

Comparison of parenting stress among normal and developmentally challenged children

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Received: 04.01.2016; Revised: 17.03.2016; Accepted: 03.04.2016

■ **ABSTRACT :** The maternal and paternal parenting stress of normal and developmentally challenged children was studied among the parents of normal, mentally challenged and hearing impaired children. Participants were 314 fathers and 341 mothers of children under the age group of 5 to 15 years. Parenting stress was assessed with Abidin's (1995) "Parenting stress index- short form". Frequency, percentage, t-test and one way ANOVA were used for the analysis. The results revealed that there was significant difference between parents of normal and developmentally challenged children on parenting stress wherein higher percentage of parents were in clinically significant category among mentally challenged and hearing impaired than normal group. Paternal and maternal parenting stress did not differ significantly.

■ **KEY WORDS:** Parenting stress, Mentally challenged, Hearing impaired, Normal children

■ **HOW TO CITE THIS PAPER :** Hidangmayum, Narmada and Khadi, Pushpa.B. (2016). Comparison of parenting stress among normal and developmentally challenged children. *Asian J. Home Sci.*, 11 (1) : 8-14, DOI: 10.15740/HAS/AJHS/11.1/8-14.

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The idea that children can cause stress in parents is an often exploited scenario in cartoon pages. "Dennis the Menace" has tormented his parents and other adults for decades, and Calvin, the little boy in the cartoon series "Calvin and Hobbes," kept a record on his calendar of how often he drove his mother crazy. Similarly, in the non-cartoon world, the question of whether children cause stress yields numerous raised hands in any group of parents. Indeed, a considerable number of publications in the psychological literature support the argument that children are a major source of stress for their parents.

Rearing happy, well-adjusted children is quite an accomplishment for any parent. Knowing that you are effective with your children and can meet their needs

contributes to parents' feelings of satisfaction. Hard work, responsibility, demands for time and attention are also part of parenting. This is the part of parenting that causes stress to mount and make us feel caught and sometimes overwhelmed by demands constantly made upon the parents.

All families experience normative and transitional life event stressors such as birth, death etc. In addition, parents are subjected to the inherent chronic stressors of parenting. Parental psychological stressors are related to the worries that parents have about the physical safety and the growth and development of their children. Parents generally take pride in their children's accomplishments and are hurt by their children's failures. Parenting is particularly difficult and stressful when

children do not measure up to family or community expectations. When a child is diagnosed with a disability, all of the attention is focused on helping the child and other family members' feelings and frustrations are overlooked. Parents of children with special needs often find themselves trying to burn the candle at both ends. It seems the stresses and strains they endure on a daily basis go far and beyond what they would believe themselves able to cope with. Often they feel like an elastic band which has been stretched beyond breaking point (Miller, 1998). Parents also need assistance in coping with their own feelings and frustrations.

Parenting a child with a disability can be challenging and stressful. Many studies have reported that parents of a child with a disability experience higher levels of stress (Oelofson and Richardson, 2006) and lower levels of well-being (Bundy and Kuncze, 2009) than do those whose child is developing typically. The demands of a child are especially strenuous on parents of developmentally challenged children. They feel particularly worried and unsure. Much of the research to date examining disabled children and the impact on the family has been focused on the developmentally disabled population as a whole, with comparatively few studies being focused on hearing impaired children. However, we cannot ignore the fact that all parents whether the child is normal or challenged face some short of stress that bother them. Therefore an attempt has been made to compare the parenting stress between normal and developmentally challenged children.

Objective:

To determine and compare the level of parenting stress between normal and developmentally challenged children.

■ RESEARCH METHODS

Research design:

A differential research design to compare the level of parenting stress among normal and developmentally challenged children was undertaken in 2011-2012.

