

Level of Social Support and Perceived Stress among the Parents of Mentally Challenged Children

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ABSTRACT

Every child is special for their parents. But, some children have special needs that challenge parents to find ways to prepare these children for the future and to handle the problems. Families having mental retarded children often face challenges because of the special demands placed upon them. Having a mentally challenged child is an unexpected stressful event and it affects the whole family. There is a connection between the social support and the perceived stress. To find out the relation between social support and the perceived stress, the present study aims to analyze the level of social support and perceived stress of the parents of Mentally Challenged Children. To meet the framed objectives, samples of 60 parents of mentally challenged children belonging to age group 5-15 years were randomly selected. The Multi Dimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support and the Perceived Stress Scale were administered on the subjects. Findings suggested that, there is a significant negative correlation between the social support and the perceived stress of the parents of mentally challenged children.

1. Introduction

Giving birth of a child with a disability can have profound effects on the parents. It is more devastating for a family that a disabled child is born. It is a severe test of a family's resiliency that a child is born with an incurable disease.

Families of mentally retarded children often face challenges because of the special demands placed upon them. Successful utilization of resources has been important for the families in coping with the challenges and everyday demands in caring a child with mental retardation (Beresford, 1994; Rimmerman & Duvdevani, 1996; Hentinen & Kyngas, 1998; Thyenet *et al.*, 1999). In particular, social support influences the successful adaptation of such families (Dunst *et al.*, 1986; Boyce *et al.*, 1991; Trivette & Dunst, 1992; McConachie, 1994; Greenberg *et al.*, 1997; Llewellyn *et al.*, 1998).

Mental retardation is the deficiency in functioning. Mental retardation is characterized by significantly sub average intellectual functioning with limitations in adaptive skill areas like communication, self-care, social skills, leisure, and work. Mental retardation occurs from birth to age 18 (American Association on Mental Retardation, 1992). There are also many other recent definitions such as mental retardation is a disability characterized by significant limitations in intellectual functioning and in adaptive behavior (American Association on Mental Retardation, 2002).

The American Psychiatric Association' Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders(DSM-IV-TR 2008) defined Mental Retardation as a central nervous system dysfunction which produces an IQ below 70 and results in significant deficiencies in two or more life skills, such as self-direction, academics skills, social skills, communication, and health.

Stress is experienced by all people throughout the lifetime. Pipp -Siegel *et al.*, (2002) defines stress as "a physiological,

cognitive, emotional strain or tension." Stress may be because of the consequence of a crisis; however, for some people stress can be a long term problem. Stress can occur any time and intervention may be required to overcome it (Lederberg and Golbach, 2002).

Perceived stress is the feelings or thoughts that under how much stress an individual is. It deals with the feelings related to the uncontrollability and unpredictability of one's life. It also deals with the thought that how often one person has to deal with irritating hassles of everyday life, with the changes of in one's life and confidence in one's ability to deal with the unexpected events, problems or difficulties. Perceived stress measures feelings about stressfulness of individuals of their life and their ability to handle and tackle the stress. Individuals may suffer similar negative life events but the impact and severity of the events would differ from one person to another due to some factors like personality, coping resources, support. Thus, perceived stress is the reflection of the interaction between an individual and their environment.

Social support is the information from other persons that a person is cared for, esteemed, valued, and part of a network of communication. Social support can come from parents, partner, relatives, friends, society, family and community (such as churches or clubs) (Rietschlin, 1998). People having social support experience less stress when they confront a stressful experience, cope with the stress more successfully (Taylor, 2011), and they experience life events more positively (Gable *et al.*, 2012).

Supportive friends and family can provide emotional support by assuring that the person is valuable and is loved by others. A person under stress can approach the stressful event with greater assurance when provided warmth and nurturance by other persons.

Chourasiya *et al.*, (2018) studied the perceived stress of the families having mentally retarded children and found out the factors influencing perceived stress. 100 families and 102 mentally retarded children were studied. Section I of family interview for stress and coping in mental retardation (FISC-MR) was used to measure the family burden of care. The result was that 32% of mothers felt mild stress of which 59.3% were having education level up to Degree College. While 61% of mother were found to have moderate stress of which 68.8% having education up to Degree College, (67.3%) nuclear families show mild stress while only 22 (52.3%) joint families show mild stress.

Bodla *et al.*, (2012) aimed to examine the psychological well-being and social support of the parents of intellectually challenged children. A sample of 30 parents of intellectually challenged children was chosen. Scale of psychological well-being and social support scale questionnaires were used. Significant difference was found between psychological well-being and social support.

