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STRESS AND COPING AMONG PARENTS WITH MENTALLY HANDICAPPED CHILDREN

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# ABSTRACT OBJECTIVE



To measure the difference in Stress and Coping of parents with mentally handi­ cappedchildren.

# STUDY DESIGN

Cross sectional

# PLACE AND DURATION OF STUDY

The data were collected from special education institutes of Faisalabad in durationof6 months.

# SUBJECTS AND METHODS

The sample consisted of ninety parents of mentally handicapped children (45 fathers & 45 mothers) from different government and private institutes of special education in Faisalabad. Standardized Urdu versions of the Brief COPE and Parental Stress Scale were administered on participants.

# RESULTS

The results indicated asignificant difference in stress and coping of parents with mentally handicapped children. Fathers of mentally handicapped children had a high stresslevel and used more problem focused coping style than mothers. Mothers of mentally handicapped children used more emotion focused coping as compared with fathers.

# CONCLUSION

The results indicated asignificant difference in stress and coping strategies among parentswith mentally handicapped child.

# KEYWORDS

Parental Stress, Coping Strategies, Intellec­ tualdisability.

# INTRODUCTION

Lazarus and Folkman suggested the transactional nature of stress. Stress is a two way procedure; the surroundingsgenerate stress and the people findout solutionsto deal the stress. In cognitive appraisal a person considers two major factors that mostly play an important role in hisreaction to stress; stress' tendency to threaten the individual and the appraisal of resources required minimizing, tolerating or eradicating the stressit created.' Personal as well as situational factors impact coping strategies such as personal/social support and highselfesteemcan bringbetteradjustment at psychologicallevels.'"

There are two types of coping strategies, namely problem focused and emotion focused. The person triesto dealconstructively in problem focused strategieswherecognition and behavior, both efforts are used while in emotion focused strategies the person tries to deal with hisown fearsorinternal statesothat the psychologicaldistress isreduced.'

Stressis decreased by any strategy that aimsat solving the problem and defensive coping strategies always increase the stress'. In a study denial was used by 98.18% mothers of handicapped children, 96.36% used rehearsal of outcomes, 85.45% were looking for emotional support and50.91% were using information seeking to cope their stress.When mothers used problem focused coping, their children's behavior was observed to get improved andbehavioral disturbance of child reduced'.

A research was conducted on parents of mentally handicapped children and normal children to compare the stress experienced by parents and coping strategies. For this purpose 60 parents of school going children were selected as a research participant. Research showed that there wasasignificant difference in stresslevels andcoping among parents of handicapped and normal children. Parents of handicapped children showed more stress than normal children.Parents of normal children were much better in coping strategiesthan handicapped children'.

Sajjad found in his study that mothers of handicapped child experienced more stressand itsimpact on their daily life routine. In Pakistan mothers showed extreme stress because their handicapped child showed unsuitable behavior, could not afforded assessment/therapy services and had no social contact with their intellectual handicapped children.Mothers had a feeling of loneliness, anger, depression due to the stress that had a negative impact on their families. Mothers of handicapped children could not pay more attention to their normal children because their handicapped child required moretimeand attention from them'.

The basic aim ofour study is to findoutandcompare thelevel of stresslevel and difference of coping stylesused by fathers and mothersof the handicapped children.Moreover the study also aimsat creating awareness about the coping stylesthat are used in ourculture. Given the variety of demands of the environment of mentally handicapped children, parents need more information, knowledge, skills and attitudesto copesuccessfully with



the demands of these children. Additionally, results of this study wouldhelpto broaden the repertoire of effective coping strategies in relation to stressand expectations for the benefit of all concerned.

## SUBJECTS AND METHODS

#### Participants

A sample consisted of ninety research participants in which 45 were fathers and 45 were mothers (N=90).The participants were selected by purposive sampling technique from different government institutes of special education located in peoplecolony, Ameen town and Ghulam Muhammadabad in Faisalabad. The age range of the research participants was from 25 to 50 years. They were belonging to middle socioeconomic status.

**Instruments**

### *Brief Cope•*

To measure the Coping of Parents with Mentally Handicapped Children a scale of 28 items with 4-point Likert scale translated into Urdu was used.The Brief Cope consists of 14 subscales of two items each and their alpha coefficient ranges from.50 to .90. TheBrief COPE takes 10 to 15 minutes to complete. Scoring and profiling take about 5 minutes. A low score signifies a low level of coping anda highscore signifiesa highlevel of coping.

### *Parental Stress Scale'*

To measure Stress level of parents with mentally handicapped children, translated version of "Parental Stress Scale" was used. It has items with 5point likert type scale.This is relatively short and easy to administer in less than 10 minutes. A low score meant low level of stress, and high scores indicated high level of stress. Reliability was described as adequate, with a alpha coefficient of 0.83. Test-retest reliability was foundto be0.81

#### Procedure

After taking institutional permission and informed consent, Brief COPE and Parental Stress Scale were administered on 90 participants (45 mothers & 45 fathers) of mentally handicapped children. SPSS

version 19 wasused to analyze the data.

