

A study of stress in mothers of mentally challenged students

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ABSTRACT

To study stress in mothers of mentally challenged students, institutional based cross sectional study was carried out in mothers of 165 mentally challenged students of Nandanwan School and sheltered workshop, Nagpur from March 2004 to May 2005. Mothers were given questionnaire on resources and stress- short form having 52 questions in 4 different factors, viz. Parents and family problems, Pessimism, Child characteristics, Physical Incapacitation. . Of the 165 mothers, 159(96.36%) responded. It was found that in Factor I, mothers expressing mild and moderate stress were 26(16.35%) and 66(41.51%) respectively. 50(31.45%) and 17(10.69%) mothers expressed severe and very severe stress respectively. In Factor II 55(34.59%) and 82(51.57%) mothers experienced severe and very severe stress respectively. In Factor III 59 (37.11%) mothers expressed moderate and same no. of mothers showed severe stress. In Factor IV 46 (28.93%) mothers expressed mild stress, while 60 (37.74%) expressed moderate stress. Global stress- Global stress was assessed by adding scores of all 52 questions. 65 (40.88%) mothers experienced moderate and 76(47.80%) mothers experienced severe stress. Pessimism was found to be the most important factor .

Key words: Mentally challenged students, stress in mothers.

INTRODUCTION

There is a high level of stability in parental stress in parents of mentally challenged children(developmental disabilities*). In her study Dyson L. observed that stress related to parent and family problems and pessimism increased over time¹. In her another study also Dyson L. found that parents of mentally challenged children (with developmental disabilities*) experienced greater level of stress². Mothers of mentally challenged (Down's syndrome*) children have greater stress and less coping than fathers in all factors. Parents

of mentally challenged children experienced greater level of stress than those of normal children³. Holoroyd J. (1974)⁴ also reported greater problems by mothers of mentally challenged(handicapped*) children with behavioral problems. Hence this study was undertaken to assess stress in mothers of mentally challenged students in Indian set up.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The present study was carried out to assess stress in mothers of mentally challenged students.

Study Design

Institutional based cross sectional study.

Study Subjects

Mothers of mentally challenged students.

Study Duration

This study was conducted from March 2004 to 31st May 2005.

Study Place

This study was conducted in "Nandanwan School and Sheltered workshop for Mentally Handicapped" Sitabuldi, Nagpur, Maharashtra, India.

Along with the main centre at Sitabuldi it has four subcentres situated at

- a) Gandhibag
- b) Dharampeth
- c) Chandannagar
- d) Lashkaribag

The school admits mentally challenged children and adolescents between the age group of 4–18 years. The admission procedure starts after assessing intelligent quotient / social quotient. Mentally challenged children are referred to this institution by primary and nursery schools, Medical colleges, Mental hospitals, Private practitioners in Nagpur and Vidarbha region of Maharashtra.

192 students were enrolled in the main centre and its sub-centres during the study period, of which mothers of 165 students agreed to participate and 159 mothers responded. 137 students were enrolled in the main school and 55 students in sub-centres. Sub-centre wise distribution of students enrolled was as follows:

a) Gandhibag	-	22
b) Dharampeth	-	17
c) Lashkaribag	-	9
d) Chandan Nagar	-	7

This study was conducted after obtaining written permission of the superintendent of the school and approval of the Ethical committee of Indira Gandhi Government Medical College and Hospital, Nagpur.

Appointments with mothers of students were fixed as per their suitability. Mothers were called on for the interviews. In case if mothers were unable to come for the interview, then their addresses were obtained and one or more as required, home visits were given.

For assessment of stress, mothers of mentally challenged students were given questionnaire on resources and stress (QRS-F developed by Freidrich W.M. et al (1983)⁵. This is a validated questionnaire, a short form of original questionnaire on resources and stress, consisting of 52 questions in 4 different factors. This questionnaire was translated in vernacular language and validated.

The four factors of the of the scale(QRS-F) are as follows,

Factor I: labeled 'Parents and Family problems' consists of 20 items that assess the respondent's perception of problems for themselves, other family members, or the family as whole. Items loading on this factor came exclusively from the QRS scales of poor health/mood, excess time demands, lack of family integration, and limits on family opportunity.

Factor II: labeled 'Pessimism' consists of 11 items that came exclusively from the QRS scale of Negative attitudes towards index case, overprotection/dependency, and overcommitment/martyrdom, pessimism and lack of activities. The central characteristic of this factor is an immediate and future pessimism about the child's prospects of achieving self sufficiency.

Factor III: labeled 'Child Characteristics' consists of 15 items, 11 of which came from QRS scale difficult personality characteristics. 3 additional items were from the QRS scale Negative Attitudes toward Index case, in the remaining, single item was from the QRS scale Occupational Limitations. This factor involves the respondent perception of the specific behavioral or attitudinal difficulties presented by the index child.

Factor IV: labeled 'Physical Incapacitation' consists of the 6 items retained from the QRS scale

of the same name. This factor involves the respondent perceptions of limitation in the child's physical abilities and self help skills⁵.