Population and sample:

Developmentally challenged children studying in special schools and normal children studying in normal schools in Hubli-Dharwad city of Karnataka formed the population. There were 59 schools providing normal

education for children from class 1 to 10, eight special schools for mentally challenged children and 4 schools for hearing impaired children. 50 per cent of special schools and 15 per cent of normal school were selected for the study. The final sample constituted 45 mothers and 39 fathers of mentally challenged children, 36 mothers and 16 fathers of hearing impaired and 260 parents of normal children.

Tools used for the study:

- General information Schedule to elicit information about the children and their parents
- Parenting Stress Index – Short form (PSI-SF) developed by Abidin, 1995 was employed to know the parenting stress. PSI-SF is a self reported questionnaire that yields an overall parenting stress. The items of parenting stress (Abidin, 1995) is not designed to assess the stress that parents experience related to other life roles and life events. The PSI was originally used with parents who have at least fifth grade reading levels. There are three factors/ subscales which are assessed by the PSI-SF. Parental distress (PD), Parents- child Dysfunctional interaction (PCDI) and Difficult Child (DC). The PSI-SF (Abidin, 1995) consists of 36 items that are rated on a five point scale. Score's were anchored from 'strongly agree' with five score to strongly disagree with a score of one with higher scores indicating greater stress. The PSI-SF total stress scores is the sum of the three subscales which range from 36-180.

Statistical analysis:

- Frequency and percentage- There were used to describe the level of parenting stress among normal and developmentally challenged children.
- t-test- It was used to test for comparison of parenting stress between fathers and mothers.
- One way Analysis of variance (ANOVA)- This technique was used to compare the significant difference on parenting stress among the normal, hearing impaired and mentally challenged children.

■ RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The results of parenting stress among normal and developmentally challenged children are presented in Table 1. It is unfortunate to know that higher percentage of parents of mentally challenged and hearing impaired children fell in a clinically significant level of parenting

Category	Children						Total	Modified ²
	Normal		Mentally challenged		Hearing impaired			
	Father	Mother	Father	Mother	Father	Mother		
Low stress	101 (38.80)	71 (27.30)	2 (5.10)	1 (2.20)	2 (13.30)	3 (8.34)	180 (27.48)	1.84**
Normal	110 (42.30)	134 (51.50)	8 (20.50)	11 (24.40)	3 (20.00)	6 (16.70)	272 (41.52)	
High stress	12 (4.60)	23 (8.80)	4 (10.30)	2 (4.40)	1 (6.70)	3 (8.34)	45 (6.88)	
Clinically significant	37 (14.20)	32 (12.30)	25 (64.10)	31 (68.90)	9 (60.00)	24 (66.67)	158 (24.12)	
Total	260 (100.00)	260 (100.00)	39 (100.00)	45 (100.00)	15 (100.00)	36 (100.00)	655 (100.00)	

** indicates significance of value at P=0.01

Figure in parenthesis indicates percentage

stress. Even the parents of normal children had clinically significant level of parenting stress.

Among the normal group, for fathers, 14.20 per cent fell in clinically significant level of parenting stress, 4.60 per cent had high level of parenting stress, 42.30 per cent and 38.80 per cent had normal and low level of parenting stress. For mothers, 12.30 per cent had clinically significant level of parenting stress, 8.80 per cent had high level of parenting stress, half of the mother (51.50 %) had normal level and 27.30 per cent had low level of parenting stress.

Among mentally challenged children, for both father (64.10%) and mother (68.90%) fell in clinically significant level of parenting stress, followed by 20.50 per cent of fathers and 24.40 per cent of mother had normal level of parenting stress, 10.30 per cent of fathers and 4.40 per cent of mothers had high stress and 5.10 per cent of fathers and 2.20 per cent of mothers who were in low level of parenting stress.