## RESULTS

The age range of the research participants was from 25 to 50 years. They were belonging to middle socioeconomic status. Independent sample t- test was used. Results indicated that fathers of mentally handicapped children experienced more stress as compared with mothers, t(88) = 9.041, p = 0.00 (see table 1). Results showed that there was a significant difference in use of coping styles between mothers and fathers of mentally handicapped children, t(88) = 2.263, p = 0.026 (see table 2). Results indicate that there was a significant difference in use of emotion focused coping between mothers and fathers of mentally handicapped children, t(88) = -2.741, p = 0.007 (see table 3). Results showed a significant difference in use of problem focused coping between mothers and fathers of mentally handicapped children,t(88) = 3.403, p=0.001 (see table4).

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##### Table I

Difference in stress level among the Parents of Mentally Handicapped Children

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Parents** | ***M*** | ***S.D*** | ***df*** |  | ***p*** |
| Father (n=45) | 63.51 | 7.25 | 88 | 9.041 | 0.00 |
| Mother (n=45) | 46.93 | 9.91 |

##### Table 2

Difference in coping styles among the Parents of Mentally Handicapped Children.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Parents** | ***M*** | ***S.D*** | ***df*** |  | ***p*** |
| Father (n=45) | 71.62 | 6.21 | 88 | 2.263 | .026 |
| Mother (n=45) | 67.75 | 9.62 |

##### Table 3

Emotion focused coping among the Parents of Mentally Handicapped Children

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Parents** | ***M*** | ***S.D*** | ***df*** |  | ***p*** |
| Father (n=45) | 24.13 | 4.178 | 88 | -2.741 | .007 |
| Mother (n 45) | 26.60 | 4.360 |

##### Table 4

Emotion focused coping among the Parents of Mentally Handicapped Children

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Parents** | ***M*** | ***S.D*** | ***df*** |  | ***p*** |
| Father (n=45) | 23.02 | 3.285 | 88 | 3.403 | .001 |
| Mother (n=45) | 20.51 | 3.702 |

## DISCUSSION

Family can be a beginning of great pleasure and as well as tension. Parenting of child is a highly stressful task, and parenting of mentally handicapped child is the most stressful life event that can happen. Theparents' reaction to thisstressdepends on individualabilities and factors related to family and environment". Handicapped children require supplementary items such as special clothing, tackle, communication devices, and bathroom aids. Although Handicapped children may have supplementary requirements, regardless of their disabilities they arechildren first".

It was clear from table 1 that on the Parental Stress Scale fathers of mentally handicapped children scored more as compared with mothers of mentally handicapped children. The fathers of mentally handicapped child might think mentally handicapped child as sources of financial burden. Government of Pakistan is unable to provide facilities which are necessary for handicapped children. Fathers of mentally handicapped children often need to be absent from the job on the account of treatment of these children. Hence resultant workload also buildsup and may increase stress.They need



to put great efforts to cope with the financial expenses that may be the source of stress we found out in fathers. The present findings are consistent with some other researchers as well. Gray (2003) found thathighlevel of stress was because fathers of mentally handicapped children wanted to see their children independent.It was shown that the fathers of mentally handicapped considered that they could sacrifice for their children through work hard to meet the extra demands of the family".

In the light of the current findings, mothers of handicapped children tended to focus on emotion focused coping in order to get a relief from the stress they faced.Mothershada tendency to findexpression for their feelings and had a wider variety of emotional expression, feeling sorrow and unhappiness in addition to irritation and crying. Mothers of mentally handicapped children get rid from emotional distress through talking to friends and family. Shin (2002) conduct a research to compared 38 American and 40 Korean mothers of mentally handicapped children and concluded that mother of mentally handicapped experience less level of stress in the presence of socialsupport".

Fathers were found using more problem focused coping in the current findings.Folkman and Moskowitz (2000) stated that problem focused coping can be defined as the thoughts and actions to solve the causes of grief". It is more commonly used at that time when personal control over the result ishigher.In order to takegoodcare of a mentally handicapped child, it is instrumental that someone provides support andautonomy to the childand helps him/her out in performing daily tasks". This trend of focusing on problems in order to copewas seen in fathers of handicapped children; it may be taken as an effort to *solve* the problems faced by the children. It can be assumed that the fathers took their mentally handicapped children as extension of their self and the tendency to adopt a problem focused coping style was a way of directly or indirectly focusing on the problems of their children.

## CONCLUSION

Difference in stress, problem focused coping and emotion focused coping were found among parents of mentally handicapped children. It was found that mothers of mentally handicapped children used more emotion focused coping as compared with the fathers of mentally handicapped children while fathers used more problem focused coping.

## LIMITATION AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

Although this research has provided some valuable results, so far a number of limitations were identified during the research and recommendations are made for improvement in the future researches.

1. The research wasrestricted to Schoolsofonly onecitytherefore, its result cannot be largely generalized.
2. Demographic variable may also be considered as confounding factorsin futurestudy.

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