All questions have to be answered in true or false and based on the answer to each question stress was assessed. Then grading was done as 'mild', 'moderate', 'severe' and 'very severe' for each factor. Global stress was assessed by adding scores of all 52 questions

RESULT

It shows that mothers expressing Mild and Moderate stress were 26(16.35%) and 66(41.51%) respectively. 50(31.45%) and 17(10.69%) mothers expressed severe and very severe stress respectively. (Table 1)

It shows that mothers experiencing mild and moderate stress were 02(1.26%) and 20(12.58%) respectively. 55(34.59%) and 82(51.57%) mothers experienced severe and very severe stress respectively. (Table 2)

It shows that 59 (37.11%) mothers

Table 1: Stress related to factor I (parents and family problems) in mothers of mentally challenged students

Stress	Score	No.(%)
Mild	1-5	26 (16.35)
Moderate	6-10	66 (41.51)
Severe	11-15	50 (31.45)
Very severe	16-20	17 (10.69)
Total		159 (100)

Table 2: Stress related to factor II (pessimism) in mothers of mentally challenged students

Stress	Score	No.(%)
Mild	1 - 2.75	02 (1.26)
Moderate	2.76- 5.50	20 (12.58)
Severe	5.51 - 8.25	55 (34.59)
Very severe	8.26 - 11	82 (51.57)
Total		159 (100)

expressed severe stress and equal number of mothers expressed moderate level of stress. (Table 3)

In factor no. 4, 46 (28.93%) mothers expressed mild stress, while 60 (37.74%) expressed moderate stress and 39 (24.53%) mothers expressed very severe stress. (Table 4)

This reveals that 65 (40.88%) mothers experienced moderate and 76(47.80%) mothers experienced severe global stress. (Table 5)

Table 3: Stress related to factor III (child characteristics) in mothers of mentally challenged students

Stress	Score	No.(%)
Mild	1 - 3.75	16 (10.06)
Moderate	3.76 - 7.50	59 (37.11)
Severe	7.51 - 11.25	59 (37.11)
Very severe	11.26 - 15	25 (15.72)
Total		159 (100)

Table 4: Stress related to factor IV (physical incapacitation) in mothers of mentally challenged students

Stress	Score	No.(%)
Mild	1 - 1.5	46 (28.93)
Moderate	1.6- 3	60 (37.74)
Severe	3.1 - 4.5	14 (8.81)
Very severe	4.6 - 6	39 (24.53)
Total		159 (100)

Table 5: Global stress in mothers of mentally challenged students

Stress	Score	No.(%)
Mild	1 - 13	05 (3.14)
Moderate	14 - 26	65 (40.88)
Severe	27 - 39	76 (47.80)
Very severe	40 - 52	13 (8.18)
Total		159 (100)

DISCUSSION

In the present study a very high percentage of mothers experiencing moderate and severe stress may be because they lacked understanding and support from their family members, presence of family problems in their families, lack of family integration, limits of family opportunity and because of their poor health /mood, and excess time demands.

The pessimism and hopelessness of the mothers in the present study, revealed by the fact that, nearly 55(34.59%) and 82(51.57%) mothers experienced severe and very severe stress respectively.

In the present study, reasons of greater psychological distress and depression among mothers may also be that the mothers had to take care of the children most of the time, which is quite demanding. Secondly, they also reported little or no support from the other members of family while looking after the child. Thus these factors accompanied by their own apprehensions about the future of the children/students increased overall global stress on them.

A study by Dyson L. (1993) ¹ also showed that there was greater stress related to parents and family problems among the parents of mentally challenged children (with developmental disabilities*) as compared to those of normal children.

McConachie P. (1986)⁶ also found that mothers of mentally challenged children (with mental retardation*) may be at more risk for psychiatric problems as they suffer from more stress than fathers.

Kornblatt E.S. *et al.*,(1985)⁷ studied families of mentally challenged children(with developmental disabilities*). they found that families experiencing high intensity need for care were consistently the same families experiencing decreased coping ability and these families repeatedly revealed a lack of knowledge and utilization of existing community services.

A study by Dyson L. (1997)²found that

parents of mentally challenged children(with developmental disabilities*) experienced greater stress in all scale factors as compared to the parents of normal children.

It was observed by Rousey A. *et al.*,(1992)⁸ that mothers experienced higher stress in dimension of pessimism as compared to the fathers. Mothers expressed more stress with respect to all factors than fathers.

Wilton K *et al.*,(1986)⁹ also observed significantly higher level of stress on 3 of their 4 QRS-F scales in families of mentally challenged (intellectually handicapped*)children .

Fredrich *et al.*,(1981)¹⁰ also found that as compared to parents of normal children(non-handicapped*), parents of mentally challenged(mentally handicapped*) children experienced greater stress and also they experience less psychological assets.

Another study by Scott B. *et al.*,(1997)¹¹ showed that parents of mentally challenged (Down's syndrome*) children were clinically depressed. The mothers experienced greater psychological distress, depression and fatigue than fathers.

In the present study most of the mothers of mentally challenged students experienced moderate to very severe global stress. Factor II, regarding pessimism was found to be the most important factor. Most of the mothers bothered about the child's prospect of achieving self-sufficiency.

There is an urgent need to assess and reduce the stress present in the parents especially in mothers of mentally challenged children. They should be provided psychiatric counseling and social support so as to cope up with the burden of the problems of their mentally challenged children.

* indicates different terms used by different authors in their papers for referring mentally challenged children. As these terms mentioned in brackets are synonyms of the term 'Mentally challenged' children the authors of the present study have used the term 'mentally challenged' students in the study.

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