

Mental Health of Children of Working Parents During Covid Pandemic

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ABSTRACT

The Covid 19 Pandemic has drastically changed the life of human beings. It is shown in studies that the children and parents psychological wellbeing are affected due to the lockdown (Christner, Essler, Hazzam and Paulus, 2021). Children who are experiencing parental stress are associated with higher child abuse potential whereas greater parental support during pandemic are associated with lower perceived stress and child abuse potential (Brown, Doom, Lechuga-Pena, Watamura and Koppels, 2020). Hence an attempt has been made to find the mental health and psychological wellbeing of children of working parents during pandemic. The study used descriptive research design by using quantitative analysis. The data was collected from random working parents with school going children aged 10 to 17 years. The Convenience sampling method using inclusion and exclusion conditions sampling technique was used in this study. Personal Information form, perceived stress scale by Cohen (1988), Strength and Difficulties questionnaire (SDQ) and psychological wellbeing scale by Ryff was used for the purpose of collecting data. Using appropriate statistical test, after testing for normality it was found that there exists a significant association between the wellbeing of the children and the mental health of the working parents. The author through this study has given an indication towards the current scenario for mental health of children of working parents which will help in developing psycho-social intervention for mental health of both children and their parents.

Keywords: Covid-19, Mental Health, Psychological well-being, Parental Stress

The pandemic has posed enormous physical, psychological, environmental and social challenges all over the world. The report highlights the risk of mental illness in children (WHO, 2020). The isolation, engagement in online classes, network issues, lack of socialization, fear about future and parental pressure has huge psychological effect on the children (Chhetri, Goyal, Mittal, Battineni, 2021). Many studies highlighted the impact of the pandemic on the mental health of parents and behavioral and emotional problems in children (Ford, John & Gunnell, 2021; Imran, Zeshan, Pervaiz, 2020 & Saurabh & Ranjan, 2020). Studies has also highlighted the risks for child protection, sexual abuse during the pandemic (Ramaswamy & Seshadri, 2020).

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Children and families are bereft of their education, work, recreation and socialization. Suddenly parents had to manage their children at home for 24 hours a day. Many parents had to work from home while carrying out their children's school commitments. Many parents also had to manage stress related to having sick or dead relatives, wages reductions, or having lost their work. This helps us to understand how Indian families have been exposed to a very strong emotional and psychological stress.

Further, it is also evident that the emotional and behavioral problems of children and adolescent were exacerbated by the parents (United Nations, 2020; Morelli, et. al. 2020; Kamis, 2020& Ryan, Farrelly & Ramchandani, 2017). Childhood mental health problems can have lasting effects on children and parenting is considered as a key risk factor in the development of early mental health issues. As the research studies says that both parents and children's mental health was affected in the pandemic due to the fear, uncertainties and various challenges. The pandemic which created job insecurities, loss of pay, health related fear and expenses, managing household and the work has impacted the parental stress which in turn strained the parent and child relationship. So as a researcher I was interested to find out the effects of pandemic on children and mental health of working parents.

METHODOLOGY

Aim

The aim of this study was to determine the effect of pandemic on the mental health of children of working parents.

Objectives:

To examine the effect of pandemic on:

- Mental health of children
- Psychological well-being of parents
- Child parent relationship

Study variables:

Independent variable

- Perceived Stress
- Psychological Wellbeing
- Child and Parent Relationship Scale

Dependent variable

- Strength and Difficulties (Mental Health) of children

Measuring Instruments:

- **Socio-demographic data** sheet was used to gather information about initial, age, gender, age of children, no of children, type of family, working status.
- **Perceived stress scale** (Cohen, Kamarch& Mermelsten,1983) was used to measures the perceived stress in parents. The scale had 10 items and an internal consistency of 0.78, moderate concurrent criterion validity with the amount of stress experienced during an average week ($r=.39$, $p<.001$) and the frequency of stressful life events within the past year ($r=.32$, $p<.001$).
- **Psychological wellbeing Scale** (Ryff& Keyes, 1995) measures the psychological wellbeing of the parents and has 18 items. The scale has a good reliability score of .80.

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- **Child parent relationship Scale** (Piant,1992) measures the relationship between the child and parent. The scale had 30 items and has a reliability of 0.83 in the dimension of conflict, 0.72 in the dimension of affiliation and 0.50 in the dependency dimension.
- **Strength and difficulty questionnaire SDQ** (Goodman, 1997) measures mental health problems of the children and has 25 items. The scale has an internal consistency of 0.73 and test re-test reliability of 0.62.

Hypothesis:

- There is no significant relation between the mental health of parents and mental health of children
- There is no significant relation between the child parent relationship and mental health of children.
- There is no significant difference between the working status of the parents and the children's mental health.

Research design

- It was a descriptive retrospective research design.

Sample size

- 35 parents (14 single working parents and 21 both working parents) was taken as samples for the study.

Inclusion criteria:

- Parent with children in the age group of 6 to 17 years.
- Children who were living together with parents during this pandemic
- Parents who can comprehend English
- Single working parent and both working parents were included in the study.

Exclusion criteria:

- Parents who wasn't living with their children during the pandemic
- Parents who cannot comprehend English were excluded from the study.

Sample procedure:

Convenience sampling technique was used in this study. Parents fill out the questionnaire through online as well as physically. The researcher explained the purpose of the study and asked parents consent to participate in the study and then they were asked to describe their experience during the Covid Pandemic. The respondents were assured of their confidentiality. The whole data collection process took around 1 month.

