

Extent and Determinants of Parenting Stress in Parents of Children with Intellectual Disability, Specific Learning Disability, and Slow Learners

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ABSTRACT

Studies pertaining to parental stress and parental psychopathology in parents of children with Intellectual Disability and Developmental Disabilities. However, information involving the effect of disability on the parents of children with Specific Learning Disability and Slow Learners is very sparse. The current study was undertaken to understand the extent and determinants of parenting stress in parents of children with Intellectual Disability (ID), Specific Learning Disability (SLD) and Slow Learners (SL). Parents of 24 children with mild Intellectual Disability, 23 children with SLD, and 10 SL were studied. They were evaluated using 'PSI-4 SF' in relation to total parenting stress, parental distress, parent-child dysfunctional interaction and difficult child in comparison with the child's adaptive behavior and other child and parent variables. The data was analyzed using One-Way ANOVA, Duncan's Multiple Range Test, Product Moment Correlation, and t-Test. Results indicate that total parenting stress, parental distress, and parent-child dysfunctional interaction was significantly higher in the group of parents of children with Intellectual Disability as compared to parents of children with SLD and Slow Learners. Correlation between total parenting stress and adaptive behavior was observed when all the three conditions were taken as a single group.

Keywords: Parenting Stress, Adaptive Behavior, Intellectual Disability, Specific Learning Disability, Slow Learners

Parenting is the process of promoting and supporting the physical, emotional, social, financial and intellectual development of a child from infancy to adulthood. Parenting refers to the aspects of raising the child aside from the biological relationship. (Davis, Martin 2000). Chronic conditions of disability, both medical and emotional, make extra demand on the parents, resulting in stress (Tew & Laurence, 1975; Breslau et al., 1982). Parenting a child with a developmental disability presents special challenges for the parents. Stress levels of parents whose children have a developmental disability are significantly higher than the

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Received: April 25, 2019; Revision Received: June 13, 2019; Accepted: June 28, 2019

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parents of typically developing children (Dyson, 1997). Research on stress in parents of children with developmental disabilities has shown that the stress level of these parents often remains high over time (Houser-Cram et al. 2001). Gupta (2007) reported that behavioral and developmental disability was associated with higher parenting stress than medical disability.

Intellectual Disability is a disability characterized by significant limitations in both intellectual functioning and in adaptive behavior, which covers many, everyday social and practical skills. Disability originates before the age of 18. A **Slow Learner** refers to the child whose thinking skills have developed significantly slower than the accepted norm for his age. This child will go through the same basic developmental stages as other children but will do so at a significantly slower rate. However, this development, while being slower, nevertheless will be relatively even. In short, there is a discrepancy between the child's potential and actual achievement. On the other hand, a child with a **Specific Learning Disability** is one of average or above average intelligence who has a very specific disability, which can make learning very difficult. There may be a deficit in any of the basic central nervous system functions. These have to do with the use of listening, speaking, reading, writing, reasoning or mathematical abilities; in other words attention and memory spans, language acquisition, auditory and visual perception, motor coordination and planning, spatial orientation, impulse control, and sequencing. (Different Strokes, Parent Edge 2011).

In 1987, Horn and Fuchs gave a history of adaptive behavior and about its role in the assessment and treatment of intellectually disabled individuals. In the middle of the 19th century, although the term adaptive behavior not used until the 20th century, it was understood that successful treatment programs should include the skills, necessary for coping with societal demands. By the 20th century, intelligence tests came into being and were accepted as one of the suitable ways of assessing individuals with Intellectual Disability. During the 1950s-1980s adaptive functioning of such individuals were of main importance and training programs focused on such skills. For the first time, adaptive measures were employed systematically as an assessment practice, supplementing traditional intelligence tests. Researchers got interested in assessing the adaptive functioning of individuals with a disability. It is a known fact that adaptive functioning differs in various disabilities. However, it is less clear whether these differences are attributable to the solely intellectual level, or whether these different patterns are part of disability itself. (Horn & Fuchs)

The rationale of the study

The focus of the current study is to explore the Parenting Stress in 3 types of developmental disabilities viz. Children with Intellectual Disability, Slow Learners, and Children with Specific Learning Disability in the Indian context. For the purpose of this study the operational definition of 3 categories is as follows: Intellectual Disability – Mild (IQ 50-70); Specific Learning Disability – Average/Above average Intellectual Functioning (IQ 90 or more) with specific learning difficulty; Slow Learners – (IQ 80-89) (Wechsler IQ Classification in Groth-Marnat, 2009). The current study also explores the determinants (Both children generated and parent-generated) of parenting stress in parents of children with Intellectual Disability, children with a specific learning disability and slow learners, especially in the Indian context.

