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STRESS AMONG MOTHERS OF MENTALLY CHALLENGED CHILDREN - EVIDENCE FROM SPECIAL SCHOOLS, COIMBATORE

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ABSTRACT

Background: Parenting a mentally retarded child is not an easy task. Parents especially mothers need every help and encouragement possible in their difficult task. Psychological Stress refers to “pressures on an individual that are in some way perceived as excessive or intolerable, and also to the psychological and physical changes.” The child's condition can range from mild to profound; the mother's stability and ability to handle problems can range from weak to strong. **Objective:** To assess the Stress level among mothers of mentally challenged children in Coimbatore. **Methods:** A descriptive research design was adopted in this study to assess the level of Stress among Mothers of Mentally Challenged Children by using convenient sampling technique. **Results:** About 44% of the mothers had mild level of stress, 42.4% of the mothers had moderate level of stress, 11.5% of the mothers had severe level of stress and about 2% of the mothers had very severe level of stress. **Conclusion:** The relationship between stress level and demographic variables of mothers of mentally challenged children, education, type of family, no. of children, and age of affected children and gender of affected children are positively correlated and other demographic variables are negatively correlated.

KEYWORDS

Mentally challenged children and Stress.

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INTRODUCTON

Caring for mentally challenged children is a very important task of parents and most importantly for the mothers than fathers. There is more stress caused to the mothers since all the care aspects of mentally challenged children will be met by them. Stress is defined as a condition in which the human body responds to changes in its normal balanced state. The cause of stress is due to the change in the environment that is perceived as a challenge or

threat which both positive and negative effects (Minde, 1988)¹.

It is estimated that about 3% of mentally challenged children are below 14 years of age group. It is estimated that the population with disability in India approximately over 90 million are with speech and hearing defects, 6 million orthopedically handicapped, 24 million mentally retarded and 7.5 million mentally ill children (Baquer and Sharma, 1996)².

When the researcher was visiting the special schools she found many of the mothers of mentally challenged children were having more stress and many studies also show more stress among mothers of mentally challenged children. Hence the researcher has chosen study on this topic.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Al-Qaisy (2012)³ conducted study to determine the amount of stress experienced by the mothers of children of mentally handicapped and identified the stress of mothers with some of the variables such as: age and sex of children and age of mothers. A group of 235 mothers of children who were mentally challenged were selected in a randomized sample method. The study revealed that the mothers' total stress score was at a high severity level. Additionally, the results showed that there was no difference in the mothers' stress with sex and age of the mentally handicapped children. It also directed that in relation to the age of mothers there was no difference between mothers' stress.

Hidangmayum and Khadi (2012)⁴ conducted study to compare the level of parenting stress of normal and mentally challenged children, which was undertaken on a sample of 30 mentally challenged children and 60 normal children of age group 5-10 years. Abidin's (1995)⁵ Parenting stress index- short form was used to assess the level of parenting stress. The study results revealed that higher percent of parents of mentally challenged had clinically significant parenting stress (73.4%) when compared to the parents of the normal children.

Upadhyaya and Havalappanavar (2008)⁶ conducted a study on parents of 628 mentally challenged children who were assessed for their apparent stress

using Family Interview for Stress and Coping in Mental Retardation (FISC-MR). So sociodemographic data relating to the mentally challenged individuals and their parents were collected to assess behavior disorder, BASIC-MR, Part-Bis used. The study results revealed that the mothers' stress was higher when compared to the fathers and it was significant at 0.001 level. Majority of the parents reported mild to moderate stress and none of them reported to have very high stress level. Mothers report higher stress with relation to the areas of care, emotional and social stress. Both parents report equal stress levels related to the area of financial stress. It was also noted that more than one mentally challenged children in the family; higher levels of behavior disorder; lower age of the mentally challenged individual and parents; and lower income of the family are associated with higher stress.

Mbugua *et al*, (2011)⁷ conducted study to determine the risk of severe stress/depression in caregivers of children with intellectual disability. The study was conducted among 114 caregivers registered at the Gachie Parish program (in Kenya) for the intellectually disabled children. A researcher-designed social demographic questionnaire and the Beck depression inventory were administered to those that met the inclusion criteria. Results showed that 79% of the caregivers were at risk of clinical depression. So this shows that the majority of the caregivers of children with intellectual disability were at risk of developing clinical depression.

Majumdar *et al*, (2005)⁸ conducted study comparing the stress perceived by parents of mentally retarded and normal children. This study was conducted in the Child Guidance Clinic of a tertiary care psychiatry hospital. The study sample consisted of 180 subjects and was sorted as: group A (60 parents of profound to moderately mentally retarded children), group B (60 parents of mild to borderline mentally retarded children) and group C (60 parents of children with normal intelligence), which served as the control group. The Family Interview for Stress and Coping (FISC) in Mental Retardation, and the Hamilton Anxiety Rating Scale (HARS) were used on each parent and they found that the

Parents in group A had a significantly higher incidence of stressors and level of anxiety as compared to those in groups B and C. There existed a positive correlation between the level of anxiety and stressors.

