

Research Paper

Influence of social support on marital quality among mothers' of children with special needs

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ABSTRACT

In India, there is an assumption that children with Special needs have a negative effect on parental marriage and this continues to be perpetuated in the mass media, with reports that such marriages are doomed for divorce. A study done by Spratt, Saylor and Marcias (2007) indicates that families in which children with developmental, neurological or other special care needs exist tend to experience high levels of stress related to raising those children. Social support especially from emotionally close persons as a protective factor can help individuals to deal with stress and buffers the negative effects of life stress on marital satisfaction (Roshtami, 2013). Mothers as primary care givers of children with special needs tend to spend more time with children and involve themselves in stressful situations that are less rewarding than fathers and usually find it difficult to manage. The Aim of the paper is to study the influence of Social Support and Work Status on Marital Quality among mothers of children with special needs. Marital Quality scale and Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support were administered on Working and Non- working mothers of children with special needs. The study consisted of 56 participants of which 30 were Non- working mothers and 26 were working mothers. The findings of the study showed that Work status had an influence on the Marital Quality of the mother. In conclusion, working status helps mothers to perceive better social support in terms of providing a financial aid, self- esteem and contributes to their Marital quality.

Keywords: *Social support, Marital quality, Children with special needs, Work status*

Marital Quality includes positive and negative aspects of marriage, the attitudes, behaviors and interaction patterns. Social support is the experience of being valued, respected, cared about, and loved by others who are present in one's life such as family, friends, teachers, community, or any social groups to which an individual is affiliated.

There has always been the assumption that children with special needs negatively impact the marital relationship of the parents (Doherty, 2008; Solomon & Thierry, 2006) and report less satisfaction with the marital relationship (Friedrich & Friedrich, 1981). Children with special

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needs include those who have significant delays in reaching developmental milestones or as a lack of function in one or multiple domains which includes their cognition, motor performance, vision, hearing and speech, and behavior.

Families in which children with developmental, neurological or other special care needs exist tend to experience high levels of stress related to raising those children (Spratt, Saylor and Marcias, 2007). The wellbeing of a family is dependent upon factors that include the level of access to social support, the amount of stress they encounter and the child's specific disability and needs.

Caring for a child with a disability brings multiple challenges to parents, such as additional financial burdens for treating their child's condition, dealing with the child's problematic behavior, social stigma associated with disabilities and various physical, emotional issues centered around it. Studies have found that social support in the form of family resource (T.S Azevedo, 2019), income (H. Kachooei, 2017) contributes to post-crisis growth (Alon, 2019) helping in building resilience (Khan, 2017) and a greater sense of parenting competence (Angley and colleagues, 2016).

Mothers as primary care givers are likely to have more difficulties than fathers in managing such children since they spend more time with them and are likely to experience more stressful and less rewarding situations (Barkley, 1932). In today's changing times, Mothers who work tend to combine a career with the added responsibility of raising a child while a non- working mother usually gets ample time to attend to the needs of their child as they focus primarily on raising a child.

A report by UNICEF on the Status of Disability in India (2000) indicated that there are around 30 million children that have some form of disability, of which 20 million school aged children between ages 6-14 years, require special needs education (Rehabilitation Council of India, 2000).

Although quite a lot of research has been done with regard to marital satisfaction, limited studies have focused on mothers as primary care givers and their perception of social support as being an aspect of marital quality for mothers' with special children. Infact, there have been studies that have yielded mixed results with regard to marital satisfaction when comparing groups of parents of children with special needs and those without them. Though a few studies have focused on the work status, studies have not indicated the influence of social support such as work status on the marital quality among mothers of children with special needs.

The knowledge gained through this research contributes to the profession of a mental health worker as it can be applied to understanding various aspects and problems of parenting, issues in marital relationship, regulating various relationships in a family and role of social support. This research can be a foundation to understand how they influence each other.

METHODOLOGY

Aim

To Study the influence of Social Support and Work Status on Marital Quality among mothers of children with special needs.

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Hypothesis

1. There is an influence of social support on marital quality among mothers of children with special need.
2. There is an influence of working status of the mothers on their Marital Quality
3. There is an influence of Social support and Work status among mothers of children with special needs

Variables: **Independent Variables** - Social Support, Work Status
Dependent Variable – Marital Quality

Operational definitions

Perceived social support – Perceived social support refers to the amount of support mothers perceive from their husbands and the environment which eases them of the burden of bringing up children with special needs.

Marital quality- Marital quality refers to the amount of satisfaction that the mother attains in a marital relationship where she considers her feelings for her husband, her importance in the relationship and the interactions between them.

Special children- Refers to those children with Cognitive disabilities, Motor disabilities, Vision, hearing and Speech disabilities and Behavioral disorders.

Working Mothers- refers to women who are mothers and who work outside the home for income in addition to the work they perform at home in raising their children.

