



STRESS AND COPING STRATEGIES OF MOTHERS OF CHILDREN WITH AND WITHOUT AUTISM

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ABSTRACT

Parenting is a challenging job. Being a parent of a child with autism is more challenging and tough. The present study aims to find out the stress and coping strategies in mothers of children with and without autism. Data were collected from 25 mothers of children with autism and 25 mothers of children without autism. SPSSI it is invented by Arun Kumar Singh; Ashish K. Singh & Arpana Singh (2011). This inventory consists of 35 items. The inventory had 35 items with three options seldom, sometimes, and frequently. The second measures used in this study was coping strategies scale (CSS). This scale is developed by A.K. Srivastava. The scale contains 50 items, to be rated on five-point scale, describing varieties of coping behavior was used to collect the data. The questionnaire-based survey method was used to collect data. Findings revealed that mothers of children with autism were found high in their stress scores as compare to mothers of children without autism. Approach-oriented coping (problem focused coping) used by both group of mothers to cope from stress.

Keywords; Mothers, Autism, Stress, Coping strategies.

INTRODUCTION

Everyone's life is significantly impacted by mothers. Having a mother in one's life is a blessing. Mothers have many roles and responsibility for their children, from birthing to bringing up and integrating them into societal structure. However, in this situation, the role of mothers becomes more crucial when it comes to the children who have been diagnosed with autism. They do their best for the child in coping with the condition. Sometimes they also play the role of a therapist, teacher and so on. Since the child with the disorder is the focus of their entire attention, they spend the majority of their time and energy on him or her. Some of the studies have instead determined stress levels among mothers and fathers as separate individuals and have found parental differences in the levels of stress experienced. A study, for example, discovered that mothers' stress levels are more severely affected (Herring et al., 2006).

Stress is a condition when an individual is not able to cope with specific demands and events. Stress has both mental as well as physical aspects. It can be beneficial, such as when it enables a person avoid danger or meet a deadline. However, chronic stress can be harmful to one's health. Every person, handled it in different manner like it can be stressful in negative manner for someone, while at the same time it can be eustress for another. All those conditions are known as stressors, which create lots of pressure and demand on an individual to perform.

Coping strategies refer to a series of behavioral or cognitive efforts aimed at reducing stress levels and are considered tools that parents can use to adapt to the stressors associated with raising a child with ASD. Coping strategies in studies of parents of children with ASD are commonly assessed using coping questionnaires (WOC; Folkman and Lazarus, 1988) or coping strategies for experienced problems (COPE, Carver, 1997). Despite the different classifications proposed, two blocks of coping strategies are emphasized, even though various taxonomies have been suggested. Problem-focused coping strategies (such as engagement and positive reframing) aimed at solving the problem or doing something to positively change one's perception of the stressor and coping strategies that focus on emotions. Coping strategies aimed at reducing or managing feelings of stress (e.g., avoidance, denial, distraction).

Autism is a complex neurodevelopmental condition that affects a person's receptive and interactive behaviour. The qualities that influence social development must be sensitive and have a specific intensity in order to be diagnosed. Autism includes enduring difficulties with social interaction and communication. People with autism also have difficulty with social and emotional interactions, are less interested in sharing feelings and emotions, and are often unresponsive to social interactions. Autism People with sarcasm often have trouble maintaining, developing, or understanding relationships. They have poor integrated verbal or nonverbal communication and exhibit abnormalities in eye contact and body language. Because child characteristics moderate the effects of coping strategies on maternal outcomes, involvement has a significantly positive effect on maternal well-being when the child's symptoms are more severe (Benson, 2010).

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Dabrowska (2010) administered the Questionnaire of Resources and Stress (QRS) to 162 parents of preschool children with autism, she accurately anticipated that the level of stress would be higher in parents of preschool children with autism than in parents of children with Down's syndrome or normally developing children. On three QRS measures (e.g., limitations on family opportunities), parents of autistic children scored higher than Down's parents, and on nine out of eleven scales, parents of normally developing children scored higher. She also discovered that mothers of children with ASD had higher stress than fathers, although this was not seen in either the Down's syndrome or usually developing populations.