In hearing impaired group, like mentally challenged children majority of fathers (60.00%) and mothers (66.67%) were having clinically significant level of parenting stress which was followed by 20.00 per cent of fathers and 16.70 per cent of mothers had normal level of parenting stress, 13.30 per cent of fathers and 8.34 per cent of mothers showed low level of parenting stress and 6.70 per cent of fathers and 8.34 per cent of mothers had high parenting stress. There was a significant association between parenting stress and the groups of parents as indicated by Chi-square value of 1.84 which was significant at 1 per cent level.

Thus, from Table 1, it can be concluded that higher proportion of parents among developmentally

challenged children showed clinically significant level of parenting stress. Similarly, it is unfortunate to note that some parents of normal children had clinically significant level of parenting stress. Again some parents (2.2 - 13.3%) had low level of parenting stress though they had mentally challenged or hearing impaired children.

Table 2 represents the comparisons of mean parenting stress score among normal and developmentally challenged children by group and gender of parents. It was found that mothers of mentally challenged children had the highest parenting stress (103.44) followed by mothers of hearing impaired children (98.83) fathers of mentally challenged children (99.69), and fathers of hearing impaired children (94.07).

The mean score of parenting stress among mothers of normal children was 68.52 and fathers were 66.07. The comparison of mean parenting stress among the group revealed that parents of mentally challenged children had highest means score (101.70), followed by parents of hearing impaired children (97.43) and least was among the parents of normal children with mean parenting stress score of 67.30. There was significant group difference as indicated by ANOVA. The ANOVA effect of group was found to be significant indicating that parents of developmentally challenged children had significantly higher parenting stress than parents of normal children, but there was no interactionary effect and no significant difference within the group. The critical difference was 6.34 between the groups.

Parenting stress was significantly higher among parents of developmentally challenged children than parents of normal children (Table 1). It is unfortunate to

Group	Parents' Gender	N	Mean	Std. deviation	S.E
Normal	Father	260	66.07	22.19	1.388
	Mother	260	68.52	19.44	1.388
	Total ^a	520	67.30	20.88	1.388
Mentally challenged	Father	39	99.69	27.87	3.583
	Mother	45	103.44	25.12	3.335
	Total ^b	84	101.70	26.34	3.459
Hearing Impaired	Father	15	94.07	32.91	5.777
	Mother	36	98.83	27.77	3.729
	Total ^b	51	97.43	29.12	4.753
Total	Father	314	71.58	26.42	.981
	Mother	341	76.33	25.42	2.447
	Total	655	74.06	26.00	3.438

ANOVA Table:

Source	MSS	F	S.E.±	C.D. (P=0.01)
Group	54074.188	108.03**	2.288	6.34
Parents	802.660	1.604	2.022 ^{NS}	-
Group * parents	37.678	.075	3.2 ^{NS}	-

** indicates significance of value at P=0.01

NS=Non-significant

note that it ranged between 60-69 per cent of parents of developmentally challenged children who had clinically significant level. About 12-14 per cent of parents of normal children also had parenting stress at clinically significant level. When the mean score was compared between the three groups highest mean score on parenting stress was among parents of mentally challenged children followed by hearing impaired children and the least was among the parents of normal children. This is consistent with other researchers who have found that parents of children with disabilities have significantly higher levels of stress than parents of typically developing children (Dellve *et al.*, 2006 and Hauser-Cram *et al.*, 2001). Numerous studies have documented that mothers of children with a range of developmental delays and disabilities report higher levels of stress than normative samples and comparable groups of mothers of typically developing children (Crnic *et al.*, 2003 and Oelofson and Richardson, 2006).

Parents of children with intellectual disabilities (ID) typically report more parenting stress than parents of typically developing children (Fidler *et al.*, 2000; Hauser-Cram *et al.*, 2001; Baker *et al.*, 2003 and Emerson, 2003). Additionally, the stress experienced by parents of children with ID tends to be chronic (Glidden and Schoolcraft, 2003). Several factors (e.g., child care) have been identified to contribute to this increased level of stress for parents. For instance, the increasing child

care demands associated with raising a child with a disability (Baker *et al.*, 2003 and Fidler *et al.*, 2000) and parental concerns about their child's future, the child's ability to function independently, and the permanent state of the disability may attribute to higher levels of parental stress (Pisula, 2007). Researchers have indicated that parental stress levels may be impacted by the presence and intensity of a child's behavioural problems more than other disability related characteristics (e.g., intellectual disability) (Baker *et al.*, 2003).