Mita *et al.*, (2005) studied the stress and anxiety in parents of mentally retarded children. In the child guidance clinic of a tertiary care psychiatry hospital, the study was done. The sample was comprised of 180 subjects, and was divided into categories as: group A (60 parents having profound to moderately mentally retarded children), group B (60 parents of mentally retarded children having mild to borderline) and group C (60 parents of normal intelligence children). The Family Interview for Stress and Coping (FISC) in mental retardation, and Hamilton Anxiety Rating Scale (HARS) were used. Parents in group A had a significantly higher frequency of stressors and level of anxiety, whereas the parents of groups B and C had lower frequency than the group A. A positive correlation was found between the level of anxiety and stressors.

Jin Y. Shin (2002) studied the informal and professional supports available for families of children with mental retardation in Korea and the United States and the effects of culture and social support on maternal stress. 38 American and 40 Korean mothers were taken for the home-visit interview. 10 types of informal and 11 types of professional support for the two groups were identified by the pilot study. The findings suggested that American mothers received more informal and professional support in almost every domain whereas Korean mothers experienced more stress.

2. Materials and methods

Objectives

- To study the perceived stress of the parents of mentally challenged children
- To study the social support of the parents of mentally challenged children
- To study the role of social support on the level of perceived stress among the parents having mentally challenged children

Hypothesis

- There is no perceived stress among the parents of mentally challenged children.

- There is no social support among the parents of mentally challenged children.
- There is no correlation between the perceived stress and social support of the parents having mentally challenged children.

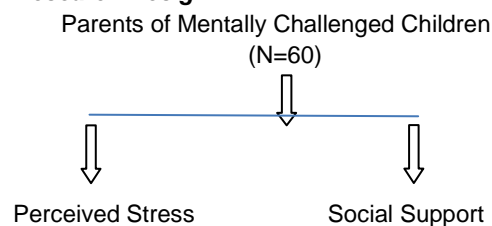
3. Sampling

Sample of 60 parents having mentally challenged children were taken for the study. The sample was taken from Nirmal Vivek Special School, Jaipur and Prayas Inclusive School, Jaipur, Rajasthan on availability basis. The sample of 25 parents was taken from Nirmal Vivek School and Sample of 20 parents was taken from Prayas Inclusive School in the parent-teacher meeting. And the remaining data of 15 parents was collected through call by taking contact numbers from the school. The data was collected using the random sampling.

Variables

1. Perceived Stress
2. Social Support

Research Design



Tools Used

- Perceived Stress Scale (Cohen S., 1994)
- Multi Dimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (Zimet *et al.*, 1988)

4. Result and Discussion-

The purpose of the study was to examine the level of social support and perceived stress among the parents of mentally challenged children. A sample of 60 parents was taken from Jaipur, Rajasthan on the basis of availability by using random sampling method. Parents of mentally challenged children were taken for the study. For the data collection the parents were seated comfortably, and good rapport was established with them. The Perceived Stress Scale and Multi Dimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support were conducted on them. After that the scoring of the test was done according to the manual. Then the results were tabulated and the interpretation was done.

Hypothesis 01: There is no Perceived Stress among the Parents of Mentally Challenged Children

Table 1- Perceived stress among the parents of mentally challenged children

Perceived Stress		
Sample Size= 60		
Level of Stress	In Numbers	Percentage
High	10	16.66
Moderate	45	75
Low	5	8.33

Table 1 shows the high, moderate and low levels of perceived stress of the parents mentally challenged children. The high perceived stress level is 16.66%, moderate perceived stress level is 75% and low perceived stress level is 8.33%.

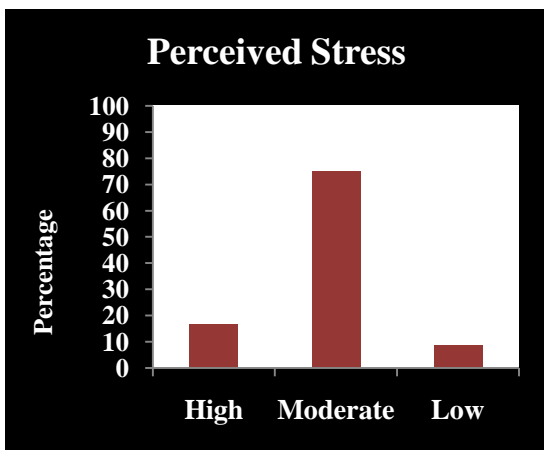


Figure 1 Perceived Stress among the Parents of Mentally Challenged Children

From the Table 1 and Figure 1, it is observed that the only 5 parents among the 60 are having low level of perceived stress. It indicates that having a disabled child in family creates some form of mental stress in parents. 10 parents are having high level of perceived stress. It indicates that taking care of a mentally challenged child is a challenging task for any parent. Parents of mentally challenged children have to face stress as they have to look after their child. They have to bear financial problems as well as emotional problems. 45 out of 60 parents were found to have moderate level of perceived stress. It indicates that almost every parent has to face some level of stress. When interrogating the parents during data collection it showed that most of the parents were fairly often upset due the things that happened unexpectedly. Parents were fairly often not able to control the important things in their life; they felt stressed and nervous sometimes. From the analysis, it is proved that hypothesis 'There is no Perceived Stress among the Parents of Mentally Challenged Children' is rejected.