The adverse effect of adaptive behavior problems on family dynamics, particularly parental stress has been well documented (Weiss et al., 2003) & Hauser-Cram et al. (2001). The

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child's behavioral problems were found to be a significant predictor of maternal and paternal child-related stress. In addition, higher levels of behavioral problems were associated with parent-related stress for mothers, but not for fathers.

Slow Learners and Children with Specific Learning Disability represent a significant section in any academic class. They are not easily identified on the basis of their appearance and conduct. However, because of their academic difficulties, these children are left out and ridiculed leading to various behavior problems.

The current study has been conceptualized to study the extent and determinants of the parenting stress in the parents of children with Intellectual Disability, parents of children with Specific Learning Disabilities, and parents of Slow Learners in Indian context with the objective to identify the target group of parents for supportive intervention so that long-term harmful consequences of untreated parental stress can be minimized.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

The sample considered were taken based on a set criterion for the study design. The following inclusion and exclusions were considered.

Parents of Children with diagnosed Intellectual Disability, Slow Learners and Children with Specific Learning Disability willing to be part of the study. Age of the children ranged from 5 to 12 years and children meeting the predefined criteria for Mild Intellectual Disability (IQ 50-69) Slow Learners (IQ 80-89) and Specific Learning Disability (IQ 90 and above). Care was taken that the children were evaluated by a clinical psychologist to determine their IQ in the past year alone. The exclusion was also considered for the parents having the pre-existing psychological disorder (assessed by GHQ-12). Based on the considered factors, the sample consisted of parents of children with Intellectual Disability IQ 50 – 70 (N 24), was collected from Don Guanella Special School, Chennai and from Sri Ramachandra Medical University. The samples for the parents of children with Specific Learning Disability (N 23), and Slow Learners (N 10) were selected randomly from Sri Ramachandra Medical University.

Instruments

Three measures were used in this study,

- 1. General Health Questionnaire-12:** The GHQ is among the most thoroughly tested of all health measures. It is a self-administered screening instrument designed to detect current diagnosable mental disturbances and disorders. It is used in surveys or in clinical settings to identify potential cases, leaving the task of diagnosing actual disorder to a psychiatry interview (Ian McD, 2006). GHQ is available in 4 versions depending upon the number of items required for the extensive screening, the current study uses GHQ 12 as a basic screening for parents. Ever since Goldberg introduced the GHQ in 1978, it has been translated into 38 different languages, testimony to validity and reliability of the questionnaire. Reliability coefficients of the questionnaire range from 0.78 to 0.95 in various studies (Jackson, 2007). Goldberg et al. (1997) reported that the average area under ROC (Receiver Operating Characteristics) curve was 0.88, range from 0.83 to 0.95, which reflect its validity.

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- 2. Abidin's Parenting Stress Index (PSI-4 SF):** A brief version of the full PSI-4 (PSI-4 SF) offers a rapid assessment of the overarching domains of parenting stress. The three subscales of the PSI-SF are labeled as Parental Distress (PD), Parent-Child Dysfunctional Interactions (P-CDI) and Difficult Child (DC). Total Stress (TS) score indicates overall parenting stress that an individual is experiencing. Internal Consistency refers to the extent to which items on the same scale produce a consistent measurement of a given construct. All alphas were found to be near 0.90. Test-retest reliability of the original PSI-SF was assessed over a 6-month retest interval. The test-retest coefficient for the Total Stress scale was 0.84; for Parental Distress, it was 0.85; for Parent-Child Dysfunctional Interaction, it was 0.68: and for Difficult Child, it was 0.78. (Abidin, 2012).
- 3. Vineland Adaptive Behavior scale- Second Edition (VABS):** It is a semi-structured survey interview conducted with parents that assess adaptive functioning in children, which includes Communication, Daily Living Skills, Socialization, and Motor Skills. Internal Consistency of Adaptive Behavior Composite is very high, with reliability coefficients ranging from 0.94 to 0.98 for children birth to 18 years of age. The authors report that the VABS-II has been demonstrated to be a valid measure for assessing adaptive behavior in individuals from birth to 90 years of age (Sparrow et al, 2005).

Procedure

Parents were approached in special schools and from the out patient clinic of the Clinical Psychology department (Kept confidential as agreed with parents). Parents have explained the need and rationale of the study, issues of confidentiality, voluntary nature, and option to withdraw. Informed consent was obtained and socio-demographic data form was filled. Then the parents were asked to complete the GHQ-12 on completion if they were screened eligible, they were administered PSI-4-SF. The parents were next interviewed by the principal investigator using VABS-II, to estimate the child's adaptive functioning. The study aimed to identify the interaction of study variables in the given population. Aiming to identify the varied stress patterns in parents and that links to the level of disability and adaptive behavior. The data was analyzed using One-Way ANOVA, Duncan's Multiple Range Test, Product Moment Correlation, and t-Test.

