

Case Study

A Study of Family Environment and Parental Stress Level Among Working and Non-Working Mothers: Case Study

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ABSTRACT

Stress may be damaging and seriously impact a person's physical and emotional health when it gets excessive. Stress comes in two types: acute and chronic, depending on how long it lasts. The term "acute stress" refers to stress that lasts only briefly. Contrarily, stress that persists for a longer period is referred to as chronic stress. The social, emotional, and academic adjustment of children can be influenced by parenting, and research has been done to identify the variables that influence parenting style. Stress from parenting is one such factor. Parenting stress is one of these elements. Excessive stress in the parenting role and in relationships between parents and children is known as parenting stress (Abidin, 1995). Questionnaire was used for subject information regarding stress among parents and their family environment. Total number of subjects/mothers was 20 (N=20). For all the computation purposes SPSS 16.00 version was used. According to this study, working mothers endure parental stress at a considerably higher rate than non-working mothers. The family environment of women who work and mothers who do not work did not significantly differ. Further evidence that parental stress is unrelated to the family environment comes from the fact that the dimensions of the family environment did not significantly correlate with the parental stress levels.

Keywords: *Stress, Parents, Family Environment, Mothers*

A person experiences restraints and strains while they are under stress is called stress. An individual's discomfort is stress. It is a state of emotional disarray. Stress is a tension that prompts response and performance. A person's performance can improve when they are under moderate stress, but when they are under extreme stress, they cannot work as hard.

Stress is the result of a person's response to a stressful event such as a stimulus or an environmental element. Stress is a body's way of responding to a crisis. Stress causes the sympathetic nervous system to be activated in the body, which results in the fight-or-flight responses. Stress usually refers to a condition, either positive or negative, that may influence a person's mental and physical health.

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The biological systems of the human body can be profoundly affected by stress. The sympathetic nervous system is most active during a stress response, controlling many bodily physiological processes in ways that should make an organism more terrain adaptive.

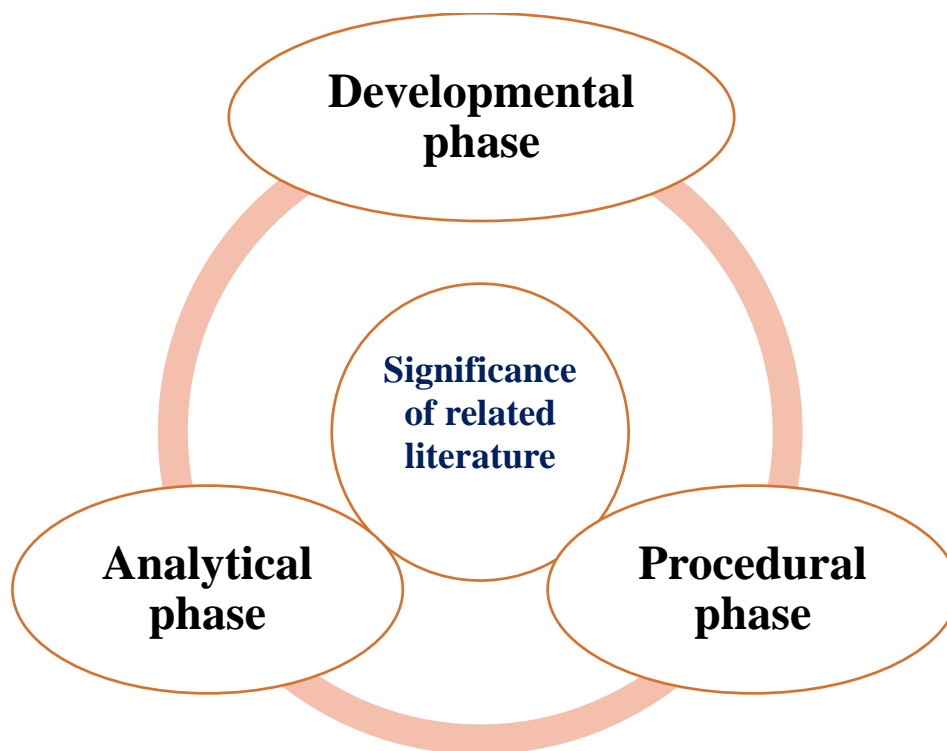


Fig 1.1 Phases of the research

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Parenting is a challenging process. It is widely accepted across all cultures that parents and families play a critical role in raising, nurturing, safeguarding, and socializing young children. The social, emotional, and academic adjustment of children can be influenced by parenting, and research has been done to identify the variables that influence parenting style. Parenting stress is one of these elements. According to Abidin (1995), “parenting stress is excessive anxiety and tension that is specifically related to the parent's role and parent-child interactions.”

