

# LEVEL OF STRESS AND COPING STRATEGIES AMONG MOTHERS OF AUTISTIC CHILDREN AT SELECTED SETTING, IN A VIEW TO DEVELOP AN INFORMATIONAL BOOKLET

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## ABSTRACT:

**Background:** Stress is normal part of life and everyone experiences stress in different degrees depending on persons tolerance level, stress exists when environmental / internal demands exceeds the individual resources for managing them (Horloryd & Lazarus 1982). When raising a child with disabilities parents go through a significant changes in their life to accommodate and adapt the constant change accompanying the growth of child (woodman and harer 2013) Parenting is a tough role and having a child with autism can make it more difficult as the children have impairment in physio-psychosocial development ,Hence parents especially mothers find their roles very stressful resulting in social/economic/physical and physiological problems.

## Objectives:

- 1) To assess the level of stress and coping strategies among mothers of autistic children.
- 2) To determine the relationship between the level of stress and coping strategies among mothers of autistic children.
- 3) To develop an information booklet on coping with stress for mothers of autistic children.

## Design and Methods:

A quantitative descriptive research design was adopted and 100 sample was selected by purposive sampling technique. Data was collected by using demographic variables and standardised questionnaire like Parental stress scale and COPE inventory. The data was analysed by using descriptive and inferential statistics.

## Result:

The present study revealed that 59% of the mothers suffering from moderate stress, 41% are having severe stress. 54% are having Inadequate coping skills, 46% are having moderately adequate coping skills and there was a significant negative correlation was found between stress and coping skills where r value is -0.78.

## Conclusion:

The study concluded that the mothers are exposed to severe stress in rearing autistic child and they use poor coping strategies.

## Recommendation:

The researcher recommend that stress management and proper usage of coping skills training to be given to the Mothers .

**Keywords:** mothers of autistic children ,coping strategies, stress

## Introduction:

Johns Hopkins and psychiatrist Leo Kenner was the first to describe autism and in 1944 by Australian pediatrician Hans Asperger. Autism is one among the five pervasive developmental disorders (PDD) that are characterized by abnormalities of communication, social interactions, severely restricted interests and highly repetitive behaviour.

According to the World Health Organization, autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a group of complex brain development disorders that affect social interaction and speech, verbal and nonverbal communication, and repetitive or stereotyped behaviours, as well as a person's often limited range of interests and activities. A form of sensory sensitivity to various sensations, including touch, noises, taste, light, temperature, and pain, can occur in people with autism. For instance, many environmental background noises that infrequently disturb other people may make autistic people sound harsh and irritating while also making them experience anxiety and physical pain (WHO 2017).

By the age of 8, autism spectrum disorder (ASD) was diagnosed in 1 in 59 children nationwide in 2018. (CDC – Centre for disease control and prevention 2018). In the United States, autism spectrum disorder is regarded as the second most frequent developmental impairment (Newschaffer et al 2007). By the year 2015, it is predicted that there will be an increase of 10% to 17% in annual cases, reaching around 4 million people (Autism society of America 2010). Autism affects boys more frequently than girls (CDC). Mental retardation is thought to emerge in between 75% and 80% of people with autism as a co-morbid symptom (WHO 1993). Parents of autistic children have a 2%–18% probability of having another autistic kid.

As soon as the child is born, parents begin to have expectations and beliefs about parenting, which are then adjusted as a result of interactions with their growing child. Because autistic children frequently exhibit odd behaviour, parenting is disrupted and under a lot of stress.

A study reveals that stress and depression is negatively associated (www.brighthots.com). In a recent study mothers of children with autism reported more trouble in understanding their children behaviour than mothers of typically developing normal children. Accurate knowledge of autism may aid parents into their children difficult behavior. Depression and stress are two ailments parents experience in rearing a child with autism (Eric Hollander et al)

As opposed to other disorders including mental retardation, learning disabilities, and intellectual disabilities, research on autistic children has been conducted more frequently. Mothers play a major role in parenting a child, and if the child is autistic, she is piled up with severe stress. Therefore, the researcher aims to understand the level of stress faced by mothers and coping mechanisms used by her. Parenting a child with autism places a very high demand on the family, making it difficult to cope. In order to build a module on effective coping skills, the researcher will be able to draw conclusions about the types of coping techniques most mothers employ and where they need to be enhanced.