Non-working Mothers- refers to women who are mothers and are involved in raising their children

Sample

Sample description: The present study was conducted on working and non-working mothers with special children from the ages of 28 to 40 living in different cities of India

Sampling size: The proposed sample for the present study was 200 working mothers of children with special needs which included 100 working women and 100 non-working women.

Sampling Method: Purposive and Snowball Sampling technique was used for data collection

Inclusion Criteria: Mothers who have children with at-least one special need, Mothers who are literate and can read as well as write in English, Mothers who are in a marital relationship for at-least a period of 3 years and above, Mothers who are working and non-working, Mothers living in different cities of India, Mothers whose age ranges from 28-40 years, Mothers who have children with special needs such as Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder, Autistic Spectrum Disorder, Mental Retardation, Learning Disability, Down Syndrome.

Exclusion Criteria: Mothers who do not have children with special needs, Mothers who are married or unmarried for a period of less than 3 years, Mothers who cannot read and write in English, Mothers who are part time workers, Mothers who are not the primary care givers of the child.

Tools for data collection

- 1. Socio-demographic sheet:** In order to collect demographic information from the participants of this study, the researcher formulated a socio demographic data sheet to acquire the information on the participant's name, age, gender, educational qualification, etc.
- 2. Marital Quality scale by Dr Anisha Shah:** This is a multidimensional scale. It has two different forms for Male & Female. The Female Form is used for this research paper. It consists of 50 items in a statement form with a four point rating scale which has ready formats for use with men and women. The scale gives a total score and sub-total scores on 12 relationship dimensions. The dimensions of the scale are Understanding, rejection, satisfaction, affection, despair, decision making, discontent, dissolution potential, dominance, self-disclosure, trust and role functioning. The tool has been developed and standardized on the Indian Population. Reliability was found to be ($r = 0.83$) and internal consistency (coefficient alpha $= 0.91$).
- 3. Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support by Zimet et al (1988):** This is a multidimensional scale. It consists of 12 items in a statement form with a seven point rating scale. The scale gives a mean score and total score on three dimensions. The dimensions of the scale Friends, Family and Significant other. The tool has been developed and standardized on the Indian Population. The Reliability was found to be ($\alpha = 0.84- 0.87$) and internal consistency was 0.92, Split half reliability was found to be 0.72.

Procedure for Data Collection

Participants for the particular research were contacted through visiting various special schools by the researcher and through researcher's friends who work with or have contacts with special children in other cities of India. Participants were asked to sign the consent form and fill up the information in the socio demographic sheet. The questionnaires were then provided to the participants along with the instructions after which they were asked to choose a particular response for each statement from the given options which was true to them. After the collection of data, the responses were analyzed through statistical analysis.

Procedure for Data Analysis

Based on the results, the data was further organized and segmented with the help of Statistical Package of Social Science (SPSS) version 16.0. To test the hypothesis Two- way Anova test was used.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Aim of the paper is to study the influence of Social Support and Work Status on Marital Quality among mothers of children with special needs. In the study, marital quality is the dependent variable (DV) while Social support and Marital quality are the Independent Variables (IV). The study includes a sample consisting of Working and Non-working mothers between the ages of 28- 40 years, who have a child with special need and live in different cities of India. The present study hypothesized that there is an influence of Social support on Marital Quality of mothers, there is an influence of Work status on the Marital Quality of mothers and that there is an interaction effect between the three variables.

The results of the descriptive analysis for the data showed that for the sample consisting of 56 individuals, the Mean and SD obtained for DV are 88.59 and 21.333 respectively. The skewness is .977 and kurtosis is 1.384 which lies within the range of ± 1.96 indicating that

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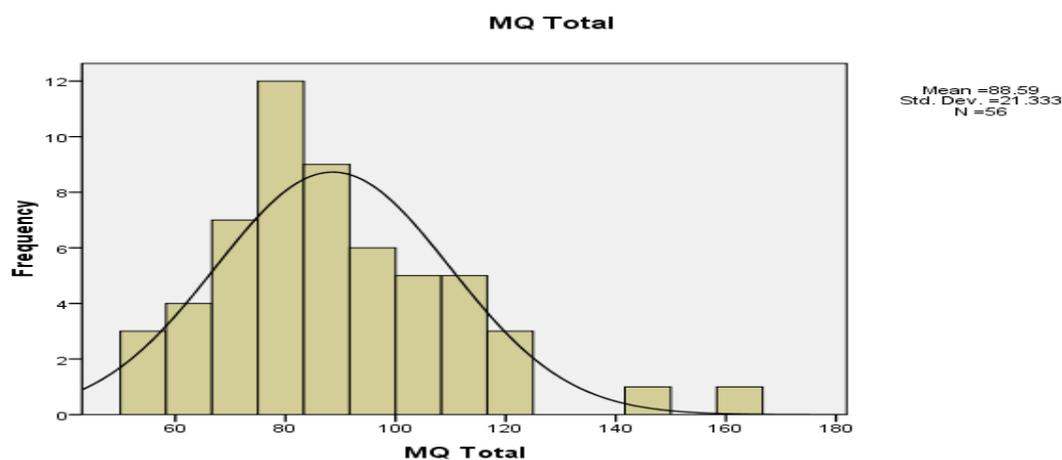
this sample population follows the normal probability curve. Similarly, the Mean and SD for the IV are 2.73 and .486. The skewness is -1.561 and kurtosis is 1.544 which lies within the range of ± 1.96 indicating that this sample population follows the normal probability curve. The Levene's statistic ($F=1.512$, $p=.213$) indicates that variance of each group is significantly different and that the results are not valid at the 0.05 level. Hence $p<0.05$ indicates that variance of each group is significantly different.

