

RESEARCH ARTICLE

PERCEIVED STRESS AND PSYCHOLOGICAL ADJUSTMENT AMONG FATHERS AND MOTHERS OF PHYSICALLY HANDICAPPED GIRLS

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ABSTRACT

Background: Physical disability of a female child by birth or by some injury in a family is very challenging for the parents and siblings. Present study is an attempt to explore the role of Perceived Stress and Psychological adjustment among parents of Physically Handicap girls.

Objective: to explore the relationship between stress and psychological adjustment among parents of physically handicapped girls. **Methodology:** The sample consisted of n=40 parents of physically handicapped female children from the Nishtar hospital Multan. Snowball sampling technique was used for data collection. The parents of female physically disable children were included in the study. Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) (Cohen et al. 1988) and Psychological Adjustment Scale were used to measure study variables. **Results:** There was a negative association between perceived stress and psychological adjustment ($r=-0.77$, $p=0.01$) among parents of handicapped girls. Results further suggested through t-test scores that fathers of handicapped girls were high on psychological adjustment as compared to mothers ($p=0.01$) and mothers were more under stress as compared to fathers ($p=0.02$). **Conclusion:** The Fathers and mothers of physically disabled female children are different in term of coping the level of stress as well as the fathers show more psychological adjustment as compare to mothers.

Keywords: Disability, psychological Adjustment, Stress.

INTRODUCTION

A female child with a physical disability by birth or by some injury in a family may present enormous challenges for the parents and siblings. The birth of physically handicapped children especially female child is quite challenging. The special needs along with the expenditures to be met and the day-to-day problems may lead the parent toward extreme disturbance psychologically as well as physically.¹ The disability because of some injury or disease, later on, became the source of psychological distress for the entire family also².

Parents of severe physical handicap children especially with a female child may confront various challenges which may tend to tremendous psychological pressure. Moreover, the developmental process of such girls is usually weak and slow, because of physical deficiencies and the inability to learn adaptive skills³. In South Asia and especially in Pakistan, most physically handicapped individuals have usually been cared for by their families. Therefore, their parents are more vulnerable to physical and emotional distress consequently their personal domestic life also fluctuates due to the birth of a disabled child in the family and this change can be even more severe when a child with special needs is born^{4,5}. A review of literature suggests that the parents of disabled

children often had symptoms of stress and depression⁴. Literatures also suggest that there are significant differences in stress-related issues between parents of children with developmental disabilities as both suffer from parental stress, family social support, or family functioning. However, parents of female children with disabilities experience extremely higher levels of stress in different fields of life. Paternal and maternal stress was mostly linked with aspects of family functioning as perceived by themselves and their spouses^{6,7}.

The present study is an attempt to highlight levels of stress among father and mothers due to the challenging role of parenting because of their physically disabled female child. In Pakistani society this problem is very stressful for the family that they have disable daughter. In this connection, the current study may provide the basis for parents and family counselling for parents of disabled female children as well as treatment of handicapped girls. This can improve father and mother psychological wellbeing in the society. So, the objective of this study was to explore the relationship between stress and psychological adjustment among parents of physically handicapped girls.

METHODOLOGY

The correlational study was conducted at Nishtar Hospital Multan on $n=40$ fathers and mothers of physically handicapped female children. The ethical approval was obtained from the ERB of Islamic international University (ERB# FSS-0781). The Parents age range was 21-42 years. The sampling technique was snowball sampling technique, from Nishtar Hospital Multan. The age of father and mother ranged from 21-42 years, whereas the age of female disabled children ranged from 4 to 12 years. The Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) Psychological Adjustment Scale (PAS) were used to assess stress and psychological adjustment among parents of physically disabled female children respectively. Pearson product moment correlation was used to find association between PSS (Cronbach's $\alpha=0.81$) and PAS

(Cronbach's $\alpha=0.82$) and to determine the difference between father and mother and stress and psychological adjustment independent t-test was used. SPSS Ver 23 was used for data analysis while keeping the significance level $p<0.05$.

