

# Exploring the Relationship Between Marital Satisfaction and Parenting Stress among Parents of Mentally Challenged Children

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## ABSTRACT

Studying marital satisfaction is important for the parents of children with disabilities. Spousal support has proven itself an important contextual factor for overall parent well-being, predicting not only parenting stress but also anxiety and depressive symptoms and observed parenting behavior (White and Hastings, 2004). The present study examined the association between parenting stress and marital satisfaction of parents of mentally challenged children. The study was conducted on purposively selected 65 parents of mentally challenged children residing at Hubli Dharwad City of Karnataka. Parenting Stress Index-Short Form (PSI-SF) developed by Abidin (1995) and ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Scale developed by Flowers and Olson (1993) was used for the study. Results revealed that the majority (80 %) of parents had high marital satisfaction. The mean score of parenting stress was significantly higher among parents who had low marital satisfaction than parents who had high marital satisfaction.

**Keywords:** Parenting stress, Mentally challenged children, Marital satisfaction

## INTRODUCTION

Parenting stress is very important because of the link between negative parenting and its possible consequent effects on the child. Parenting stress can impair the quality of parent-child interactions as well as the quality of the parent-child relationship. It has also been associated with behavioural problems in young children (Anthony *et al.*, 2005; Crnic *et al.*, 2005). A model of determinants of parental stress suggests that individual characteristics of children and parents, marital relationships, parent-child relationships, environmental characteristics, and the interactions between these factors all play a role in the parent's experience of stress (Abidin, 1990; Crnic and Acevedo, 1995). Psychological and emotional well-being influences how mothers perceive all aspects of life, including relationships with children, marital relationships, social support networks, and work (Belsky, 1984).

Being a parent is one of life's most enjoyable and rewarding experiences, but we all have times when the

demands and problems of everyday life cause us stress. The added stress of caring for a child can make parents angry, anxious, or simply "stressed out." These tensions are an unavoidable and normal part of family life and parents need to learn how to manage them so that they are not overwhelmed.

Deater-Decker (2004) defined parenting stress as, "a set of processes that lead to aversive psychological and physiological reactions arising from attempts to adapt to the demands of parenthood. This is often experienced as negative feelings and beliefs toward and about the self and the child. By definition, these negative feelings arise directly from the parenting role,"

Marital satisfaction is conceptualized as a spouse's subjective appraisal of various aspects of marriage. Indicators include satisfaction with decision-making, marital communication, and shared values and beliefs (Bradbury *et al.*, 2000). Marital satisfaction is a state of mind that reflects the benefits and costs of marrying a particular person. The more expenses a spouse imposes on a person, the more likely they are to be dissatisfied

with their marriage and spouse. Similarly, the greater the perceived benefit, the greater the satisfaction with one's marriage and spouse.

Research on marital satisfaction is important for parents of children with disabilities. Spousal support has been shown to be an important contextual factor in parental overall well-being by predicting not only parental stress, but also anxiety and depressive symptoms, and observing parental behaviour (White and Hastings, 2004). Perceptions of spousal support may indirectly influence parental stress by influencing parental perceptions of children with disabilities. Cuskelly and Dadds (1992) found that marital satisfaction significantly predicts how mothers perceive their children, as mothers' marital satisfaction predicts their children's reported behaviour problems. Similarly, parents of children with disabilities consistently report higher PS and lower MS than parents of normally developing children (Deater-Deckard, 1998). Grayson *et al.* (1997) reported that there was no difference between the spina bifida and normal control groups regarding marital satisfaction. Havens (2005) noted that families of students with disabilities are more likely to experience divorce or separation than families with children without disabilities. Stress in families with children with disabilities is the most common factor leading to divorce and family breakdown. I point out that I can feel the effect as.

