

A Study on Parental Stress in Families of Children with Intellectual Disabilities in Coimbatore District

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ABSTRACT

Raising a child with an intellectual disability presents unique challenges that can significantly impact the emotional and psychological well-being of parents. This study aims to examine the levels, causes, and coping mechanisms of parental stress among families of children with intellectual disabilities in Coimbatore District. Intellectual disabilities often require continuous care, specialized education, and therapeutic interventions, all of which can place a heavy burden on parents emotionally, financially, and socially. The present research adopts a descriptive design and uses both quantitative and qualitative methods to explore the lived experiences of parents. A structured questionnaire and in-depth interviews were conducted with a purposive sample of 100 parents (both mothers and fathers) whose children are diagnosed with varying degrees of intellectual disabilities and are receiving support from special schools or rehabilitation centers in Coimbatore District. The study found that stress levels were significantly higher among mothers compared to fathers, and factors such as the severity of the child's disability, lack of social support, financial strain, and societal stigma contributed to elevated stress. Furthermore, the study revealed that coping strategies varied, with some parents relying on spiritual practices, social support, or professional counseling, while others experienced emotional burnout due to lack of resources. The results revealed that 60% of the respondents exhibited a high level of parental stress in families of children with intellectual disabilities. Additionally, 28% demonstrated a moderate level of parental stress in families of children with intellectual disabilities, while the remaining 12% reflected a low level of parental stress in families of children with intellectual disabilities.

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KEYWORDS: Child, Intellectual Disability and Presents.

INTRODUCTION

Parenting is universally acknowledged as a challenging yet fulfilling role. However, when a child is diagnosed with an intellectual disability, the demands placed on parents can intensify significantly. Intellectual disabilities are characterized by limitations in intellectual functioning and adaptive behaviors that manifest before the age of 18. These limitations often lead to difficulties in communication, self-care, social skills and learning, requiring continuous supervision and care. As a result, families especially parents often experience heightened levels of stress, anxiety and emotional exhaustion. Parental stress in such families is not

solely due to the child's condition but is compounded by several external and internal factors. These may include financial burdens from medical and educational expenses, limited access to support services, lack of societal understanding and the strain on family dynamics. In India, and particularly in semi-urban areas like Coimbatore District, awareness about intellectual disabilities remains limited and support structures are often inadequate. Parents frequently face social isolation, guilt and helplessness, making it crucial to understand the depth and nature of their stress. This study focuses on exploring the levels, causes and coping mechanisms

of parental stress in families of children with intellectual disabilities in Coimbatore District. By doing so, it aims to highlight the specific challenges faced by these families and provide insights into how health professionals, educators and policymakers can offer better psychological, social, and institutional support. Understanding the multifaceted nature of parental stress is essential not only for the well-being of the caregivers but also for the optimal development of the children. This research is timely and relevant as it addresses a critical gap in the local context and contributes to the broader discourse on disability and caregiving in Indian society.

Definition of Child

According to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989):

“A child means every human being below the age of 18 years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier.”

Definition of Intellectual Disability

American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AAIDD, 2010):

“Intellectual disability is characterized by significant limitations in both intellectual functioning (such as reasoning, learning, and problem-solving) and adaptive behavior, which covers a range of everyday social and practical skills. This disability originates before the age of 18.”

Definition of Parental Stress

Abidin (1995) defined parental stress as: “A set of processes that lead to aversive psychological and physiological reactions arising from attempts to adapt to the demands of parenthood.”

PARENTAL STRESS IN FAMILIES OF CHILDREN WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES

Emotional Burden:

Parents often experience intense emotions such as sadness, guilt, frustration, fear and anxiety upon learning of their child's intellectual disability.

Increased Caregiving Demands:

Children with intellectual disabilities require continuous attention, supervision and support in daily activities, increasing physical and mental strain on parents.

Financial Stress:

Costs related to medical care, therapy, special education and assistive services can cause financial hardship, especially in families with limited income.

Social Isolation:

Parents may withdraw from social circles due to stigma or lack of understanding from society, leading to feelings of loneliness and exclusion.

Marital Strain:

Disagreements over caregiving roles and emotional exhaustion can lead to tension between spouses, affecting marital harmony and family dynamics.

Impact on Siblings:

Attention toward the child with a disability can unintentionally reduce focus on other children, causing sibling resentment or neglect.

Lack of Support Services:

In many regions, including rural or semi-urban areas like Coimbatore, limited access to counseling, respite care, or parent support groups exacerbates stress.