This is essential for understanding the factors that affect parenting stress and how children develop, both normally and in challenging circumstances. According to Perry (2004) “the most complex set of non-specific, persistent, and significant challenges associated with one of the most important roles of parents—taking care of their children—is regarded as parental stress.

Lazarus & Folkman (1984) suggested that the transactional model of stress and coping has been used as the theoretical framework in several studies. According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984), “stress is a unique type of an individual's association with the environment, that the individual perceives as putting certain demands or overreaching his/her resources thereby posing a threat to his or her well-being.”

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Parents' ability to adapt to the demands of raising a child with a developmental disability may be significantly impacted by stress. According to McCubbin and Petterson (1983), a variety of factors, including parents' coping methods and styles, are necessary for successful adaptation.

These stressors are related to physical, psychological, and social factors that can produce adverse effects. Researchers suggest that initial stress is good for performance as it works as an energizer for individual. Since it is a reason for arousal, hence it improves performance. When the stress continues for a long time, it affects one's health and overall well-being. (Pett M.A.1994).

Staal in 2004 defined stress as the “physical and psychological demands and constraints that impinge on an individual as a result of operating in an environment”. When individuals feel they are unable to adequately manage the demands placed on them or the threats to their well-being, stress develops. (Lazarus, R.S., 1966). Studies have shown that a particular relationship between an individual and their environment—one that the individual perceives as taxing or exceeding their well-being—is the root cause of psychological stress.

Lezin et al. (2004) Children's social, emotional, and academic development can be impacted by parenting. There have been attempts to identify the variables that influence parenting behaviour. One such factor is parenting stress. Abidin, in 1995 defined “parenting stress as excess anxiety and tension specifically related to the role of a parent and to parent-child interactions”.

In India, where the rapidly expanding middle class of the world is experiencing profound changes in its professional and social prospects, toddler stress is the most recent manifestation of the frantic race to get ahead. Parents are placing unknowing demands on their children to begin their education earlier to help the children capitalize and help the youth profit from the country's recently liberalized business environment. "The aspirations of the middle class are growing so rapidly that they have realized that the only real ladder to rising economically and socially is through education," said Shakti Sinha (2004), director of education for the New Delhi city schools.

According to a recent government-sponsored study, 86% of private schools were questioned, and these schools gave toddlers between preschool and children's ages two and three an average of four to eleven books. The children carry a 9-pound load of books between school and home each day as they enter first and second grade. The trend has the nation's educators so concerned that the government will raise the age requirements for children enrolling in nurseries and pre-schools for the upcoming school year.

In the fall of last year, the government suggested but did not mandate the elimination of preschool entrance exams, lenient toddler classroom schedules, and restrictions on the number of books students could bring home each day.

According to government officials, the number of private schools in New Delhi has doubled in the last ten years to about 600, or about 40% of all the schools in the city. However, educators are concerned that while the middle class, which can afford private tuition, can provide their children with a better education, most Indian children are forced to attend

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government schools, which are underfunded and overburdened by a growing student population.

Parents began the tedious process of applying to pre-schools in October across New Delhi and other major Indian cities, with some parents sending applications to as many as 20 schools.

800 children competed for as few as 60 nursery school seats at many of the schools. Parents hope that their children will be chosen for the round of interviews for the upcoming academic year, which will start in December.

According to Rangaswamy and Bhavani (2008), parents of children with disabilities may experience higher levels of stress and lower levels of well-being than parents of normal children. It plays an important role in the development of both normal and disabled children and helps us better understand the factors that influence parental stress.

Limited communication with the child is another potential child trait that could increase parental stress. A variety of verbal and nonverbal skills, including gestures, intonation, melody, rhythm of utterance, facial expression, and posture, are affected by communication deficits (Walenski et al., 2006). These kids also struggle with controlling social interactions through communication.