Hess (2008) examined the association between marital satisfaction (MS) and parental stress (PS). The Kansas Marriage Satisfaction Scale (KMSS) was used to measure marital satisfaction. At the same time, parental stress was measured using the Parent Stress Index-Short Form (PSI-SF). Twenty-seven traditional couples were recruited through her CCAMPIS fellowship at Utah State University. The minimum criteria were that at least one of hers in the couple must be eligible for the Pell Scholarship, be enrolled full-time at Utah State University, and have at least one child of hers. MS and PS have been found to be correlated in many ways, most notably in the areas of parental stress and parent-child interaction. Huth-Bocks and Hughes (2008) found that intimate partner violence was independent of parental stress, ineffective parenting, child behaviour, and childhood depression (a child outcome). Shtayamman (2013) investigated stress and marital satisfaction in parents of children diagnosed with autism. An online web survey was used to collect data from her 253 parents caring for a child diagnosed with ASD. 9 % of them were mothers. Both parents reported increased parental stress related

to caring for children on the spectrum. In addition, we found that parents' marital satisfaction was low. The existing literature in this area is sparse, and it is unclear whether lower marital satisfaction correlates with overall parenting demands or parenting stress (and *vice versa*). Therefore, in this study, we investigated the relationship between parenting stress and marital satisfaction in parents of children with intellectual disabilities.

## METHODOLOGY

The study group was parents of children with intellectual disabilities from Hubli Dharwad, Karnataka, India. The age group of children was 5-15 years old. In Hubli-Dharwad city, eight special schools provided special education programs for persons with mentally challenged. Of these, 50 percent of schools, *i.e.* Four schools selected for study. All parents with children aged 5 to her 15 years distributed the questionnaire. The final sample consisted of parents of 65 children with intellectual disabilities.

Parenting stress was measured using his Parenting Stress Index-Short Form (PSI-SF) developed by Abidin (1995). The PSI-SF is a self-report questionnaire for identifying potentially dysfunctional parent-child systems. The "Parental Stress" (Abidin, 1995) item is not intended to assess the stress parents experience in relation to other life roles or life events. PSI was originally used by reading parents in grades 5 and above. As described, there are three factors/subscales assessed by the PSI-SF.

i. Parental distress (PD) measures reduced parenting ability, lack of social support, role limitations, depression, and spousal conflict. Parental perceptions of one's own behaviour, including perceived competence, marital conflict, social support, and restrictions on life due to parental demands.

ii. Dysfunctional Parent-Child Interaction (PCDI) examines the child's failure to meet parental expectations and unenhanced interaction with the child.

iii. A difficult child (DC) uses traits in a child that make it easier or harder for parents to deal with.

This subscale indicates how parents perceive their child's disposition, disobedience, demands, and rebellion. The PSI-SF (Abidin, 1995) consists of his 36 items rated on a 5-point scale. Scores fixed from 'strongly agree' to a score of 1 on a scale of 5, with higher scores indicating greater stress. Each of the three subscales consists of 12 items, so the minimum and maximum scores for each subscale are 12-60. The PSI-SF total stress score is the

sum of three subscales ranging from 36 to 180.

Based on the total stress score the respondent's stress on parenting was classified as below:

Sr. No.	Parenting Stress categories	Range of Score
1.	Low level of stress	Scores < 55
2.	Normal level of stress	56-85
3.	High level of stress	86-90
4.	Clinically significant of stress	Scores>90

On pretesting the coefficient of reliability by using the split half method was found to be 0.93 which was significant. This questionnaire requires only 15 minutes for answering all the items.

Parents' marital satisfaction was assessed using the ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Scale (EMS) developed by Flowers and Olson (1993). The EMS scale is a 15-point scale consisting of ideal bias (5 points) and marital satisfaction (10 points). Each point of marital satisfaction represents one domain of the marital relationship. Personal issues, equal roles, communication, conflict resolution, financial management, leisure activities, sexual relationships, children and marriage, family and friends, religious orientation. The idealism bias scale is used as a correction for the tendency to overestimate marital satisfaction. This is a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree." There are both negative and positive opinions. If the statement is negative, the opposite scoring is performed. An individual's her EMS score is determined by lowering her marital satisfaction score based on her idealism bias score. The higher the idealistic score, the greater the tendency to describe the relationship in unrealistically positive terms, and the greater the modification of the marital satisfaction score. As shown below, the higher the EMS score, the greater the satisfaction. A higher score and a lower EMS score indicate lower marital satisfaction.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 shows the parenting stress of parents with children with intellectual disabilities. Results showed that 67.7% of parents experienced clinically significant parenting stress, followed by 24.60% of parents who experienced normal parenting stress, 4.6% of parents who experienced little stress, and 4.6% of parents who experienced little stress. 3.1% of fewer parents followed.