### Subjects and Methods:

#### Study Design:

A quantitative descriptive research design was conducted in three selected autistic centres ,tamilnadu from 04/02/2019 to 28/02/2019

#### Development and validation of questionnaire:

The standardised tool parental stress scale and cope inventory was used to gather data from the mothers of autistic children, and it consist of demographic variable of the mothers like Age of mother, Age of child, Sex of child,, Religion, Education, Occupation, Income, No. of Children, Availability of any support system, Type of Family.

Parental stress scale (Berry & Jones 1995), parental stress scale attempts to measure the level of stress experienced by parents. It is a 5 point scale which has 18 Items supports to describe a specific manifestation of stress.

Cope inventory Carver C.S. Modified Cope inventory is a 4 point scale 40 item questionnaire that ask you to indicate what you generally do and feel. When you experience stressful event.

The study was done for the specified period of 4 weeks, the period of data collection is from 4<sup>th</sup> February to 28th February 2019, the data collection was done in 3 autistic centres by getting official The 100 mothers who fulfilled the inclusion criteria were selected by purposive sampling. The purpose of the study was explained and the informed consent was obtained from the mother. Stress coping strategies was measured by the structured questionnaire and the researcher developed an information booklet and distributed to the centres.

#### Study Subject and data collection method:

The population selected for the study was mothers of autistic children who fulfils the inclusion criteria. The exclusion criteria includes the mothers who refused to participate in the study, Mothers with co morbid physical illness, Mothers already underwent training programme.

Parental stress scale and cope inventory was given to 5 samples per day totally 30 samples were assessed in Thai Rehabilitation Centre, from 04/02/2019 to 09/02/2019, another 30 samples were assessed in Smart Learning Centre, from 11/02/2019 to 16/02/2019 at last 40 samples were assessed in Shivesh Autism Centre from 18/02/2019 to 28/02/2019. The average time taken was 30 minutes per sample, a formal permission from the concerned authorities were obtained for conducting the study, confidentiality was ensured.

#### Data analysis:

The data was analysed by using descriptive and inferential statistics on the basis of objective sand hypothesis of the study. frequencies and percentage distributon of demographic variables on level of stress and coping strategies was assessed. Mean and standard deviation were also computed to assess the level of stress and coping strategies . Pearsons correlation was done to find the relationship of stress and coping strategies.

#### Socio demographic Variables:

Age-wise, 28% of the mothers were between 26 and 30 years old, and 25% were between 31 and 35. 6 (6%) of the moms were over 40 years old, 23% of the women were aged 36 to 40, 18% of the mothers were aged 20 to 25, and In terms of child majority age, 40% of children were between the ages of 5 and 7; 30% were between the ages of 8 and 10; 26% were between the ages of 2 and 4; and 4% were over the age of 10

In terms of gender, 53% of the children were girl and 47% were male. In terms of religion, the majority are Hindus (59%), Christians (22%), and Muslims (19%). In terms of mother's educational standing, 42% had completed higher secondary education, 38% had graduated, and 20% had just completed elementary school. Regarding the majority occupation, 26% were employed compared to 74% who were jobless. In terms of household income per month, the majority (56% of families) made over Rs. 15 000, 39% made between Rs. 10,000 and Rs. 15, and 5% made between Rs. 5,000 and Rs. 10,000. In terms of the most common number of children, 60% of moms had two children, 28% had one child, and 12% had three. 51% of moms live in joint families, the most common type of household.

