

Stress Among Parents of Differently Abled Children

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ABSTRACT - The present study was conducted to examine the Stress level among the parents of differently abled children. The data were collected from 400 samples of parents of the differently abled children, among the total sample 100 parents of Loco motor disability children, 100 parents of Visual Impaired children, 100 parents of Hearing Impaired children, and 100 parents of Mentally Retarded children. Stratified random sampling technique was used for this study. Stress Questionnaire developed by Latha Satish (1997) was used for this study to assess the level of stress. The results indicated that significant differences were observed in Stress levels among the parents of differently abled children with regard to Parental gender, age, occupation and Category of differently abled children.

Keywords: Differently abled children, Hearing impaired, Mental retardation, Locomotor disabled, Stress, Visually impaired,

I. INTRODUCTION

Usually birth of a baby in a family anticipated with great excitement and expectation of the future filled with happiness and success. This exuberance may become muted with the birth of a disabled child. It doesn't matter in the category of disability is visually impaired, hearing impaired, orthopedically disabled, mentally retarded or mental illness. The family in which this child is born will definitely have certain changes in psychosocial aspects among the family members especially excess in their parents.

When a child is diagnosed with disability, the attention focused on helping the child. But parents also need assistance in coping with stress, maturity, with their emotions and also positive personality approaches are required to them. Parents of children with disabilities have very high level of parenting stress signifying that they perceived more stress in their role as parents than did parents of children without disabilities, many studies highlighted the same aspects in their findings.

The parents are going through many stages of understanding and accepting their child's disabilities. Before the child's birth the parents have several expectations but after the birth it might be an emotional earthquake for them regarding their differently abled children. Everything seems to be upside down for them. Families caring for and bringing up the child with disability can create strain in the family, social isolation due to the child's limited and lack of mobility or behavioral problems.

Disability in a child provokes a series of disequilibrium among the parents in their psychological aspects which directly or indirectly affect them in various social and psychological well-beings. Parent shows a series of reactions after knowing that their child is disabled and they

start showing the guilt, sorrow, denial, anger, which affects different parents differently, so that these sort of stressors lead the parents to physical and mental health problem.

Having a disabled child born into a family and grow into adult is one of the most stressful experiences a family can endure. Parental reactions to the realization that their child is exceptionally usually included depression, stress, anxiety, anger, emotional shock, guilefulness etc. Every individual handles each of these feelings differently and may stay longer in certain stages than others. Some of the parents perceive that their disabled child as an extension of themselves and may feel ashamed, social rejection, ridicules or embarrassed. Parents' reactions may be affected due to economic status, level of stress, personality traits, emotional maturity or immaturity and marital stability or status.

Lot of problems may provoke in life situations in the families of differently abled children, example, lot of financial constraint strain or stress will arise for providing the necessary medical expenditure, special equipment for their easy axis's, arranging special schools, arranging special transportation, care takers in the absences of the parent, difficulties in entertaining the friends and relatives at their home, marriages for the siblings etc. may lead to mild to severe stress and also emotional disturbance will occur to the parents of the differently abled children.

Approximately 3 to 5 percentage of the population of children experience or get affected with physical, intellectual and mental health problems according to the National Health Survey in India and other Western countries. Stress and Emotional problems like depression are more common among the parents of children with disabilities which indirectly impose a significant burden on the society. Depressive symptoms, stress and emotional pressure have been cited as having the highest disease

burden of all health conditions in parents, impairing social and physical functioning and being associated with suicide, parental separation, divorce problems, increased health care costs, morbidity, crime rate increase, and mortality. (World Health Organization -2001).

STRESS

The stress phenomenon is an integral part of normal day to day life, when we are in a state of relaxed wakefulness the stress response is very low, but as soon as we start to concentrate and do something, the brain prepare us for action both psychologically and physiologically, and the stress response may thus be viewed as a natural consequence of any human information processing activity.

Stress in psychology is used in at least two different ways. First it is defined as the state of psychological upset or disequilibrium in the human beings caused by frustrations, conflicts and other internal as well as external strains and pressures. In a more serious condition of the stress, the individual reaches a point where the physical processes are seriously affected and mental processes are confused, and the emotional state is chaotic.

Hans Selye, first introduced the concept of stress in 1939. Derived from Latin, the word "stress" was popularly used in the seventeenth century to mean hardship, straight, adversity or affliction. According to Selye (1956) , "any external event or internal drive which threatens to upset the orgasmic equilibrium is stress". He has defined stress as the non-specific response of the body to any demand made upon it.

The factors that affect stress are called stressors. Almost any change in the environment even a pleasant change, such as a vacation demands some coping and a little stress is useful in helping us adapt. But beyond some point, stress becomes distress. What acts to produce distress varies greatly from person to person but some events seem to be stressors too many of as chief among these are injuries or infection of life which force us to cope in new ways, and anticipated or actual threats to our self esteem.