Table 1: Showing the Test of Between- Subjects Effects

Dependent Variable	Source	Df	f	Sig
Marital Quality	Occupation	1	4.222	.045
	Social Support	2	1.322	.276
	Occupation *	1	.654	.422
	Social Support			

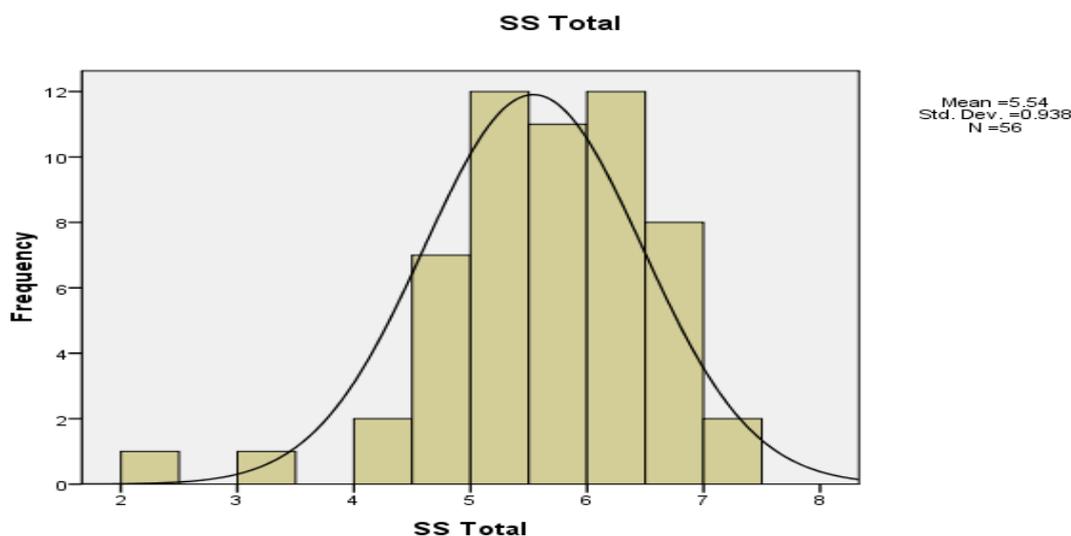
Table 1 shows the Test of Between-Subjects Effects. It can be seen that Marital Quality has a significant effect on Occupation among mothers ($F=4.222$, $p=0.045$) at 0.05 level whereas Social Support has no significant effect on Marital Quality among mothers ($F= 1.322$, $p=0.276$). Moreover, the interaction effect of Social support and Work Status shows that there is no significant interaction between the effect of Social Support and Work status on Marital Quality ($F=0.654$, $p= 0.422$). Hence, $p=0.045$ indicates that Work status has an influence on the Marital quality among mothers of children with special needs.

Graph 1: Showing the mean score of Marital Quality among Working and non- working mothers



Graph 1 indicates that for Marital quality, N is 56, the mean score and SD are 88.59 and 21.333

Graph 2: Shows the mean score of Social Support among Working and Non-working mothers



Graph 2 indicates that for Social support, N is 56, the mean and SD are 5.54 and 0.938

CONCLUSION

In the present study it is found that Work status influences the Marital Quality among mothers' who have children with special needs. The finding is supported by previous research conducted by Hamid Kachooei and colleagues (2017).

The sample recruited for the study was limited in terms of size and geographical area from where it was sourced since it was during the Pandemic. Also, considering the cultural and emotional aspect of being a woman, it was observed that most women were contradicting in their opinions as they responded to the scales. Another significant limitation of the study was that most women were not able to accept their children as having special needs and hence were apprehensive while responding. For further research, a larger sample size with equal representation of geographical area can be considered. These findings can be very useful in formulating various mental health services provided in therapy and rehabilitation settings with respect to social support and open a broader understanding of the society to how work provides social support.

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Conflict of Interest

The author declared no conflict of interest.

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