

## Stress, depression, anxiety and coping strategies in parous and nulliparous women

Moksha Bhavsar<sup>1\*</sup>, Jyoti Thakar<sup>2</sup>

### ABSTRACT

Sufficient attention to mental health is often not encouraged, especially in women. The motherhood phase plays a crucial role when it comes to women's mental health and coping strategies. This research is an attempt to study the level of anxiety, stress, depression and coping strategy in parous women (have children) and nulliparous women (do not have children). We examined and compared the attitudes of women in both the categories. This study is based on 120 subjects divided into two equal groups (60 Nulliparous and 60 Parous) selected through random maternity and IVF hospitals in Ahmedabad, Gujarat and from the surrounding environment. The level of anxiety, stress, and depression were measured by anxiety, depression, and stress scale (ADSS- 2008) developed by Pallavi Bhatnagar et al., and the level of coping strategies were measured by the Coping Checklist (CCL-1986) test developed by Rao. T-test and correlation were applied for data analysis. The results revealed that there was no significant difference found between two female groups in respect to stress, depression and anxiety. While, there was a significant positive correlation found in the coping strategies amongst nulliparous and parous women.

**Keywords:** *Stress, Depression, Anxiety, Coping Strategy, Parous Women, Nulliparous Women*

**A** woman plays an important role of a mother in an Indian society. This paper is based on the study of measuring the level of stress, depression, and anxiety in two types of women; parous women and nulliparous women. It also explores how coping strategies are used by both groups of women to overcome these psychological issues. Stress, depression and anxiety can be correlated very well with coping strategies.

Parous is a scientific term used for women who have given birth to one or more offspring. The word parous is derived from Latin word *pariō*, meaning "I give birth." Nulliparous is a scientific term used for a woman who has never given birth to a child either by choice or due to any medical reason. It is also used for a woman who gave birth to a stillborn baby. The word null means "not" and "parere" means "to bring forth." After having a child, a woman witnesses a huge change in her life. She has to adjust in accordance to her children, husband,

<sup>1</sup> Clinical Psychology, St. Xavier's College, Ahmedabad, Gujarat, India

<sup>2</sup> Clinical Psychology, St. Xavier's College, Ahmedabad, Gujarat, India

\*[Responding Author](#)

Received: April 4, 2020; Revision Received: June 1, 2020; Accepted: June 25, 2020

## Stress, Depression, Anxiety and Coping Strategies in Parous and Nulliparous Women

and family members. There is an add-on responsibility of household work and therefore, she ends up with no time for herself. Due to these reasons women experience fatigue and lack of time for themselves. As the responsibility increases, they also face adjustment issues in their routine life. At the end of the day she finds herself in a stressful environment and this further leads to severe psychological problems. There have also been considerably many reasons for women being nulliparous by their choice because they feel that these days a child would become an obstacle in their professional milestone so they do not want to sacrifice their career and want to be free from all the extra responsibilities that come along with a child. Many women often fear losing their freedom while others face societal pressure and financial issues. There are a few women who fear that they would give birth to a baby, who will be transmitted with hereditary diseases or mentally retarded children. Few women have been through severe childhood trauma or have been in a family environment which created a lasting impression, had severe accidents. Apart from this “27.5 million couples suffer from infertility.” Thus, Parous and nulliparous women also adopt various coping strategies to deal with the stress they undergo.

Talking about the most common psychological diseases witnessed in both groups of women is Stress, depression and anxiety and to overcome these psychological diseases they use coping strategy. One of the most common and modern diseases is ‘Depression.’ It is reported by the World Health Organization that “300 million people around the world suffer from depression.” Studies suggest that “women experience depression up to twice as often as men.” Studies have always claimed that depression in women is much more higher than in men due to CA biological, social, cultural, psychological problem. Stress is neither a stimulus nor a response but an ongoing transactional process between the individual and the environment. The stress level differs from person to person as every individual has different personalities and different ways of reacting to a stressful situation. “Study done by Nielsen reveals that Indian women are the most stressed in the world today. An immense 87% of Indian women said they felt stressed most of the time, and 82% had no time to relax.” Anxiety is witnessed, in both nulliparous and parous women which has been supported by many researchers conducted on fear of childbirth, antenatal anxiety in nulliparous women and maternal prenatal anxiety, postpartum anxiety in parous women. The anxiety associated with nulliparous women also affects the maternity treatments while the anxiety associated with parous women affects her social and personal life. Coping is a natural way a human use to defend oneself and so foam of defense mechanisms which are gradually developed at a particular age.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### *Data Collection*

The information of all the participants in our study was retrieved from women with children and without children. The data of nulliparous women was collected from the following IVF institutes:

Wings IVF endoscopy hospital, Ahmedabad and Nagori's Institute for Infertility & IVF, Ahmedabad: Medical and Psychological information was collected from nulliparous women.