Statistics and data analysis

The data collected was subjected to analysis using SPSS. Normality of distribution was tested prior to inferential analysis. t-test, Pearson's correlation method and regression analysis was used in this study.

RESULTS

Table 1. Difference between Both Parents Working and Single Parent Working in the Study Variables.

Demographic Variable	N	Mean	SD	t	p
Perceived Parenting Stress					
BPW	21	52.98	19.52	-.244	.796
SPW	14	54.46	14.28	-.260	
Psychological Wellbeing					
BPW	21	71.08	8.62	1.19	.228
SPW	14	67.68	7.56	1.23	
Child Parent Relationship					
BPW	21	62.60	6.90	.22	.800
SPW	14	62.14	3.70	.25	
Strength & Difficulties					
BPW	21	34.09	7.73	-2.33	0.026*
SPW	14	40.57	8.50	-2.28	

Note: N=35 BPW- Both Parent Working SPW- Single Parent Working *p<.05

This table shows that there is a significant difference in terms of SDQ scores. Both working parents had more mental health issues in their children. Other variables didn't have any significant difference.

Table 2. Difference between Parents with One and More than One Children in SDQ Measure

Variable	n	Mean	SD	t	p
No of children					
1	10	32.20	8.23	-2.053	.048*
2	25	38.48	8.13	-2.034	

Note: *p<.05N=35

There is a significant difference between parents having one and more than one children. Parents having more than one children have more SDQ score than parents having one child.

Table 3. Correlation between Strength and Difficulty (SDQ), Perceived Stress, Child Parent Relationship and Psychological Wellbeing.

Variables	1	2	3	4
1.Strength and Difficulty	-			
2.Perceived Stress	.485**	-	.111	-.527**
3.Child Parent Relationship	.229		-	-.067
4.Psychological Wellbeing	-.326			-

Note: N= 35*p<.05 **p<.01.

This table shows that there is significant positive relation between the strength and difficulties of the children and the perceived stress in parents. It also shows that psychological wellbeing has a significant negative relation with perceived stress.

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Table 4. Linear Regression of Parent's Perceived Stress and Working Statues as Predictors of Strength and Difficulty of Children (SDQ) in Children

Variable	B	β	SE	T	R ²	p
Perceived Stress	0.238	.485	.075	3.19	23.5%	.003
Both Working parents	-6.132	-.356	2.43	-2.52	12.8%	.017

Note=N=35p<0.05

This table shows that 23.5% of strength and difficulty was explained by the variable perceived stress and 12.8% by the variable both working parents.

DISCUSSION

The study showed that the mental health problems of the children differed in terms of the working status and number of children of parents. It states that the parents with more than one children are found to have children with more mental health issues which might be due to high parental stress involved in taking child care and engaging all children in home and this in turn impacts the mental health of children. The children might also have high mental health issues due to the sibling rivalry, sibling comparison etc.

The results also states that the children whose both parents worked had higher mental issues than single working parents which shows that as both the parents are preoccupied with their work stress in home there is no one to give emotional support for the child. Children generally seek parental support during the unpleasant times but as both the parents are not able to meet the emotional needs of the children, the children face mental health issues. They do not have access to socialize with grandparents, friends which would aggravate the loneliness. They are left with mobile phones which lead to other complications like problems in eye sight, frequent headaches, addiction and mental health problems (Rosenfeld, 2017). It states that the pandemic has affected the children's mental health. It is evident that many children are facing lot of emotional and psychological problems. The loss of loved one, fear, uncertainty, social isolation, increased screen time, parents and teachers pressures contributes to the mental health of the children (UNICEF). Usually friends, family and leisure activities are things that act as a buffer to children but the Covid-19 pandemic had put end to it. This might explain the high amount of mental health issues in children.

The study also highlights the strong influence of the parental perceived stress (both & single working parents) on the mental health of the children. The results of the current study collaborate with results of many studies (Spinelli, Lionetti, Pastore & Faloso, 2020). The pandemic caused panic in all sectors of people across the globe. In this situation it was even harder for the working parents to manage their emotional and occupational challenges they are facing on everyday basis which arises due to the uncertainty of the situation about the school reopening, managing household, work from home, financial issues, family's health etc. which in turn influenced the children's mental health (UNICEF).The parental stress make them less sensitive to the needs of their children and to respond in more aggressive way (Pinquart, 2017). The study also revealed a significant negative relation between perceived stress and psychological wellbeing which would justify how increased stress in parents reflects on their poor well-being. Study done by Dhingra and Dhingra in 2020 also showed a significant negative relation between both variables.

CONCLUSION AND LIMITATION

The study concluded that pandemic has an influence on mental health problems in children and parents. The mental health of parents has an influence in the psychological and

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emotional well-being of children. The study was administered in a small population with 35 parents as it was a pilot study and hence a small sample was used for this study.

This would have been a limitation of the study. In future, the same study will be done with larger population.

Implication

This study implies to develop parent based interventions to better handle their personal resources and to build their coping mechanism in stressful situations. The awareness should be created to the parents on how situations like these can deplete parent's mental resources and thereby impact child's socio-emotional development. Resilience building, stress management interventions and the equipping parents with the necessary information to care for the children is very important. The society can overcome this critical period of distress and avoid any long term effects with timely measures.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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