**Table 1: Frequency and percentage distribution of demographic variables of stress and coping strategies**

N=100

Demographic Variables	f	%
<b>Age of Mother</b>		
20 – 25	18	18
26 – 30	28	28
31 – 35	25	25
36 - 40	23	23

Above 40	6	6
<b>Age of Child</b>		
2 – 4	26	26
5 – 7	40	40
8 – 10	30	30
Above 10	4	4
<b>Sex of child</b>		
Male	47	47
Female	53	53
<b>Religion</b>		
Hindu	59	59
Muslim	19	19
Christian	22	22

<b>Demographic variables</b>	<b>f</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Education</b>		
Primary education	20	20
Higher secondary education	42	42
Graduates	38	38
Illiterate	0	0
<b>Occupation</b>		
Employed	26	26
Unemployed	74	74
<b>Family monthly income</b>		
5000 – 10,000	05	05
10,001- 15,000	39	39
Above 15,000	56	56
<b>No of children</b>		
1 child	28	28
2 child	60	60
3 child	12	12
<b>Types of family</b>		
Nuclear family	49	49
Joint family	51	51
<b>Availability of support system</b>		
Relatives	50	50
Agencies	22	22
Social support	13	13
Others	15	15

**Table 2 Frequency and percentage distribution of level of stress among mothers of autistic children .  
N=100**

<b>S.no</b>	<b>Level of stress</b>	<b>f</b>	<b>%</b>
1	Moderate	59	59
2	Severe	41	41

The result shows that out of 100 samples about 59% of mothers with autistic children have suffering from moderate amount of stress that was assessed by parental stress scale and about 41% of mothers with autistic children has severe stress and it shows that none of them has mild level of stress.

**Table 3 Frequency and percentage distribution of level of coping among mothers of autistic children .  
N=100**

S.no	Level of coping	f	%
1	Inadequate	54	54
2	Moderately adequate	46	46

About 54% of mothers with autistic children had inadequate level of coping strategy ,which was assessed by cope inventory and about 46% had moderately adequate level of coping strategy among mothers with autistic children .

**Table 4: Correlation between level of stress and coping strategy among mothers of autistic children.**

**N=100**

S.no	Variables	Mean	Standard deviation	r- value
1	Stress	56.28	12.08	r = - 0.78
2	Coping	76.13	12.95	

The above table shows that there is negative correlation between stress and coping strategies

#### DISCUSSION:

This research study surveyed 100 sample of mothers with autistic children and revealed that 59% of mothers had moderate stress, 41% had severe stress , 54% of mothers had inadequate coping, 46% had moderate coping and none had adequate coping, the most commonly used coping were positive interpretation and growth focus on venting of emotions.

The data analysis revealed that the correlation coefficient ( $r = -0.78$ ) this shows there is a significant negative correlations between stress and coping strategies. This reveals that the mothers of autistic children are having high level of stress due to us of poor coping strategies. Hence the study revealed that there is a significant relationship between among mothers of autistic children.

The analysis revealed that there was statistically significant association of stress with socio demographic variable like education of mother  $\chi^2 = 8.20$  and occupation  $\chi^2 = 0.38$  at  $P < 0.05$  level the analysis revealed there was no significant association between stress with socio demographic variable like age of mother, age of child sex of child religion, income number of children, type of family, availability of support system.

The analysis revealed that there was a significant association of coping strategy among mothers of autistic children with socio demographic variables like education of mother  $\chi^2 = 14.96$  and sex of child  $\chi^2 = 4.677$  at  $P < 0.05$  .

A Meta-analysis of Studies Comparing the Experience of Parenting Stress in Parents of Children With and Without Autism Spectrum Disorder. Journal of Autism  
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#### Limitations:

This study was mainly a descriptive study design. Also, the study participants may present recall bias. The effectiveness of the informational booklets was not measured in this study

#### Conclusion:

The result of this study concluded the most of the mothers had severe level of stress (41%), 59% of mothers have moderate level of stress. On assessment of coping skill 54% have in adequate coping 46% have moderate coping. The study concluded that there was a negative correlation r value = -0.78 between level of stress and coping strategies.

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