Hypothesis 02: There is no Social Support among the Parents of Mentally Challenged Children

Table 2- Social Support among the Parents of Mentally Challenged Children

Social Support		
Sample Size= 60		
Level of Social Support	In Numbers	Percentage
High	15	25
Moderate	38	63.33
Low	7	11.66

Table 2 shows the high, moderate and low levels of social support of the parents mentally challenged children. The high social support level is 25%, moderate social support level is 63.33% and low social support level is 11.66%.

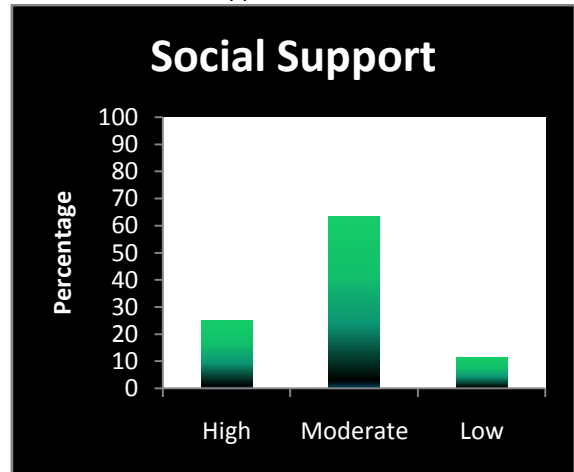


Figure 2 Social Support among the Parents of Mentally Challenged Children

From the table 2 and figure 2 it is observed that the level of low social support is 11.66%, Moderate social support is more than the level of high social support. It indicates that every parent have support from someone including friends, relatives and neighbors. As their child is mentally challenged, every parent is not getting high support but they do have support either from their friends or family or from significant others including neighbors and society. 63.33% of the parents are getting moderate support. It indicates that the family of the parents of mentally challenged children tries to help them. Parents get the emotional support from their family. Support and help from extended family members like grandparents also act as significant facilitator to coping. Social Support gives special feeling to an individual. Most of the parents can count on their friends in need. While the level of support they get from someone special is high in most cases of parents. Provision of social support of any kind, in any situation and from any source rejected our hypothesis 'there is no Social Support among the Parents of Mentally Challenged Children'.

Hypothesis 03: There is no correlation between the Social Support and Perceived Stress of the Parents of Mentally Challenged Children

Table 3- Correlation between Perceived Stress and Social Support of Parents of Mentally Challenged Children

Areas	Sample size	Mean	S.D	Correlation
Perceived stress	60	21.1	5.6	-0.67
Social support	60	4.5	1.03	

Table 3 shows the correlation between the perceived stress and the social support. The correlation value is -0.67, which rejects the null hypothesis 'There is no correlation between the Social Support and Perceived Stress of the Parents of Mentally Challenged Children'. There is a significant negative correlation between the perceived stress and social support of the parents of mentally challenged children. Negative correlation means if social support is increasing then the perceived stress decreases and vice versa. It may be clearly stated that social support has an effect on the level of perceived stress. High level of social support may lead to decline the perceived stress level of the parents. When the person gets support from their family, friends or their neighbors, it helps them to cope up with the problem. It brings the person to be in mentally healthy state. When parents get support from someone it helps them to deal with the stress effectively. Hence if they have social support, then the level of their stress will be low. In contrast, low social support leads the parents lonely and frustrated. So their stress level increases. Therefore, such families are needed with very high level of perceived social support in order to be able to achieve the protective effects of support.

5. Conclusion

From the study, it may be concluded that 16.66% of parents are having high level of perceived stress, 63.33% of

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parents with moderate level of perceived stress, and 8.33% of parents with low level of perceived stress. 25% of parents were found to have high level of social support, 75% of parents were found to have moderate level of social support and about 11.66 per cent parents of mentally challenged children still have very low level of social support. A negative correlation was found between the social support and the perceived stress of the parents of mentally challenged children. As for the suggestion Psycho education could be given to the parents for how to tackle and deal with the mentally challenged children, how to cope with their stress level. Social support and taking personal time may be the two coping mechanism which may help an individual to express more readily and communicate their feelings, thoughts and insecurity. A meditation-based stress reduction counseling program can be provided to such families who are facing these problems.

6. Limitations

- In this study only 60 samples were taken, which is small. In future more samples can be taken.
- In this study the questionnaire was used as a research tool for data collection. It will be more effective if the questionnaire is competed with personal interview.
- Age limit for the parents is taken 30-45 years.

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