are used interchangeably, it can impede the comparability of studies, especially when the particular concept employed is ambiguous and necessitates in-depth scrutiny (Vance & Brandon, 2017).

There is compelling evidence regarding the association between PC and PSE. Multiple lines of evidence indicate that PSE not only directly influences child adjustment but also exerts an indirect effect through various parenting behaviors and practices (Jones & Prinz, 2005). According to a review of the literature, PC is a broad concept (Milligan, 1998) with various definitions based on areas of study, conditions, topics, and individual characteristics (Valloze, 2009).

utilize these concepts interchangeably in the literature without clear distinctions between the two constructs. This conflation may hinder a nuanced understanding of their distinct impacts on parenting and ultimately on child outcomes. The lack of standardized terminology may limit the comparability of research studies and the clarity of results. Therefore, defining and differentiating these constructs explicitly in research is crucial for ensuring consistency of findings and facilitating comparisons among studies.

### **Relationship Between PSE and PC Concepts**

In their research, Coleman and Karraker (1997) discuss and describe the relation between PC and PSE:

- 1) PSE is related to PC. It measures whether a parent can perform the actions necessary to successfully raise a child in their best interests, well-being, and needs.

- 2) Self-efficacy is a concept that mirrors an individual's self-value and capacity to be a proficient parent, encompassing attributes like maternal assurance, self-respect, motherhood, and a feeling of proficiency.
- 3) Parents who possess strong self-efficacy are more prone to engaging in the education of both their children and themselves.
- 4) PSE empowers parents to adapt to their children's behaviors, consequently benefiting their children's developmental progress.

## 7. Difference Between PC and PSE Concepts

A study conducted by Montigny and Lacharite (2005) asserted that competence and self-efficacy were interrelated but different, as follows:

- 1) The distinction between PC and PSE, as well as in those who recognize the perception.
- 2) Parental effectiveness is defined as the parent's perspective, while PC is defined as assessments that the other individuals regard the parent's abilities.
- 3) Perceived PSE was separated (parental confidence and PC) in this conceptual analysis. benefit from more defined ideas such as nursing, psychology, and practice.
- 4) Despite increased studies on perceived PSE in the late of last century, other terms such as "perceived PC" and "parental confidence" remained commonplace.
- 5) Different titles have been used interchangeably to refer to the same phenomenon, namely PSE, PC, and parental confidence.
- 6) Misunderstandings concerning perceptions of PSE, competence, and confidence have hampered studies on the topic, as well as issues with measuring these concepts.

Vance and Brandon (2017) examined three important related to parenting concepts to identify differences. Multidisciplinary information was used to assess parental confidence, self-efficacy, and competence. By comparing definitions and measurements, researchers found that parental confidence and self-efficacy are similar attributes, antecedents, and results. Competence is an objective measure of parenting quality.

From an individual standpoint, PC and PSE hold significant familiarity in modern society and appear to wield a substantial influence on the dynamics between parents and children. These concepts shape parental perceptions of their roles, obligations, and achievements in nurturing their children. While PC pertains to the concrete skills and competencies utilized by parents in caregiving, PSE refers to parents' belief in their ability to apply these skills. A combination of these two aspects is essential to obtain a comprehensive understanding of parenting quality. When parents have confidence in their abilities and effectiveness, they create an environment conducive to their children's flourishing; they are also more adept at troubleshooting and remain responsive in challenging situations.

## 8. Assessment of PC and PSE

There are several scales to measure PC or PSE; however, some of these scales have been more widely used than others and therefore have more research resources. The subsequent table delineates several significant instruments intended for evaluating PC or PSE. These tools range from comprehensive assessments to those tailored for particular difficulties encountered in parenting, such as raising children within the autism spectrum.

