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PARENTING STRESS AMONG PARENTS: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF CHILD TYPE, FAMILY TYPE, AND CHILD GENDER

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ABSTRACT

The present study aims to explore the parenting stress levels among different groups of parents based on (a) whether they have normal or special children, (b) their family structure (joint vs nuclear families), and (c) the gender of the child (boy or girl). A sample of 300 parents was selected from North Gujarat using stratified random sampling. Parenting Stress Index–Short Form (PSI-SF) developed by Abidin (1995) was administered. Results indicated that parents of special children experienced significantly higher stress compared to parents of normal children. Parents living in nuclear families reported higher stress levels compared to those in joint families. No significant difference was found between parents of boys and girls.

1. INTRODUCTION

Parenting is universally acknowledged as both a rewarding and challenging experience. When parents raise a child with special needs, the challenges are amplified. Parents often deal with emotional strain, increased financial burdens, social isolation, and continuous care demands. Parenting stress emerges when the demands of parenting exceed the perceived available resources (Abidin, 1995). Elevated levels of stress can lead to adverse outcomes including depression, anxiety, and strained parent-child relationships. Research consistently shows higher levels of parenting stress among parents of special needs children compared to parents of typically developing children (Gupta & Singhal, 2004). Moreover, the presence of a joint family can act as a support system, helping parents manage stress more effectively (Singh, 2016). Gender of the child may also influence parental stress, depending on societal and cultural expectations.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Ramanandi, V. H., and Rao, Brinda (2015) conducted a study titled "Comparison of Stress Level in the Parents of Children with Cerebral Palsy and Parents of Normal Children in Vadodara Region of Gujarat" published in the International Journal of Physiotherapy (Vol. 2, pp. 421–428). The study investigated the parenting stress levels in parents of children with cerebral palsy compared to parents of normal children. Using the Gujarati translated version of the Parenting Stress Index–Short Form, the researchers collected data from 43 parents of children with cerebral palsy attending therapy at Varun Mahajan Apang Shishu Mandal, Vadodara, and 45 parents of normal children. Results indicated that parents of children with cerebral palsy experienced significantly higher stress levels across all domains—Parental Distress (PD), Parent-Child Dysfunctional Interaction (PCDI), Difficult Child (DC), and Total Stress—compared to parents of normal children.

Rani, Sunita, and Singh, Mony (2022), in their research titled "Relation between Parental Stress and Parental Self-efficacy in the Parents of Children with Autism" published in The International Journal of Indian Psychology, studied the relationship between parental stress and parental self-efficacy in parents of children with disabilities compared to those without disabilities. The sample included 50 parents of children with autism and 50 parents of children without disabilities, selected using purposive sampling from various therapy centres. Data analysis using t-tests and correlation revealed significant differences between the two groups in terms of parenting stress. Moreover, a moderately negative correlation was found between parental stress and parental self-efficacy among parents of children with disabilities, with a 49% shared variance.

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To compare parenting stress between parents of normal children and parents of special children.
- To study the difference in parenting stress between parents living in joint families and those in nuclear families.
- To analyze parenting stress levels between parents of boys and girls.

3.1. HYPOTHESES OF THE STUDY

1) There will be no significant difference in parenting stress between parents of normal children and parents of special children.
2) There will be no significant difference in parenting stress between parents from joint families and parents from nuclear families.
3) There will be no significant difference in parenting stress between parents of boys and parents of girls.

3.2. SAMPLE

The sample consisted of 300 parents (150 mothers and 150 fathers), selected from special schools, inclusive schools, and mainstream schools across North Gujarat. The stratified random sampling method ensured balanced representation based on the type of child (normal/special), family type (joint/nuclear), and child gender (boy/girl).

3.3. TOOLS

1) Parenting Stress Index–Short Form (PSI-SF) by Abidin (1995).

Procedure

Permission was obtained from various schools and therapy centers. Parents were briefed about the study, informed consent was obtained, and confidentiality was assured. The questionnaires were self-administered under supervision. The study duration was approximately two months.

4. RESULTS

Hypothesis 1: Parenting Stress - Normal vs Special Children

Group	N	Mean	SD	t-value	Sig.
Normal Children	150	72,4	9,8	6,32	0,01
Special Children	150	85,6	10,5	-	-

Hypothesis 2: Parenting Stress - Joint Family vs Nuclear Family

Group	N	Mean	SD	t-value	Sig.
Joint Family	150	76,5	9,2	3,85	0,01
Nuclear Family	150	82,7	10,8	-	-

Hypothesis 3: Parenting Stress - Boys vs Girls

Group	N	Mean	SD	t-value	Sig.
Boys	150	80,2	10,4	1,21	NS
Girls	150	78,7	9,7	-	-

5. DISCUSSION

The results of the study indicate that parenting stress is significantly higher among parents of special children than among parents of normal children. The emotional, financial, and caregiving burdens associated with raising a special child likely contribute to this heightened stress. Additionally, it was found that parents living in nuclear families experience higher stress compared to those in joint families, suggesting that extended family support mitigates stress levels. However, no significant difference was observed between parents of boys and girls, indicating that in the present sample, gender expectations do not significantly impact parental stress.

6. CONCLUSIONS

Parents of special children experience significantly higher parenting stress than parents of normal children.

Parenting stress is higher among parents living in nuclear families compared to those in joint families.

There is no significant difference in parenting stress between parents of boys and girls.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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None.

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