The data of parous women was collected from the surrounding environment.

## Stress, Depression, Anxiety and Coping Strategies in Parous and Nulliparous Women

### Study Population

This study is based on 120 subjects divided into two equal groups (60 parous and 60 Nulliparous) selected from random maternity and IVF hospitals of Ahmedabad, Gujarat and from the surrounding environment.

### Research Tool

The level of anxiety, stress, and depression was measured by anxiety, depression, and stress scale (ADSS- 2008) developed by Pallavi Bhatnagar et al., and the level of coping strategies were measured by the Coping Checklist (CCL-1986) test developed by Rao. Personal data sheets were distributed to all the women to collect data from women. Hindi, English, Gujarati language questionnaires were used. T-test and correlation were applied for data analysis.

## RESULTS

**Table 1: Comparison of Stress, Depression and Anxiety level in Parous and Nulliparous Women**

Variables	Types of women	Mean	Standard deviation
Stress	Parous women	4.86	3.643
	Nulliparous women	4.21	3.375
Anxiety	Parous women	5.23	3.175
	Nulliparous women	4.45	3.981
Depression	Parous women	3.57	3.143
	Nulliparous women	3.58	3.933

**Graph 1: Comparison of the level of Stress, Depression and Anxiety in Nulliparous and Parous Women.**

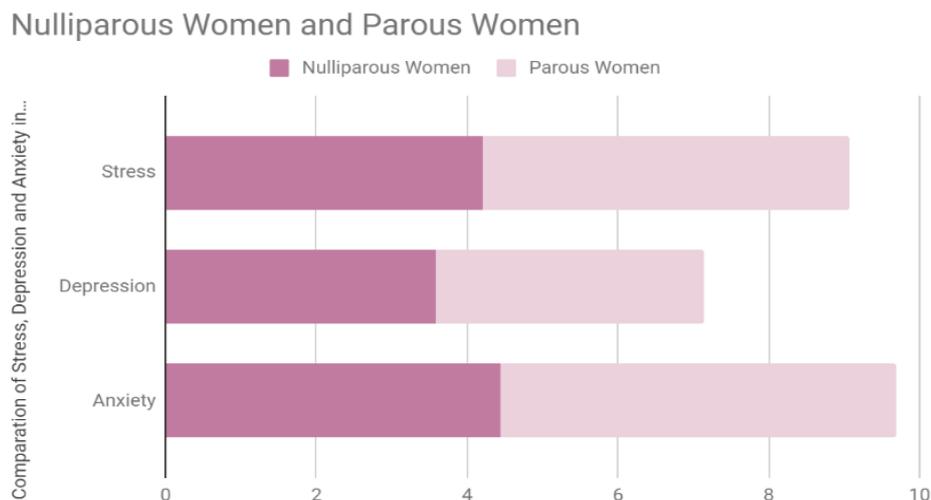


Table 1 projects comparison of the level of Stress, Depression and Anxiety in nulliparous and parous women. The mean score of nulliparous women with Stress is 4.21 and standard deviation score is 3.375 while the mean score of parous women with Stress is 4.86 and standard deviation score is 3.643. On the other hand, nulliparous women with anxiety have a

## Stress, Depression, Anxiety and Coping Strategies in Parous and Nulliparous Women

mean score of 4.45 and parous women with anxiety have a mean score of 5.23. Standard deviation of parous women is 3.175 and nulliparous women is 3.981 respectively. While, the mean score of parous women who have depression is 3.57 while the mean score of nulliparous women who have depression is 3.58 and the standard deviation score of both the variables is 3.143 and 3.933 respectively. According to the ADSS manual the above mean scores of stress, depression and anxiety for both the classifications falls under the average category. There is no significant difference found in the stress, anxiety and depression level between parous women and nulliparous women.