Seymour Monique et al, (2013) investigated the impact of maternal tiredness and coping on the association between children's problematic behaviors and maternal stress in 65 mothers with young children with ASDs (aged 2-5 years). The findings revealed that mother tiredness, but not maladaptive coping, influenced the connection between problematic child behaviour and maternal stress. These findings imply that challenges with child behaviour may contribute to parental tiredness, which in turn may impact the employment of inadequate coping techniques and increased stress. The impact of tiredness on mother health was emphasized as an essential factor to address in families with autistic children.

Miranda Ana et al 2019 examined the impact of behavioral challenges, coping methods, and social functional support in the connection between symptom severity and parental stress in mothers of children with ASD (autism spectrum disorder). The parental stress questionnaire, coping orientation to issues faced scale, strengths and challenges questionnaire, and Duke-UNC social support questionnaire were given to 52 mothers, who also evaluated the severity of their children's ASD symptoms. Correlation studies found that parenting stress was positively connected to the children's ASD symptoms and behavioral difficulties. Parenting stress, on the other hand, was shown to be negatively associated to the mothers' engagement, coping, and social functional support. Multiple mediation study revealed that engagement coping and behavioral challenges were important mediators in the link between ASD symptoms and parental stress, with the engagement variable having a bigger influence. The findings highlight the need of promoting mothers' involvement coping orientation and the use of behavioral interventions with their children to assist them buffer the impact of stress.

Hampton Sarah et al, 2022 investigated the stress, sadness, and anxiety levels of autistic parents were greater than those of non-autistic parents. Anxiety levels decreased over time in both groups. There were no differences between groups in terms of life happiness or parental confidence. On most aspects of parenting style, there were no differences between the groups, while autistic parents scored lower on parental discipline. According to this study, autistic persons may be more agitated, sad, and nervous during pregnancy and after giving birth than non-autistic people. Autistic persons, as a result, require high-quality help throughout this period. This study also reveals that autistic and non-autistic parents are equally likely to parent in good ways, such as being attentive to their baby's needs.

OBJECTIVES

1. To assess the level of stress among mothers of children with and without autism as measured by stress scale.
2. To identify the coping strategies among mothers of children with and without autism as measured by coping check list.

HYPOTHESES

1. There will be no significant difference between the stress level of mothers of children with and without autism.
2. There will be no significant difference between the coping strategies among mothers of children with and without autism.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

SAMPLE

The sample of the present study were 25 mothers whose children were diagnosed with autism spectrum disorders (ASD), and 25 mothers of children without autism, with their age ranging from 28 to 45 years old. The age of the children ranged from 3 to 10 years. The area covered for the study is Noida (Uttar Pradesh).

PROCEDURE

Mothers were contacted through early intervention centers, therapy centers and kindergartens. The mothers whose children had a clinical diagnosis by an expert and are attending therapy in special study centers were selected for the study. Those who agreed to take part in the study has been given the questionnaires listed below. Subjects in this study included 50 mothers of children with and without autism.

TOOLS USED

Stress of mothers measured by using Singh Personal Stress Source Inventory (SPSSI) invented by Arun Kumar Singh, Ashish K. Singh & Arpana Singh (2011). This inventory consists of 35 items. The inventory had 35 items with three options seldom, sometimes, and frequently. The scoring was as follows: 0-30 mild stress, 31-79 moderate level of stress and 80 or higher high level of stress. The English version of the SPSSI has both test-retest reliability and internal consistency reliability. The test-retest reliability was found to be .792 which was not only high but also statistically significant. Likewise, internal consistency reliability by odd-even method was found to be .784 which was highly significant. Thus, SPSSI possessed a sufficient degree of reliability. The second measures used in this study was coping strategies scale (CSS). This scale is developed by A.K. Srivastava. The scale contains 50 items, to be rated on five-point scale, describing varieties of coping behavior underlying following five major categories of coping strategies based on the combinations of 'operation' and 'orientation' of the coping behavior.

STATISTICAL TREATMENT:

After the collection of data to ascertain the objectives of the study statistical technique t test has been used for analyzing the data.

RESULTS**SECTION A: DESCRIPTION OF STRESS SCORE OF MOTHERS OF ASD AND NON- ASD CHILDREN:****Table 1: T table of stress scores of mothers of ASD and non-ASD children**

The findings in table 1 shows that the mean score of mothers of ASD children is 64.34 and mean of mothers of non-ASD children is 55.8. The SD value is 13.07 and 9.38 respectively. The t-value is found 2.60 which is found significant at .05 level. This means the rejection of null hypothesis.