RESULTS

The result analyzed the relationship between Total Parenting Stress and its dimensions. It also identifies the relationship between Total Parenting Stress and Adaptive Behaviour for the whole group and each disability separately.

The socio-demographics of the study population (Table 1) consists of 57 parents that are categorized as 24 children with Mild Intellectual Disability, 23 children with Specific Learning Disability and 10 Slow- Learners. Obtaining a representative population was based on availability and parents volunteering for the study, given the stigma attached to the children diagnosis parental compliance was poor and indicated more dropouts. Though the population consisted of more male children this is more to the attribute of available population and cultural stereotype of a male child having deficit or difficulty that giving more concerns from the parents compared to female children. The parental factors were also largely represented by mothers as they are primary caregivers.

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Table No 1: Demographic characteristics of the study population.

	Children with ID		Children with SLD		Slow Learners		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Sample Total per Diagnosis	24		23		10		57	
Gender of Child								
Male	20	83.3%	14	60.8%	09	90%	43	75.4%
Female	04		09	39.1%	01	10%	14	24.6%
Gender of Parent								
Male	02	8.3%	11	47.8%	01	10%	14	24.6%
Female	22	91.6%	12	52.1%	09	90%	43	75.4%
Education of Parent								
Undergraduates	19	79.1%	08	34.8%	06	60%	33	57.8%
Graduates/PG	05	20.8%	15	65.2%	04	40%	24	42.1%
Working Status of Parent								
Working	18	75%	14	60.8%	06	60%	38	66.6%
Non-Working	06	25%	09	39.1%	04	40%	19	33.3%
Place of Residence								
Urban	18	75%	18	78.2%	09	90%	45	78.9%
Rural	06	25%	05	21.7%	01	10%	12	21%
Family Structure								
Joint	04	16.6%	11	47.8%	05	50%	20	35.1%
Nuclear	20	83.3%	12	52.2%	05	50%	37	64.9%

When analyzing the relationship between Parenting Stress and Types of Disabilities, the findings indicate that mean scores of Total Parenting Stress, Parental Distress, and Parent-Child Dysfunctional Interaction for all three diagnostic groups were noted to show significant difference at 0.01 level (Table 2). However, the mean scores of Difficult Child measure for children with Specific Learning Disability, Intellectual Disability, and Slow Learners groups did not differ significantly.

Table No.2 Summary of One-way ANOVA of the relationship between Total Parenting Stress, Parental Distress, Parent-Child Dysfunctional Interaction & Difficult Child and Types of Disabilities.

	Source of Variance	df	SS	MSS	F Value
Total Parenting Stress	Types of Disability	2	3786.71	1893.36	5.64*
	Error	54	18125.43		
	Total	56			
Parental Distress	Types of Disability	2	910.74	455.37	5.91*
	Error	54	4159.93	77.04	
	Total	56			
Parent-Child Dysfunctional Interaction	Types of Disability	2	504.28	252.14	6.08*
	Error	54	2238.60	41.46	
	Total	56			
Difficult Child	Types of Disability	2	183.61	91.80	1.92
	Error	54	2584.64	47.86	
	Total	56			

*Significant at $p < 0.01$

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On Further evaluation, the mean values of Total Parenting Stress, Parental Distress and Parent-Child Dysfunctional Interaction of parents of children with Intellectual Disability as compared to parents of children with Specific Learning Disability and Slow Learners were noted to be higher. Though there was no significant difference between the parents from each group, the mean value of each group indices did show defenses through not on a higher comparison of clinical significance.

Figure No.3 Disability-wise Mean Values for Total Parenting Stress, Parental Distress & Parent-Child Dysfunctional Interaction.

	Type of Disability	Mean
Total Parenting Stress	Slow Learners	98.80
	Specific Learning Disability	101.30
	Intellectual Disability	116.96
Parental Distress	Slow Learners	33.00
	Specific Learning Disability	30.17
	Intellectual Disability	38.87
Parent-Child Dysfunctional Interaction	Slow Learners	32.90
	Specific Learning Disability	33.52
	Intellectual Disability	40.46

Adaptive behavior relationship with that of parenting stress was evaluated with a Correlation between Total Parenting Stress and Adaptive Behavior (Table 4). On correlating parental stress with adaptive behavior of the Children when taken as a Whole Group was found to be significant at 0.01 level. It also indicated that Total Parenting Stress and Adaptive Behavior were found to have a significant negative relationship when all the three conditions were taken as a single group (Whole Group).