According to Dunlap & Robbins (1994) “depending on the child's age, specific behaviour issues can increase parental stress. Self-stimulation and tantrums are most frequently mentioned by parents of pre-schoolers, whereas parents of adolescents cite destructive behaviour and withdrawal from contact as the most significant causes of concern”

In addition to posing immediate issues by endangering the child's safety or the safety of others or by causing material harm, the child's challenging behaviours may also cause parents' social isolation (Worcester et al., 2008). Additionally, parents frequently feel helpless because of their child's totally unpredictable and puzzling responses to their efforts to calm him down: “What scared me the most was his crying, and I would do anything to prevent it. When he was crying, I felt lost, because I could not hold him or kiss him since he hated it” (Grodzka, 1995, p. 217). As a result, the relationship between challenging behaviours and parental stress can be complicated. Having a better understanding of the connections between these phenomena would undoubtedly aid in the creation of parent support strategies that are more efficient.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Rationale of the study

The rationale of the current study is based on stress among mothers of pre-school children. However, in our societies, there has been reported research on stress, among mothers and children of different age groups separately, but studies on stress among mothers of any specific age group children (i.e., pre-school children) are scarce. The current study would also include analysis based on managing mothers' stress related to their pre-school children, adjustment in their daily work pattern and to learn how they can make their preschoolers involved in the activities at school and at home considering their overall well-being. The current study would also facilitate answers to the stress and anxiety problem. The research evidence has suggested that women who work have more issues managing their work-life

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balance. Since both work and family are time demanding areas it is likely that working mothers would be affected by it and would experience more parental stress as compared to non-working mothers.

The rationale of current study is based on stress among mothers of pre-school children. The current study would also include analysis based on mothers' stress related to their pre-school children, adjustment in their daily work pattern and to learn how they can make their pre-schoolers involved in the activities at school and at home considering their overall well-being.

This study will help the mothers in following areas-

- Manage their stress related to their preschool children.
- Adjustment in daily work pattern.
- To learn how they can make their preschoolers involved in the activities at school and at home considering their overall well-being.

Objectives

1. To study the level of parental stress among working and non-working mothers of preschool Children.
2. To study the family environment of working and non-working mothers of pre-school children.
3. To study the association between the family environment and the degree of parental stress for working and non-working mothers of pre-school children.

Hypotheses

1. The level of parental stress in working mothers will be higher as compared to non-working mothers.
2. There will be an influence of family environment on parental stress levels of working and non- working mothers.

Sample

There are a total number of 84 participants (42: working mothers & 42: non-working mothers) age range 30–60-year, researcher was selected from **Ankur Nursery School Chandigarh** Location- Sector 14, Chandigarh, 160014. The method of purposive sampling will be used to select the sample.

The inclusion criterion was as follows:

1. Pre-school children of the age group between 2 to 4 years
2. Boys and girls studying in play schools.

Exclusion criteria:

1. Children above the age of 4 years or studying in nursery standard.

Design

Descriptive and inferential statistical methods were applied as per nature of data.

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Tools of the study

Parenting stress scale (PSS)

The parenting stress scale demonstrates satisfactory levels of internal reliability (0.83), and test-retest reliability (0.81). The parenting stress scale demonstrates satisfactory convergent validity with various measures of stress, emotions and role satisfaction, marital commitment, job satisfaction and social support.

Author	Abidin R.R., 1990
Items	18 items
Rating scale	Five-point rating scale
Dimension	7
Reliability	Internal reliability .83, test-retest reliability
Validity	stress, emotions and role satisfaction, marital commitment, job satisfaction and social support
Score	1,2,5,6,7,8,17,18,

Family environment scale (FES)

The reliability of family environment scale estimates ten sub-scales with three dimensions. The family environment scale demonstrates consistent levels of test-retests reliability and significance intervals. The validity of family environment scale is supported by evidence.

Author	Sanjay Vohra, 1997
Items	98 items
Rating scale	Five-point rating scale
Dimension	7 COMPETITIVE FRAMEWORK, COHESION, EXPRESSION INDEPENDENCE MORAL ORIENTATION ORGANIZATION RECREATIONAL ORIENTATION
Reliability	The reliability of family environment scale estimates ten sub-scales with three dimensions. The family environment scale demonstrates consistent levels of test-retest reliability and significant intervals.
Validity	the validity of family environment scale is supported by evidence.
Score	1,2,5,6,7,8,17,18

Data Analysis

The purpose of the present research was to study the level of parental stress in the mothers of children aged between 2-4 years. The study examined the differences in the level of parental stress and family environment for working and non-working mothers. The relationship between environment of the family and parental stress level was also assessed. For all the computation purposes SPSS 16 was used.