**Table 2: Correlation between ADS and Coping amongst Nulliparous women**

variables	r (correlation coefficient)	significance	p-value
ADS in Nulliparous women	0.48	0.05	0.000
ADS in Parous women	0.20	0.05	0.118

To measure the correlation between stress, depression, anxiety and coping strategies in nulliparous women, Pearson Correlation and two tailed tests were used. The results signify that there is a high level of significance (p-value - 0.000). Therefore, the result of this study indicates that there is positive correlation where it shows that, during high level stress, depression and anxiety they are more likely to use better coping strategies. The correlation analysis shows that level of stress, depression and anxiety has a weak relationship with coping strategies ( $r = 0.20$ ).

## DISCUSSION

The present study demonstrates average levels of stress, depression and anxiety in both parous and nulliparous women which clearly indicates that the role of children does not affect the mental health of women. The stereotype belief prevailing in Indian society of having children in a family is a compulsion has been gradually decreasing. As people are accepting the new methods like surrogacy, IVF treatment and adoption. These new medical methods can be the solution for nulliparous women to experience the joy of motherhood. Similarly, parous women have embraced their motherhood As Indian society is now accepting the modern era where the woman receives help and support from her family in raising the children. Also, the responsibility of children is divided amongst both husband and wife. So, the responsibility of children has become less stressful for women.

There can be multiple reasons for the average depression level in nulliparous women. Many of them are capable of bearing children but do not want to take responsibility for their children. While other nulliparous women do not want to give up their careers in order to have children and the responsibilities related to them. On the other hand, Parous women train their mind right from the pregnancy period regarding the responsibilities and changes that take place after the birth of a child. So, they do not experience much depression.

Several studies have addressed similar psychological issues on motherhood. One such study conducted Abdulaziz Aflakseir and Masouneh Zarei on Association between coping strategies and infertility stress amongst a group of women with fertility problems in Shiraz, Iran. "The results of this study highlight the importance of coping strategies in improving the mental health of women with fertility problems". When correlating the present study

## Stress, Depression, Anxiety and Coping Strategies in Parous and Nulliparous Women

with these findings it is observed that most of the women have used emotion focused strategy to deal with the psychological distress.

The present study was not conducted on men, so future study can be conducted on comparing psychological stress in men and women. It can also be further used to study and analyse different variables to know more about women and their mental health issues so that a positive mental health environment can be maintained among women in society.

### REFERENCES

- (n.d.). Retrieved from [http://www.jri.ir/en/pmc\\_xml\\_reader.aspx?v=57&id=545](http://www.jri.ir/en/pmc_xml_reader.aspx?v=57&id=545).
- Aflakseir, A., & Zarei, M. (2013, October). Association between Coping Strategies and Infertility Stress among a Group of Women with Fertility Problem in Shiraz, Iran. Retrieved from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3911816/>
- Business News. (n.d.). Retrieved from [https://m.economictimes.com/indian-women-most-stressed-in-the-world-nielsen-survey/amp\\_articleshow/9031890.cms](https://m.economictimes.com/indian-women-most-stressed-in-the-world-nielsen-survey/amp_articleshow/9031890.cms).
- Morin, A. (2019, September 2). How Many People Are Actually Affected by Depression Every Year? Retrieved from <https://www.verywellmind.com/depression-statistics-everyone-should-know-4159056>.
- Pandey, S. (2018, May 12). Why these Indian couples are opting to not have kids - Times of India. Retrieved from <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/life-style/parenting/getting-pregnant/why-these-indian-couples-are-opting-to-not-have-kids/articleshow/64135670.cms>.
- Parous. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/parous>.
- Redirect Notice. (n.d.). Retrieved from [https://www.google.co.in/amp/s/m.economictimes.com/indian-women-most-stressed-in-the-world-nielsen-survey/amp\\_articleshow/9031890.cms](https://www.google.co.in/amp/s/m.economictimes.com/indian-women-most-stressed-in-the-world-nielsen-survey/amp_articleshow/9031890.cms).
- Schimelpfening, N. (2019, September 1). Factors That Could Increase Your Risk of Depression. Retrieved from <https://www.verywellmind.com/common-causes-of-depression-1066772>.

### Acknowledgements

The author appreciates research guide Dr. Profaina Christian and all those who participated in the study and helped to facilitate the research process.

### Conflict of Interest

The author declared no conflict of interest.

**How to cite this article:** M Bhavsar & J Thakar (2020). Stress, depression, anxiety and coping strategies in parous and nulliparous women. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 8(2), 264-268. DIP:18.01.031/20200802, DOI:10.25215/0802.031