**Table 1: Assessment Tools of PC and PSE**

Name of the Tool	Description and Focus	Category / Usage
Parental Sense of Competence (PSOC) (Gibaud-Wallston & Wandersmann, 1978)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The scale comprises 17 items and utilizes a six-point</li> <li>- Likert scale for rating purposes. It is divided into two subscales: efficacy and satisfaction.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- General tool; applicable to various contexts.</li> <li>- Modified for specific cases.</li> </ul>
Parental Self-Efficacy Scale (Coleman & Karraker, 2000)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Developed to assess PSE in mothers, focusing on middle childhood.</li> <li>- Evaluates confidence in managing child behavior and supporting development.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- General tool; designed for mothers of school-age children, adaptable to other contexts.</li> </ul>
Parental Self-efficacy tool (Kendall & Bloomfield, 2005)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Parents are instructed to respond to all terms and select the number from 0 to 10 that corresponds to how much they are suitable with each term. It reflects their views and experiences and family support centre workers who work together.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- General tool; designed for parents of children up to 6 years, adaptable to other situations.</li> </ul>
Parenting Sense of Competence Scale (Modified for Autism) (O’Nions et al., 2018)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A modified version of PSOC including items addressing autism-related challenges (e.g., communication, stereotypic behaviors). Evaluates PC and PSE in managing autism-specific behaviors.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Specialized for autism (modified versions available).</li> </ul>
Maternal Self-Efficacy Scale (Joventino et al., 2013)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- This tool aimed to explore challenges faced by infants, maternal depressive symptoms, and maternal abilities. It comprises 10 statements: 9 focusing on various aspects of infant care, and the remaining one evaluating overall mothering efficacy. Respondents utilized a four-point Likert scale for their answers.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- This tool was adapted to use with toddlers in one study only.</li> </ul>

This table provides a comprehensive set of instruments intended to assess PC and PSE. These instruments encompass self-report scales and observational frameworks that capture real-time interactions. These instruments highlight the complex nature of parenting and the necessity of adapting evaluation techniques to certain developmental phases or specialized groups.

## 9. Strengths and Weaknesses Across Tools

- These tools all provide useful insights into parenting experiences, although they differ in regard to suitability for target populations and study objectives. Some key strengths include:
- Flexibility: The PSOC and PSE scales are general tools that can be adapted to various parenting settings.
- Quantitative vs. qualitative balance Some tools (for example, Kendall & Bloomfield's PSE Tool) allow for scoring numerically, while the PSOC captures emotional and cognitive settings of parenting.
- Relevance to Specialized Populations: Autism-focused tools, such as O'Nions et al.'s modified PSOC, offer exact measurements of the specific difficulties of parenthood.

## 10. Yet these tools also have limitations:

- Self-Reporting Bias: Many scales are dependent on self-perception, which can sometimes differ from how you parent actually.
- Narrow Developmental Range in Certain Instances: In cases using a measure like the Maternal Self-Efficacy Scale that has a specific function, the findings cannot be generalized across extended intervals.
- Cultural Validation: Although a lot of these scales have been in some western contexts, it is important to validate them cross-culturally to make sure they are reliable and applicable in different populations.

Specific interventions can be designed to focus on the fundamental symptoms and stressors related to ASD. When selecting an appropriate metric, it is crucial to consider the objectives of the study or intervention, the developmental phase of the child, and the unique requirements of individual families. These instruments may be utilized separately or collectively to assess both subjective evaluations of PC and objective observations of parent-child interactions. However, Limited research exists on the PC of children with this disorder (Mohammadi et al., 2018).

## 11. Prospects for Future Research and Application

For future research in this field, longitudinal studies must be conducted to examine the progression of PC and PSE over time and their effects on children's developmental stages. It is essential to utilize standardized and authorized measurement instruments to ensure reliability. This highlights the necessity to investigate interventions that improve PC and PSE, particularly for parents of children with ASD. These improvements will offer deeper understandings of the difficulties experienced by parents and provide evidence-based support systems to enhance the well-being of both parents and children.

## 12. Conclusion

This important review emphasizes the complex interplay between PC and parental PSE conceptually distinct yet synergistic factors that influence the development of children with ASD and their family systems. Although both constructs are valuable predictors of positive parenting outcomes, their unique data challenges and differing dependence on parental emotional wellbeing warrant further investigation. With respect to construct clarification, this study lays the groundwork for future scholarly inquiry in terms of optimizing measures and targeted interventions to improve parenting and child outcomes. Future longitudinal and culturally diverse research is required to extend findings regarding the evolution of both PC and PSE, as well as across families from different sociocultural backgrounds.

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