SECTION B: DESCRIPTION OF COPING STRATEGIES OF MOTHERS OF ASD AND NON-ASD CHILDREN:

GROUPS	N	MOTHERS OF ASD CHILDREN	MOTHERS OF NON-ASD CHILDREN	T value
Mean	25	64.34	55.8	2.60
SD	25	13.07	9.38	

GROUPS	MOTHERS OF ASD CHILDREN	MOTHERS OF NON-ASD CHILDREN	T value
Mean	102.53	98.69	0.81
SD	16.41	16.5	

Table 2: T table of coping scores of mothers of ASD and non-ASD children

The findings in table 2 shows that the mean score of mothers of ASD children is 102.53 and mean of mothers of non-ASD children is 98.69. The SD value is 16.41 and 16.5 respectively. The t value is found 0.81 which is not found significant at any level. This means the acceptance of null hypothesis.

DISCUSSION

Stress is characterised as an emotional or physical discomfort. It could be caused by any event or idea that causes a person to feel upset, irritated, or nervous. How a person responds to the stressor will depend on their personality, their perceptions, and their experience. Understanding the long-term effects stress can have on one's mental and physical health is crucial since everyone reacts to stress differently. Parents of autistic children and parents of children without autism responded differently to questions about parenting styles in one study (Strid, 2013). As a result of this conclusion, families with autistic children react differently to various scenarios.

In the present study mothers of children with and without autism were found differ in their stress level. Mothers of children with autism were found high in their stress scores as compare to mothers of children without autism. This may be due to mothers are the primary caregivers of the child and they have to look after their family and their children and if the child is of special need, then it needs some extra efforts and care for the mothers which could create stress in them.

Numerous studies have revealed an increase in stress, particularly among mothers, which may be associated to the burden of trying to balance household duties, a spouse's needs, and the needs of other children. Al-Krenawi A, Graham JR, Gharaibeh FA (2011). sense of coherence.

Coping strategies of 50 mothers were assessed by using the coping scale. The tool has two sub scales approach (problem focused) and avoidance (emotion focused) coping strategies. High scores on avoidance (emotion focused) coping strategies would indicate deficient or dysfunctional coping, and low score would indicate efficient or functional coping. Avoidance coping strategies might bring immediate and short-term relief. But in long term they are likely to add to the stress of the person, and result in psychological strain and pathologies in some cases.

In the present study mothers were found similar for using coping strategies which means that both group of mothers use same approach to deal with their stress. The mean scores of mothers on approach coping style are higher than the mean score of avoidance coping. Which indicates that mothers using efficient and functional coping approach. Approach-oriented coping (problem focused coping) refers to mental efforts focused at solving the problem, understanding its sources, and embracing it, whereas avoidance-oriented coping (emotion focused coping) refers to diverting oneself from the stressor. Some of the mothers explained that they practice relaxation exercise, deep breathing, meditation even a short walk or listen music or Satsang to calm down their stressful thoughts.

The present study supported by Kiami SR, Goodgold S (2017) they interviewed 70 mothers in their study, the Coping Health Inventory for Parents (CHIP) questionnaire, a self-report form with 45 items and a score range of 0-4, was used. The authors discovered that the most commonly used problem-focused coping techniques among mothers were interaction with other parents of children with ASD and getting help from others.

CONCLUSION

The study provides valuable insight into the stressful experience and the use of coping strategies among mothers of children with and without autism. The study concludes that mothers of children with autism has moderate level of stress and problem focused coping style used by them and mothers of children without autism has low level of stress and same coping technique were used by them to cope from stress.

By attending to the needs of the child, parents of autistic children will generally be under huge pressure. The most crucial thing they ignore is to take care of themselves. They should look after themselves as well as the child. Because autism is a long-term issue, dealing with it is not an easy task. Parents should strive to keep themselves and their children happy and healthy. They must make a promise to themselves stating that they will do whatever it takes to make their children's lives happy and productive.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations have been made:

1. The study can be replicated on a large sample for generalizing the findings.
2. An interventional study on effectiveness of stress management program can be done.
3. A comparative study can be done between fathers and mothers of other developmental disabilities.
4. A study to assess the various types of stress can be conducted.

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