Islam *et al*, (2006)⁹ conducted a study to compare difference of mental and physical stress between the Parents of Children with Mental Retardation and the parents of children with no mental retardation. The study consisted of 220 parents, 50% of whom had children with mental retardation and another 50% of parents of children with no mental retardation. The study results revealed that the Parents of Children with Mental Retardation (PCMR) had a greater stress score (34.27) than the Parents of Children with No Mental Retardation (PCNR) (21.66). The mental stress was higher than the physical stress in most of the parents with mentally retarded children (71.4% mothers and 67.5% fathers). Fathers had significantly lesser mental stress score than the mothers of mentally challenged children.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Stress among Mothers of Mentally Challenged Children - evidence from special schools, Coimbatore.

Objectives

- To assess the Stress level among mothers of mentally challenged children.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Descriptive Research design was adopted in this study to assess the level of Stress among Mothers of Mentally Challenged Children at selected special schools in Coimbatore. The study was conducted in three special schools. Those special schools include Aashirvad Special School, Vidhya Vikashini Special School and Ramakrishna School for Physically Challenged, Coimbatore.

Participants

Target Population of this study was Mothers of Mentally challenged children. Accessible Population was Mothers of Mentally Challenged Children at selected special schools. The population of the study was mothers of mentally challenged children in selected special schools in Coimbatore.

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A total of 52 mothers of mentally challenged children at selected special schools were selected for this study by using convenient sampling technique.

Instrument

The semi-structured interview schedule was adopted to collect data. High level of confidentiality and anonymity was maintained throughout the study. The following tools were used for the study,

1. Questionnaire to collect demographic profile.
2. Modified stress assessment questionnaire to assess the stress level among mothers of mentally challenged children.

Scoring procedure

The stress questionnaire consists of 78 questions described under five aspects namely physical indicators (1-21), sleep indicators (22-26), behavioral indicators (27-45), emotional indicators (46-69), personal indicators (70-78) questions. The stress responses were scored as Always - 5, Sometimes - 4, Often - 3, Almost always - 2, Never - 1. The scoring of the stress assessment tool was done by adding the total score of each item. The maximum score was 390 and minimum score was 78. The stress score was interpreted as;

1-78	No stress
79-156	Mild level stress
157-234	Moderate level stress
235-312	Severe level stress
313-390	Very severe level stress

Analysis

The collected data was analysed using statistical package. Frequency distribution and percentage was used to express the demographic characteristics of mothers. Chi square test was applied to find the association between the independent and dependent variables. P value of <0.05 was considered as statistically significant.

Procedure

The investigator was appropriately selected, trained and assigned to recruit participants, and collected the data from the respondents. Oral consent was obtained and performed the interview. All interviews were conducted in 'Coimbatore' with privacy after building rapport with the respondents.

April – June

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

SECTION I

Demographic Characteristics of the Mothers of Mentally Challenged Children at Selected Special Schools.

The obtained data on demographic characteristics is described under the sub headings, which includes age, educational status of mother, occupation of mother, educational status of husband, occupational status of husband, monthly family income, type of family, religion, number of children, age of the affected child and Gender of the affected child.

The above table depicts that, 29 (55.78%) mothers belong to 31-40 years, 15(28.84%) mothers belong to 21-30 years and 4 (7.69%) mothers belong to age group of 51-60 years and 41-50 years of age. With regards to the educational status of mother, 21(40.38%) were graduates, 18 (34.62%) studied up to secondary level, 7 (13.46%) studied up to primary level and 6 (11.54%) studied up to higher secondary level. The occupational status of mothers reveals that 45 (86.54%) were house wives, 6 (11.54%) were in private sectors and 1 (1.92%) was in government sector. The monthly income of parents shows that, 21(40.39%) were having less than Rs10000 of monthly income, 20 (38.46%) were having Rs10001 - 20000 of monthly income and 11 (21.15%) were having greater than Rs20001 of monthly income. Upon looking into the type of family among parents it is noted that, 34 (65.38%) were in nuclear family and 18 (34.62%) were in joint family. The distribution of parent based on religion reveals that, 43 (82.69%) were Hindus, 7 (13.46%) were Christians and 2 (3.85%) were Muslims. Based on the number of children, it is found that 31(59.62%) were having two children, 18 (34.62%) were having one child, 3 (5.76%) were having more than two children. It is noted that the age distribution of child with MRas 23 (44.24%) were 7 - 10 yrs, 13 (25%) were 3 - 6 yrs, 8 (15.38%) were 11 - 14 yrs and 8 (15.38%) were 15 - 18 yrs of age. In regards to the gender distribution of child with MR it is noted that 34 (65.38%) were males and 18 (34.62%) were females.