Stress is not always are pleasant or unpleasant, its stressors effects depend merely on the intensity of the demand made upon the adaptive capacity of the body. Any kind of normal activity – a game of chess or even a passionate embrace can produce considerable stress without causing harmful effects (Hans Selye 1984).

OBJECTIVE

- To find out the Stress among parents of differently abled children with demographic variables.

HYPOTHESIS

- There will be no significant differences stress among parents of differently abled children with their demographic variables i.e parental gender,

age, occupation and category of differently abled children.

II. METHOD

PARTICIPANTS

The study was conducted on a sample of 400 parents of differently abled children randomly selected from 10 special schools in Tiruvallur district of Tamilnadu. The sample consists of 200 fathers and 200 mothers, among them 166 parents were below 30 years and 234 were above 30 years of age, regarding parental occupation 79 parents were government, 172 were private, 80 were self employment and 69 were unemployed. Among the category of differently abled children 100 parents each from locomotor disability, hearing impaired, visually impaired and mentally retarded. Stratified random sampling technique was used for this study.

INSTRUMENTS

Keeping in the view of the objective of the study and also the nature of research, the standardized tool Stress Questionnaire constructed by Latha Satish (1997) was used for the present study. The questionnaire consists of 52 items arranged from mild stress (least affecting the everyday affairs), moderate to severe stress (which affects the adjustment and efficiency of the individual). This lists the life experiences based on the amount of change or adjustments one has to make to life rather than the undesirability of events themselves.

PROCEDURE

Stress Questionnaires was selected to suit the specific needs of the present study as well as the sample to be investigated. The researcher approached the various principals of the special schools and got the permission from ten different special education schools running for differently abled children and interact the parents during the week end parental meeting. Majority of the parents knowing and speaking the Tamil language and the researcher felt that the questionnaire has to be translated in Tamil language. Hence, the questionnaire was translated into Tamil language with the guidance and consultation of senior most professors of psychology and literature. The parents made ease and initial rapport were established. The preliminary information sheet and stress questionnaire was given to parents and they were asked to fill the preliminary information and stress questionnaire as per the instructions given in the scale.

ANALYSIS OF DATA

The data obtained from the sample of 400 parents of differently abled children were scored and analyzed with the help of computer and SPSS package. To analyze the data statistics were used i.e., mean, standard deviation, t-test and analysis of variance to test the hypothesis of the study.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table-1: The different Levels of Stress
(N=400)

Dimensions	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Mild stress	4	17	9.46	3.52
Moderate stress	2	17	10.56	4.71
Severe stress	1	16	7.05	5.85
Total stress	7	48	26.97	13.14

The mean scores and standard deviations of stress dimensions across mild, moderate and severe levels are presented in table-1 shows that, the comparison of the scores indicated that the parents of children with disability have shown moderate level of stress in total sample but 7% of them were facing severe stress. More specifically, it is observed that the degree of stress in mild and moderate groups were normal, where as the parents with severe stress has to face severe problems in their domestic life.

Table – 2: Parental Gender and Stress

(N= 400)

Dimensions	Mean & S.D.	Fathers (N=200)	Mothers (N=200)	t - Values
1. Mild Stress	Mean	8.80	10.12	3.80**
	S.D.	3.34	3.58	
2. Moderate Stress	Mean	9.77	11.35	3.39**
	S.D.	4.72	4.57	
3. Severe Stress	Mean	5.88	8.22	4.08**
	S.D.	5.48	5.98	
4. Total Stress	Mean	24.44	12.43	3.91**
	S.D.	29.50	13.38	

* p < 0.05 ** p < 0.01

The analysis of the data involved the comparison of the stress variables across the parent gender groups i.e., Fathers and Mothers. The mean scores and t-values are tabulated in table-2, shows the t-values obtained across the two gender groups are significant. Significant differences were found between fathers and mothers on mild stress, moderate stress, severe stress and total stress. Mothers experience severe stress due to having their differently abled children and have to show more responsibility and taking care about their disabled children especially for girls. More specifically, it is observed that the differences are statistically significant across the mild stress (t = 3.80; p < 0.01), Moderate stress (t = 3.39; p < 0.01), Severe stress (t = 4.08; p < 0.01) and total stress (t = 3.91; p < 0.01).

Table – 3: Parental Age and Stress

(N= 400)

Dimensions	Mean & S.D.	Below 30Yrs (N=166)	Above 30Yrs (N=234)	t - Values
1. Mild Stress	Mean	10.11	9.00	3.15**
	S.D.	3.52	3.46	
2. Moderate Stress	Mean	11.29	4.50	2.62**
	S.D.	10.04	4.79	
3. Severe Stress	Mean	8.03	5.82	2.85**
	S.D.	6.35	5.78	
4. Total Stress	Mean	29.44	12.83	3.19**
	S.D.	25.22	13.11	

* p < 0.05 ** p < 0.01

The analysis of the data involved the comparison of the stress variables across the parent age groups i.e., below 30Yrs and above 30 Yrs. The mean scores and t-values are tabulated in table-3, shows the t-values obtained across the two age groups are significant. Significant differences were found between parental age on mild stress, moderate stress, severe stress and total stress. Below 30 Yrs aged parents experience severe stress due to their differently abled children. More specifically, it is observed that the differences are statistically significant across the mild stress ($t = 3.15$; $p < 0.01$), Moderate stress ($t = 2.62$; $p < 0.01$), Severe stress ($t = 2.85$; $p < 0.01$) and total stress ($t = 3.19$; $p < 0.01$).