Coping Mechanisms Vary:

Some parents rely on adaptive coping strategies such as prayer, acceptance and seeking professional help, while others may struggle with denial or emotional burnout.

Mothers Report Higher Stress:

Research shows that mothers, as primary caregivers, report higher levels of psychological stress compared to fathers (Olsson & Hwang, 2001).

Need for Intervention:

There is a strong need for early intervention programs, family counseling, awareness campaigns, and inclusive policies to reduce stress and improve parental well-being.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Baharudin, D. F., Mahmud, W. M. W., & Shamsuddin, K. (2021) In their study titled "*Parental Stress and Coping Strategies in Caring for Children with Intellectual Disabilities*," the authors investigated stress levels among Malaysian parents and identified coping methods. The findings indicated that parents experienced high stress due to behavioral issues in children, difficulty accessing healthcare, and lack of social support. Mothers were reported to experience more stress than fathers. The study emphasized the importance of counseling and social support systems to reduce stress.

Chadda, R. K., & Deb, K. S. (2020) In their paper published in the *Indian Journal of Psychological Medicine*, the authors examined psychological issues in caregivers of children with neuro developmental disorders, including intellectual disabilities. They found that parental stress was closely linked to poor mental health outcomes such as anxiety and depression. Additionally, cultural expectations and stigma aggravated caregiver burden in Indian families.

Al-Kandari, H. Y., & Al-Qashan, H. (2022) In their research, "*Parental Stress and Quality of Life Among Parents of Children with Intellectual Disabilities in*

Kuwait," the authors assessed how caregiving demands impact parents' daily lives. The study revealed that stress was highest among parents with children having severe intellectual impairments and minimal access to respite care. Social stigma and lack of inclusive policies also contributed significantly to stress levels.

Methodology of the Study

Objectives of the Study

- To know the personal profile of the respondents
- To assess the level of parental stress in families of children with intellectual disabilities.
- To clarify the difference between personal profile and parental stress in families of children with intellectual disabilities.
- To find out the relationship between personal profile and parental stress in families of children with intellectual disabilities.
- To get valuable suggestions about the parental stress in families of children with intellectual disabilities.

Research Design:

This study was conducted using a descriptive research design, which is appropriate for exploring and analyzing current trends and patterns.

Research Universe:

The geographical scope of the research is confined to the Coimbatore district, which served as the universe for data collection.

Sample:

A structured questionnaire and in-depth interviews were conducted with a purposive sample of 100 parents (both mothers and fathers) whose children are diagnosed with varying degrees of intellectual disabilities and are receiving support from special schools or rehabilitation centers in Coimbatore District.

Data Collection Tool:

To gather primary data, the researcher utilized a structured questionnaire developed based on the five-point Likert scale designed by Richard R. Abidin (1955), which focused on Parental Stress Index (PSI). The instrument comprised **25 items**, rated on a scale from **1 (Strongly Disagree)** to **5 (Strongly Agree)**. In cases where negative or incorrectly coded responses were identified, inverse values were assigned to ensure consistency in interpretation.

Data Analysis:

The collected data were subjected to statistical analysis using tools such as simple percentage calculations, independent sample t-tests and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) to examine differences and patterns among respondent groups.

Findings of the Study

Factors	MEDIUM	FREQUENCY	PERCENT
Age of parents	35-Above	76	76%
Age of children	10yrs-15yrs	85	85%
Gender	Female	79	79%
Marital status	Married	100	100%
Education Qualification	12th & Above	77	77%
Type of family	Nuclear Family	73	73%
Family support	Moderate	70	70%
Monthly Income	Rs.20001-Rs.30000	69	69%
Nature of work	House wife	72	72%
Nativity	Urban	65	65%

Simple Percentage Analysis

- A significant portion of participants (76%) were aged 35 years and above.
- A significant portion of participants (85%) were aged 10-14 years and above.
- The sample was predominantly female, accounting for 79% of the respondents.
- Most fully respondents (100%) reported their marital status as married.
- A large majority (77%) had attained a postgraduate 12th and above level of education.
- 73% of the participants belonged to nuclear family structures.
- Over 70% of the respondents demonstrated a moderate level of support for their family.
- A majority (69%) reported a monthly income ranging between Rs. 20,001 and Rs.30,000.
- More than half (72%) held house wife within their nature of work.
- 65% of the respondents indicated they nativity are urban areas.