The results were analyzed using the following statistics:

- **Descriptive Statistics:** Means and standard deviations were calculated for the scores obtained by the sample of mothers on parental stress scale and the various dimensions of family environment scale.
- **Inferential Statistics:** Student's 't' statistic was used to assess if there were any significant differences between working and non-working mothers in perceived parental stress and also family environment.

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- **Correlational Statistics**

Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was calculated to assess the relationship between parental stress and dimensions of family environment.

For the Parental Stress scale, a single total score is obtained for each participant.

The raw scores of the participants were used for all the computation purposes.

RESULTS AND INTERPRETATION

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for the measures of parental stress and family

Sr. No	Measures	N	Range	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance
1.	Parental Stress	20	36	37.70	9.56	74.02
2.	Competitive Framework	20	7	8.90	2.05	4.04
3.	Cohesion	20	4	12.06	1.58	3.05
4.	Expression	20	14	10.06	3.01	8.62
5.	Interdependence	20	11	9.10	3.25	8.72
6.	Moral Orientation	20	9	11.05	2.19	5.03
7.	Organization	20	8	10.05	2.03	4.23
8.	Recreational Orientation	20	8	9.02	2.47	6.21
9.	Total Score on Family Environment	20	36	70.52	10.02	99.58

Environment and its Dimensions

From the above table, it can be seen that the mean scores obtained by the participants on experienced Parental Stress is 37.70 and the standard deviation is 9.56. The highest possible score obtainable on the scale is 90. Thus, the mean scores imply that the mothers experience relatively less of parental stress.

The lowest mean obtained among all the seven dimensions is on the sub-dimension Recreation Orientation (Mean = 8.90, S.D. = 2.05). The scores fall in the average range and hence it signifies that the participant mothers do not get good opportunities for recreation. The families of the participants are moderately competitive (Mean = 9.4, S.D. 2.01), moderate levels of expression are emphasized on (Mean= 9.90, S.D. = 2.93), there is moderate level of interdependence among the family members (Mean = 9.10, S.D. = 2.82) and the families are moderately organized (Mean = 9.65, S.D. = 2.05).

The total mean scores on family environment are 70.52 and standard deviation is 10.02. the mean scores are again falling in the moderate range though a little bit on the higher side showing that the family environment is a little on the positive side.

There were 10 working and 10 non-working mothers in the sample. Student's t-test was used to examine difference in their stress levels and their family environment. The tables illustrating the results of the t-test are presented below.

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Table 2: Means, Standard deviation and T-Values for Comparison between working and non-working Mothers on the dimension of parental stress and family environment

SR. NO	VARIABLES	Working Mothers (N = 10)		Non-working Mothers (N = 10)		t – values
		MEAN	S.D.	MEAN	S.D.	
1)	Parental Stress	46.12	6.06	31.96	3.61	6.16**
2)	Competitive Framework	9.65	3.06	9.25	1.46	0.42
3)	Cohesion	11.30	1.21	12.36	1.71	-1.42
4)	Expression	10.25	1.47	9.65	3.95	0.45
5)	Interdependence	9.60	2.35	8.48	3.25	1.12
6)	Moral Orientation	11.40	1.66	11.22	2.65	0.11
7)	Organization	10.230	1.56	9.15	2.13	1.30
8)	Recreational Orientation	8.40	2.98	9.45	2.25	-1.27
9)	Total Score on Family Environment	70.30	9.51	69.10	10.89	0.26