Table No. 4 Whole Group and Disability-wise Correlation between Total Parenting Stress and Adaptive Behavior

	Total Parenting Stress			
	Whole Group	Specific Learning Disability Group	Intellectual Disability Group	Slow Learners Group
Adaptive Behavior	-0.36*	-0.10	-0.24	0.43

**Significant at p < 0.01*

When the three groups (Specific Learning Disability, Intellectual Disability, and Slow Learners) were analyzed separately, the relationship between Total Parenting Stress and Adaptive Behavior was not found to be significant. It was also found that Total Parenting Stress was not correlated with Gender of the Child, Gender of the Parent, Education of the Parent, Working Status of the Parent, Place of Residence (Urban/Rural), & Type of Family (Nuclear/ Joint).

DISCUSSION

The analysis leading to the outcome of the study showed that that the parents of Intellectual Disability group were found to have significantly higher Total Parenting Stress, Parental

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Distress, and Parent-Child Dysfunctional Interaction than those of Slow Learners and Specific Learning Disability Groups. However, parents found their child to be equally difficult irrespective of Type of Disability.

When comparing the study findings with the normative table given in the Abidin's PSI-4 SF manual, the mean score of Total Parenting Stress was in the clinically significant range in the Intellectual Disability group. Mean score of Parental Distress was high in the Intellectual Disability group. The mean score of Parent-Child Dysfunctional Interaction was seen clinically significant in the Intellectual Disability group and high in the Specific Learning Disability group. The mean score of the Difficult Child was high in Intellectual Disability group. (Abidin, 2012). Considering these factors are also in accordance with by Hidangmayum and Khadi (2012) study which also reported a high percentage of parents of intellectually challenged had clinically significant parenting stress than the parents of normal children. Aldosari and Pufpaff (2014) also reported high levels of parenting stress in children with intellectual disability in their study.

Thought extensive literature does not exist in research which has specifically compared the Parenting Stress in the parents of Children with Intellectual Disability, Children with Specific Learning Disability and Slow Learners. Finding noted that the parents of children with Specific Learning Disability and Slow Learners don't exhibit clinically significant Total Parenting Stress or its components, thus could be also related to the fact that parents of children with Specific Learning Disability or Slow Learners are able to understand the nature of the problem and are able to take help from the available resources to try to manage the disability. This may be due to them functioning on the hope and understand that the child may be able to function effectively in the future.

In accordance with the study by Weiss et al. (2003), the current study also established the relationship between adaptive functioning and parenting stress. Lower the adaptive level of functioning, higher the level of parenting stress. However, in the current study, this finding was observed only when all the three groups were analyzed as a whole. A study by Ritzema and Sladeczek (2011) also reported the significant relationship between parents' stress, child's adaptive functioning, and child's behaviour problems. When the same analysis was attempted in different subgroups of parents of a child with Intellectual Disability, Specific Learning Disability and that of Slow Learners separately, no relationship was established between adaptive functioning of the child and the parenting stress. This could possibly be attributed to the small size of the sample in individual categories in the current study.

The influence of gender of the child on Total Parenting Stress was not found to be related in the current study. This finding is at variance with an earlier study by Gupta (2007), which found that female sex of the child was associated with higher parenting stress. One possible rational being that earlier study involved sample from the Northern India population and current study is collected from the Southern India population. Thus, the geographical and cultural variations can contribute to the parental attitude towards the female child that could be different in both the demographic locations of India

The findings suggest that parents of Intellectual Disability groups had significantly higher Total Parenting Stress, Parental Distress, and Parent-Child Dysfunctional Interaction than

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those of Slow Learners and Specific Learning Disability group. The significant negative relationship between Total Parenting Stress and Adaptive Behavior in the case of the whole group is also in agreement with the previous studies. However, these parameters were found to be independent of each other if parents of children with Specific Learning Disability, Intellectual Disability, and Slow Learners were analyzed separately. The reason for such a result could be the small size of the sample.

The results of this study may be used to facilitate identification the parent groups so that scarce resources can be diverted to the needy group for early identification and timely management of the parenting stress to prevent harmful consequences. The findings of this study suggest that parents of intellectually disabled children need early attention in this regard. However future studies with larger sample size and diverse sample selection can shed light if the parents of children with Specific Learning Disability and parents of Slow Learners would also be in the need for such intervention. The Study limitations can be attributed to the sample size was small as they had to meet the inclusion and exclusion criteria, and duration of the study was short. As the sample was picked up from specific locations, it limited the possibility of generalization of the findings. Similarly, the small size of the sample, especially in the slow learner group, restricted the validity of the findings.

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Acknowledgment

The authors profoundly appreciate all the people who have successfully contributed to ensuring this paper in place. Their contributions are acknowledged however their names cannot be mentioned.

Conflict of Interest

The authors carefully declare this paper to bear not a conflict of interests

How to cite this article: Lal. N.A., & Rajan. E.J.E. (2019). Extent and Determinants of Parenting Stress in Parents of Children with Intellectual Disability, Specific Learning Disability, and Slow Learners. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 7(2), 626-634. DIP:18.01.076/20190702, DOI:10.25215/0702.076