RESULTS

A total $n=40$ parents with age range 21 to 42 years with mean age of 32 ± 9 . The children age ranges from 4 to 12 years with mean age of 7.5 ± 3.5 . The perceived stress level and psychological adjustment was negatively associated with each other ($r=-0.77$, $p=0.01$). While comparing the mother and father significant difference was observed regarding PSS ($p=0.01$, Cohen's $d=0.99$) and PAS ($p=0.02$, Cohen's $d=1.42$) with large effect size. (Figure 1)

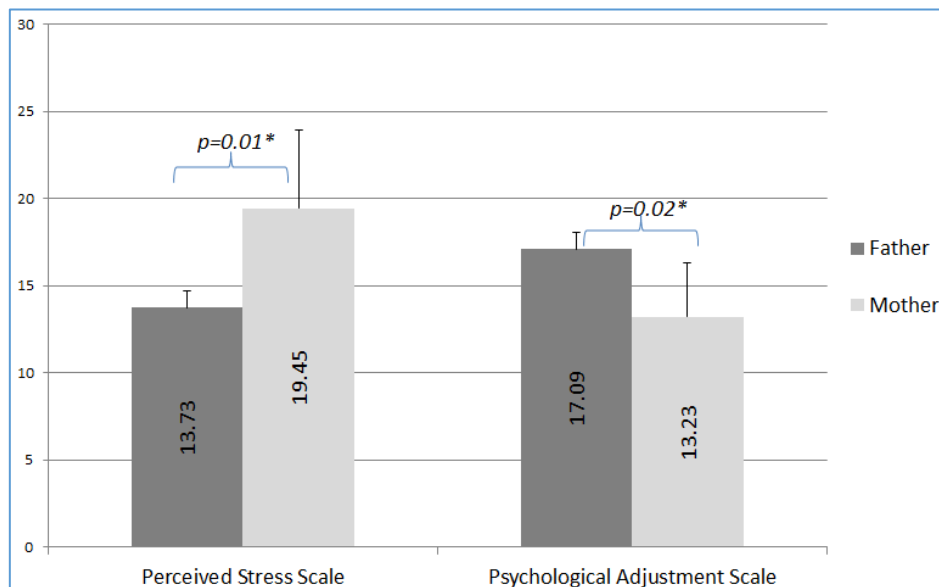


Figure 1: Comparison between Father and Mother (PSS & PBS)

DISCUSSION

The objective of the present study was to assess the perceived stress and psychological adjustment among fathers and mothers of physically handicapped girls. The current study indicated that increased level of psychological stress reduces the capability of psychological adjust among parents of physically disabled children. The Father showed more capability to psychologically adjust as compared to mothers regarding their disable child. It was revealed that as the perceived stress level increased the psychological adjustment of the parents' of physically handicapped lowers down.

Both parents of physically handicapped girls having stress due to long lasting issues of their female child's physical disability. Parents of physically handicapped children bear various kinds of pressures in their day-to-day life^{8,9}. It is a challenging and tiresome job to nurture these children and in the case of physically handicapped female children, these problems may multiply many folds due to their unique demands¹⁰. Fathers and mothers start experiencing stress with the arrival of handicapped new-borns in their family that may become severe as time passes by. During the developmental phase, the expenditures may

also increase due to increased medical, educational, and rehabilitative needs of these children, which may serve as an additional source of stress for parents^{5,11}.

The outcomes of this study suggest a negative association between stress and psychological adjustment among parents of physically handicapped female children. The present finding is supported by a study revealed that due to developmentally disabled children, parents are not only exposed to tiredness and stress but also impaired physical functioning affect their social and psychological adjustment as well⁹. Likewise, parents having mentally handicapped children undergo anxiety, stress, and strain that influence their psychological adjustment. They barely feel adjusted in life after such a lifetime incidence. Consequently, the quality of life of such parents may also get impacted¹². Another hypothesis of this study was about gender differences on stress and psychological adjustment scores experienced by the parents of physically handicapped female children. These finding were supported by literature that revealed both parents (fathers and mothers) had heightened stress levels, however; their perception of stress was different due to differences in their responsibilities and daily life activities. Usually, mothers are overwhelmed by their daily living activities while fathers go through financial and social burden^{13,14}.

It is imperative for being parents of such special children to become more empowered and educated as well as learn to provide unconditional love to their special daughters and need to modify the notion of perfection and disability. Moreover, there is a need to acknowledge the great holy responsibility of rearing a daughter. Children reflect a wide range of behaviours, competencies, and manners that they learned from their parents¹⁵.

Although the results are significant but the single center study with sample size was small, limit the generalizability of the study.

CONCLUSION

The Fathers and mothers of physically disabled female children are different in term of coping the level of stress as well as the fathers show more psychological adjustment as compared to mothers. Findings of this study might be beneficial in

rehabilitation, counselling, and therapeutic services. The future study is being recommended with large sample size and multiple centres to generalize the results. Although this study directs the professionals to train self-management Skills that would prepare fathers and mothers for the new roles associated with parenting of special children and train them with effective coping skills that help in dealing with difficult situations. It is recommended that some factors that may predict the stress level and psychological adjustment must be included in future studies i.e education of parents, family system, socioeconomic status etc.

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