This stress reaction on the part of mothers is part of a complex response with many dimensions (Orsmond, 2005). It certainly represents responses linked to their child's characteristics, including stress often generated by their child's inability to adapt to new situations, problems with mood and emotional stability, as well as overall difficulties presented by daily challenges in meeting their child's needs. Beyond these child-related dimensions, stress is represented by its more general effects on parental well-being. This form of stress is experienced due to increase in depressive symptoms as well as concerns regarding restriction of roles, health, ability to bond with their child, and sense of competence with respect to their ability to parent a child with a disability.

The challenges of raising a developmentally challenged child have been well-documented over the

last several decades. Elevated levels of maternal stress also have been linked to mothers' perceptions of being isolated from parents of typically developing children and the inadequate support from their spouse (Glenn *et al.*, 2009).

Fortunately some parents, on the other hand, of developmentally challenged children reported to have low to normal parenting stress. This indicates that there exists an individual resilience or protective factors which make the parents of developmentally challenged children low in their parenting stress. From a different perspective, social support provided to parents has emerged as having a consistent and strong relationship with parental stress and appears to play an essential role in family adaptation and personal well-being in general (Dunst *et al.*, 1997). By having available, and drawing upon their social support network, considerable resources can be obtained by parents, including assistance or advice from individuals in the network as well as validation of beliefs and emotions, to help them cope more effectively (Cochran and Brassard, 1979). Available research indicates that the demands associated with caretaking activities are strong correlates of parental stress (Beckman, 1991; Roach *et al.*, 1999 and Plant and Sanders, 2007).

The increase in parental stress that frequently occur as a consequence of having a child with a developmental disability can not only adversely affect many aspects of family well being but can also prevent parents from creating the most optimal environment for their child at many developmental periods. Some parents adapt successfully and many report positive contributions of the child with the disability (Flaherty and Glidden, 2000; Hastings and Taunt, 2002; Blacher and Baker, 2007 and Chowdhury and Raut, 2015). Parents and family positive factors, such as social support, coping skills and personality characteristics, have been shown to heighten or decrease the risk that parents of children with ID will become significantly stressed (Paczkowski and Baker, 2007 and Plant and Sanders, 2007).

Parents of children with delays are faced with many challenges across their child's lifespan, including overcoming the disappointments related to the original diagnosis, securing school placements, and learning to navigate the health and educational systems (Chen and Tang, 1997 and Floyd *et al.*, 1996). Often, the sources of stress move beyond the child to include the service

delivery system.

A number of important factors have been linked to the degree of stress experienced by parents of children with disabilities and may be of value when considering approaches to minimizing stress. Characteristics of the children themselves are, of course, critical, with the most consistent finding being an association between higher levels of children's behaviour problems and higher levels of numerous dimensions of parental stress (Baker *et al.*, 2003 and Beck *et al.*, 2004).

Zelkowitz *et al.* (2013) also revealed that pain, physical dysfunction, number of tender joints and physician global assessment of disease activity were associated with parenting disability. Self-report measures of parenting disability were associated with those of depression and parenting stress. Parenting stress was associated with children internalizing and externalizing behaviour problems while parenting disability was associated with children externalizing behaviour problems.

Hence, the investigation is inline with the previous researches that numerous factors *viz.*, child's characteristics, parental perception, and social stigma make the parents of developmentally challenged children more stressful than parents of normal children. Thus, it can be inferred that parents of developmentally challenged children suffer higher level of parenting stress than parents of normal children.

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