Table – 4: Parental Occupation and Stress

(N=400)

Dimensions	Mean & S.D.	Govt. (N=79)	Private (N=172)	Self-employed (N=80)	Un-employed (N=69)	F- values
Mild stress	Mean	6.28	9.63	9.79	12.30	50.33**
	SD	2.05	3.37	3.20	2.75	
Moderate stress	Mean	5.58	11.20	11.41	13.67	59.51**
	SD	2.93	4.37	4.51	2.83	
Severe stress	Mean	2.10	7.31	7.84	11.14	39.57**
	SD	2.47	5.73	5.87	4.96	
Total stress	Mean	13.96	28.03	29.04	36.83	56.23**
	SD	6.82	12.29	12.42	9.91	

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

The mean scores of Stress dimensions across the government jobs, private jobs, self-employment and un-employed parents are presented in table-4, shows the comparison of the scores indicated that the four groups of parents differ statistically on all stress dimensions. Significant differences were found between parental occupations on mild stress, moderate stress, severe stress and total stress. Un-employed parents experience severe and total stress due to their differently abled children. More specifically, it is observed that the differences are statistically significant across the mild stress ($F = 50.33$; $p < 0.01$), Moderate stress ($F = 59.51$; $p < 0.01$), Severe stress ($F = 39.57$; $p < 0.01$) and total stress ($F = 56.23$; $p < 0.01$).

Table – 5: Categories of differently abled and Stress

(N=400)

Dimensions	Mean & S.D.	Locomotor disabled (N=100)	Hearing Impaired (N=100)	Visually Impaired (N=100)	Mentally Retarded (N=100)	F- values
Mild stress	Mean	8.94	9.89	9.22	9.79	1.67
	SD	3.38	3.59	3.67	3.42	
Moderate stress	Mean	9.83	10.49	10.37	11.55	2.35
	SD	4.74	4.92	4.88	4.16	
Severe stress	Mean	5.64	7.91	6.46	8.18	4.34**
	SD	5.61	5.67	6.04	5.78	
Total stress	Mean	24.04	28.27	26.05	29.53	3.47*
	SD	12.84	13.23	13.62	12.37	

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

The mean scores of Stress dimensions across the loco motor disability, hearing impaired, visually impaired and mental retarded children's parents are presented in table-5, shows the four groups of parents differ statistically on all stress dimensions. Significant difference was found between disabilities of child on severe stress. All parents of children with disability experience severe stress but, parents of children with mental retardation experience higher severe

stress. More specifically, it is observed that the differences are statistically significant across the Severe stress ($F = 4.34$; $p < 0.01$) and total stress ($F = 3.47$; $p < 0.05$).

IV. CONCLUSION

Stress is a complex phenomenon. It is a subjective experience. A certain level of stress is unavoidable. Extreme stress conditions are said to be detrimental to human health, but in moderation stress is normal. Stress in

parents of disabled also leads to different health problems and we have to educate the parents and they should be oriented regarding their children disability. Disability in a child provokes a series of disequilibrium among the parents in their psychological aspects which directly or indirectly affect them in various social and psychological well beings. Parents shows a series of reactions after knowing that their child is disabled and they start showing the guilt, sorrow, denial, anger, which affects different parents in differently, so that these sort of stressors leads to parental physical and mental health Problems. Significant differences were found that among fathers and mothers on mild stress, moderate stress, severe stress and total stress. Mothers experience severe stress on their differently abled children especially having mentally retarded children. Significant differences were found between parental age i.e. below 30 yrs and above 30 yrs on mild stress, moderate stress, severe stress and total stress. In case of below 30 years of age parents experience severe stress on their differently abled children.

Regarding Parental occupation, significant differences were observed between government, private, self employed and unemployed parents on mild stress, moderate stress, severe stress and total stress. Un-employed parents experience severe and total stress on their differently abled children. Significant difference was found between disability of child i.e. locomotor disability, hearing impaired, visually impaired and mental retardation on severe stress. All the parents of differently abled children experience severe stress, but parents of children with mental retardation experience higher severe stress. Parents of children with differently abled experiencing high level stress due to spend more time on their children and more responsibility on girl disabled children. Some other factors like financial burden, medical treatment, special education and special attention also leads to stress among parents and especially mothers.

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