DISTRIBUTION OF THE RESPONDENTS BY LEVEL OF PARENTAL STRESS IN FAMILIES OF CHILDREN WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES

S. No	Level of parental stress in families of children with intellectual disabilities	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
1	High	60	60
2	Moderate	28	28
3	Low	12	12
TOTAL		100	100

INTERPRETATION

Based on the data presented in the table, 60% of the respondents exhibited a high level of parental stress in families of children with intellectual disabilities. Additionally, 28% demonstrated a moderate level of parental stress in families of children with intellectual disabilities, while the remaining 12% reflected a low level of parental stress in families of children with intellectual disabilities.

Influence of personal profile and level of parental stress in families of children with intellectual disabilities

Variables	Statistical tool	Value	Result
Age of parents and level of parental stress in families of children with intellectual disabilities.	ANOVA	F= .000 T<0.05	Significant
Age of children and level of parental stress in families of children with intellectual disabilities.	ANOVA	F= .012 T<0.05	Significant
Gender and level of parental stress in families of children with intellectual disabilities.	t-test	t = 3.051 p>0.55	Not-Significant
Marital status and level of parental stress in families of children with intellectual disabilities.	t-test	t = 0.021 p<0.55	Significant
Education Qualification and level of parental stress in families of children with intellectual disabilities.	ANOVA	F= .000 T<0.05	Significant
Type of family and level of parental stress in families of children with intellectual disabilities.	ANOVA	F= .000 T<0.05	Significant
Family support and level of parental stress in families of children with intellectual disabilities.	t-test	t = .010 p<0.05	Significant
Monthly income and level of parental stress in families of children with intellectual disabilities.	ANOVA	F= 5.743 P>0.45	Not-Significant
Nature of work and level of parental stress in families of children with intellectual disabilities.	ANOVA	F= .000 T<0.05	Significant
Nativity and level of parental stress in families of children with intellectual disabilities.	ANOVA	F= 6.200 T>0.05	Not Significant

- There is a significant difference in age of parents and parental stress in families of children with intellectual disabilities.
- There is a significant difference in age of children and parental stress in families of children with intellectual disabilities.
- There is no significant difference in gender based role and parental stress in families of children with intellectual disabilities.
- Marital status, there is a significant difference in marital status; there is a significant difference in parental stress in families of children with intellectual disabilities.
- There is a significant difference in educational qualification and parental stress in families of children with intellectual disabilities.
- Family type, there is a significant difference between and parental stress in families of children with intellectual disabilities.
- There is a significant difference in family support and parental stress in families of children with intellectual disabilities.
- There is no significant difference in monthly salary, parental stress in families of children with intellectual disabilities.

- There is a significant difference in the Nature of work, parental stress in families of children with intellectual disabilities.
- There is no significant difference in the nativity, parental stress in families of children with intellectual disabilities.

Recommendations

- Encourage parents to connect with relatives, friends, or parent support groups to share experiences, reduce isolation and receive emotional backing.
- Provide professional mental health counseling and psychological support to help parents cope with anxiety, depression and stress-related issues.
- Offer temporary relief services where trained caregivers can assist, allowing parents to rest, rejuvenate and manage other responsibilities.
- Conduct regular workshops to teach behavioral management, stress reduction techniques and effective caregiving strategies.
- Ensure the availability of special education programs that support the child's development and reduce the burden on parents to fill educational gaps.
- Provide access to disability pensions, subsidies, or welfare schemes to ease the financial pressure on families.
- Promote early screening, diagnosis, and therapy to manage the child's condition early and empower parents with knowledge and tools.
- Conduct community education programs to reduce stigma and promote understanding about intellectual disabilities.
- Encourage shared caregiving responsibilities between mothers and fathers to balance the workload and reduce stress on primary caregivers.
- Advocate for regular physical activity, hobbies, meditation, or relaxation techniques so that parents can maintain their own mental and physical well-being.

CONCLUSION

Parental stress in families of children with intellectual disabilities is a significant and multifaceted concern that affects the emotional, social, and psychological well-being of caregivers, particularly mothers. The continuous caregiving demands, financial strain, social stigma, and uncertainty about the child's future contribute to elevated levels of stress. Addressing this issue requires a holistic approach that includes accessible support services, inclusive education, counseling, financial assistance, and community awareness. Empowering parents through training,

emotional support, and shared responsibility can greatly reduce stress and improve the overall quality of life for both the caregivers and their children. This study concludes that 60% of the respondents exhibited a high level of parental stress in families of children with intellectual disabilities. Additionally, 28% demonstrated a moderate level of parental stress in families of children with intellectual disabilities, while the remaining 12% reflected a low level of parental stress in families of children with intellectual disabilities.

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