The above table shows the distribution of mothers based on the level of stress. Fifty two mothers were

assessed among which 23 (44.2%) mothers had mild level of stress, 22 (42.4%) mothers had moderate level of stress, 6 (11.5%) mothers had severe level of stress and 1 (1.9%) mother had very severe level of stress.

The above table shows the assessment on different aspects of stress among mothers of mentally challenged children. The maximum score is seen in emotional indicators (120) with the mean value of 58.17 and the mean percentage is 48.47%. The sleep indicators (25) show a less score of 10 compared to the other indicators.

The above table shows the relationship between stress level and demographic variables of mothers of mentally challenged children, education, type of family, no. of children, age of affected children and gender of affected children are positively correlated and other demographic variables are negatively correlated.

In the present study, a very high percentage of mothers experienced mild and moderate stress may be because they lacked understanding and support from their family members, presence of family problems in their families, lack of family integration, limits of family opportunity and because of their poor health /mood, and excess time demands. Among 52 mothers, 23 had mild level of stress, 22 had moderate level of stress, 6 had severe level of stress, one mother had very severe level of stress respectively. The finding of this study unswerving with those of Khadi (2012)⁴ who conducted a study to compare the level of parenting stress of normal and mentally challenged children. The study results revealed that higher percent of parents of mentally challenged had clinically significant parenting stress (73.4%) when compared to the parents of the normal children.

Upon assessment on different aspects of stress among mothers of mentally challenged children the maximum score is seen in emotional indicators (120) with the mean value of 58.17 and the mean percentage is 48.47%. The sleep indicators (25) show a less score of 10 compared to the other indicators.

The relationship between stress level and demographic variables of mothers of mentally

challenged children, education, type of family, no. of children, and age of affected children and gender of affected children are positively correlated and other demographic variables are negatively correlated. In this research income of the family has inverse relationship which is congruent to Ricketts and Anderson (2008)¹⁰ which was found that the parents of low level of income had more parental stress. Hidangmayum (2012)⁴ also found a negative relationship between family income and parenting stress.

Table No.1: Demographic Characteristics of the Mothers of mentally challenged children

S.No	Personal Information		Total n = 52	
			Frequency	Percentage
1	Age in years	21-30	15	28.84
		31-40	29	55.78
		41-50	4	7.69
		51-60	4	7.69
2	Education	Primary	7	13.46
		Secondary	18	34.62
		Higher secondary	6	11.54
		Graduate	21	40.38
3	Type of Family	Nuclear	34	65.38
		Joint	18	34.62
4	Religion	Hindu	43	82.69
		Christian	7	13.46
		Muslim	2	3.85
5	Employment status	House wife	45	86.54
		Private sector	6	11.54
		Government sector	1	1.92
6	Income in rupees per month	< 10000	21	40.39
		10001 - 20000	20	38.46
		>20000	11	21.15
7	Number of Children	One	18	34.62
		Two	31	59.62
		More than two	3	5.76
8	Age of Affected children	3-6 yrs	13	25.00
		7-10 yrs	23	44.24
		11-14 yrs	8	15.38
		15-18yrs	8	15.38
9	Gender of Affected Children	Male	34	65.38
		Female	18	34.62

Table No.2: Assessment of Stress among Mothers

S.No	Level of stress	Total n = 52	
		Frequency	Percentage
1	No stress	-	-
2	Mild stress	23	44.2
3	Moderate stress	22	42.4
4	Severe stress	6	11.5
5	Very severe stress	1	1.9

Table No.3: Assessment on Different Aspects of Stress among Mothers

S.No	Indicators of stress	Maximum	Mean	Mean Percentage
1	Physical indicators	105	42.5	40.50
2	Sleep indicators	25	10.01	40.04
3	Behavior indicators	95	37.92	39.91
4	Emotional indicators	120	58.17	48.47
5	Personal indicators	45	19.11	42.46

Table No.4: Relationship between Stress Level and Demographic Variables of Mothers

S.No	Demographic variables	'r' value
1	Age	-0.055
2	Educational status	0.020
3	Occupation	-0.065
4	Educational status of husband	-0.018
5	Occupation of husband	-0.228
6	Monthly Family income	-0.130
7	Type of family	0.006
8	Religion	-0.038
9	No. of children	0.022
10	Age of affected child	0.060
11	Gender of affected child	0.013

CONCLUSION

Dealing with mentally challenged children induces a huge amount of stress to the mother. In this study, the researcher has assessed the level of stress among the mothers of mentally challenged children. When the children are mentally challenged it is really a concern to the mothers and it creates social and emotional stress to them. Also, some mothers are very reluctant to take their child to public places due to the difficulties in handling the child. The pessimism and hopelessness of the family members causes a severe stress to the mothers. Most of the mothers had mild-to-moderate level of stress and a few had severe level of stress.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

We declare that we have no conflict of interest.

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