** The value is significant at $p < .01$

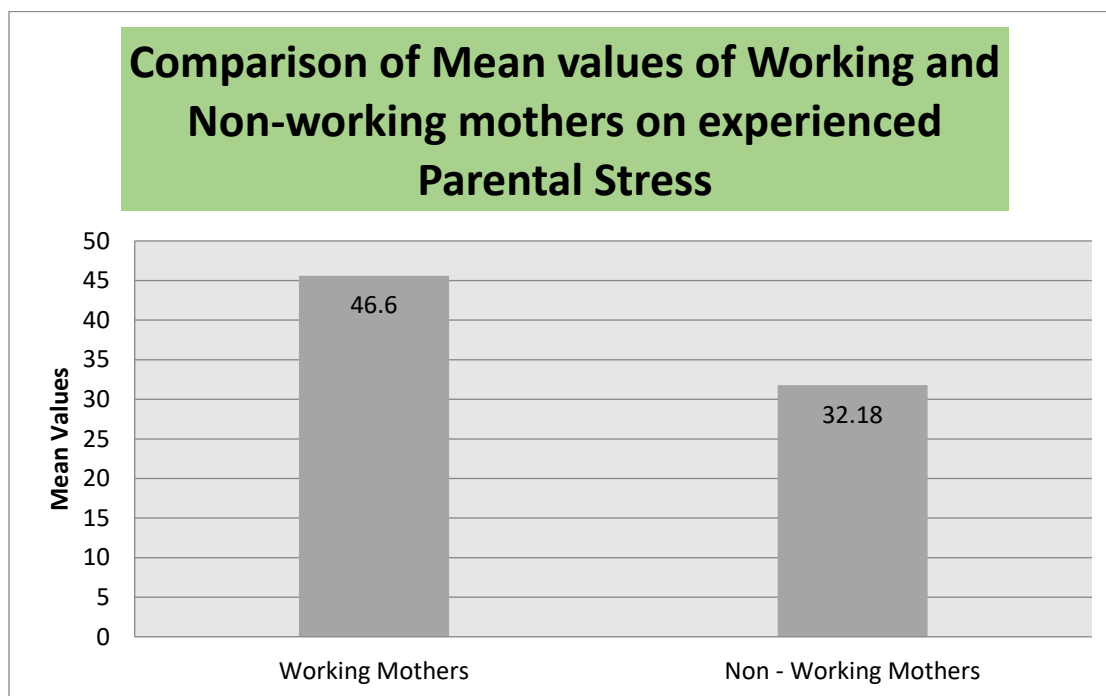


Figure 1: Comparison of mean values of working and non-working mothers on experienced parental stress.

It is observed from Table 2 clearly from the above bar diagram we can say that there is a significant difference between working and non-working mothers in their experience of parental stress (t value = 6.16, $p < .01$). Looking at the mean values (Figure 1) it can be seen that working women experience significantly higher stress (Mean = 46.60) as compared to the non-working women (Mean = 32.18). The demands of managing work with family requirements may have caused the working mothers to feel more stressed out in the upbringing of their children.

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There was no significant difference between working and non-working mothers in their perception of the family environment and its sub-dimensions (Table 2). None of the t – values were found to be significant. A possible explanation for such findings can be that the participants of the study were mothers who were from a similar socio-economic background. Further they were also situated in the similar geographical area. This could have led to similar environment in their families.

In order to understand the family environment factors associated with parental stress Pearson's Product Moment Correlation was calculated. The results are presented below.

Table 3: Pearsons's product moment correlation coefficients between the parental stress scores and scores on the sub-dimension of family stress as well as the total score.

S.NO.	Measures of Family Environment	Correlation with Parental Stress (N = 20)
1.	Competitive Framework	.010
2.	Cohesion	-.246
3.	Expression	.042
4.	Interdependence	.128
5.	Moral Orientation	-.211
6.	Organization	.075
7.	Recreational Orientation	-.263
8.	Total Score on Family Environment	-.086

It is observed from the table that it can be concluded that none of the correlations were significant. This implies that the amount of parental stress is not affected by the type of family environment in those families.

DISCUSSION

It is clear from the result and interpretation that working mothers endure parental stress at a considerably higher rate than non-working mothers. The family environment of women who work and mothers who do not work did not significantly differ. Further evidence that parental stress is unrelated to the family environment comes from the fact that the dimensions of the family environment did not significantly correlate with the parental stress levels. As a result, the relationship between challenging behaviours and parental stress can be complicated. Having a better understanding of the connections between these phenomena would undoubtedly aid in the creation of parent support strategies that are more efficient. The child's asymmetrical development in a variety of areas is one factor that contributes to behavioural unpredictability: from relatively normal development to regression and severe delay in development (cf. Marcus and other, 1997).

CONCLUSION

The conclusion drawn from the data analysis in the study is that working mothers experience significantly higher parental stress as compared to non-working mothers. It is observed from the table above that there was no significant difference found between the family environment of working and non-working mothers. Further the dimensions of the family environment did not correlate significantly with the parental stress levels implying that parental stress is not related to the family environment.

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Conflict of Interest

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