Table 2 shows the types of marital satisfaction of parents of mentally handicapped children. As can be seen

**Table 1 : Parental stress in parents of mentally challenged children**

Sr. No.	Category	Frequency	Percentage
1	Low stress	3	4.6
2	Normal	16	24.6
3	High stress	2	3.1
4	Clinically significant	44	67.7
	Total	65	100

from the Table 2, most parents were highly satisfied with their marriage. Her 80% of parents had high marital satisfaction and only 20% of parents had low marital satisfaction.

**Table 2 : Marital Satisfaction of parents of mentally challenged**

Sr. No.	Category	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Low marital satisfaction (16-32)	13	20.0
2.	High marital satisfaction (33-50)	52	80.0
	Total	65	100.0

Regarding marital satisfaction and child-rearing stress, the percentage of parents with low marital satisfaction was high, and the marital satisfaction was high. Similarly, the majority of parents with normal parenting stress (81.25%) reported high marital satisfaction and 18.75% low. A distribution was observed. The majority and clinically significant had high marital satisfaction (79.55%) and 20.45% had low marital satisfaction. We showed a non-significant association between satisfaction and parenting stress (Table 3).

**Table 3 : Association between Parenting stress and Marital Satisfaction of parents of mentally challenged children**

Parenting stress	Marital satisfaction			Modified $\chi^2$
	Low marital satisfaction	High marital satisfaction	Total	
Low	0	3(100.00)	3(100.00)	1.896
Normal	3(18.75)	13(81.25)	16(100.00)	
High	1(50.00)	1(50.00)	2(100.00)	
Clinically significant	9(20.45)	35(79.55)	44(100.00)	
Total	13(20.00)	52(80.00)	65(100.00)	

Table 4 shows that average parent stress was significantly higher for parents with low marital satisfaction than for parents with high marital satisfaction (99.07). Statistical analysis found it to be significant.

**Table 4 : Mean score of parenting stress by the level of marital satisfaction**

Category	Mean	SD	F-value
Low marital satisfaction	111.46	31.12	4.55*
High marital satisfaction	99.07	25.52	
Total	101.55	26.93	
S.Em	0.410		
CD	1.13		

Average parenting stress scores were higher for parents with low marital satisfaction than for parents with high marital satisfaction. This means that parents who were dissatisfied with their marital relationship were more stressed. The stress they are experiencing in their marital relationship spilled over to their children, which may have increased the stress on the parents. A mother's intimate relationship, especially with her spouse, is an aspect of stress that can be negatively affected. Single mothers are more likely to report higher levels of parenting stress because they do not have a partner to help with household chores (Avison *et al.*, 2007). Margolin *et al.* (2001) found that paternal co-parenting was associated with reduced maternal parenting stress. Another reason for higher parenting stress was mothers' perception of fathers' supportive co-parenting. This is an important indicator of the quality of a partner's parenting support. Cooperative parenting refers to the extent to which parents support each other's parenting efforts (Margolin *et al.*, 2001) and effectively cooperate in raising their children (Carlson *et al.*, 2008). Studies have shown that the quality of co-parenting relationships differs from the general relationship quality of couples (Schoppe-Sullivan *et al.*, 2023).

This work supports the concept of systems theory of structural coupling (Becvar and Becvar, 1999). Within each family, many subsystems operate within the context of the family. Marriage and parenting are examples of subsystems within the family system. The negative relationship between parental marital satisfaction and overall parenting stress suggests that higher parental marital satisfaction reduces parenting stress and vice versa. This supports existing literature suggesting that parental stress is correlated with reduced marital satisfaction (Webster Stratton, 1990). A negative correlation between maternal and paternal marital satisfaction and parenting stress suggests that maritally satisfied parents are less stressed about their parenting role, and that lower marital satisfaction is associated with

higher parenting stress. It shows that it is correlated with Her two systems of parenthood and marriage are counterparts that influence and support each other. This is also supported by Rogers and White (1998) who found that marital happiness was the strongest predictor of parenting satisfaction.

### Conclusion and Implication:

Most parents of children with intellectual disabilities experience clinically significant levels of parental stress. The majority of parents (80%) had high marital satisfaction. Average parental stress was significantly higher for parents with low marital satisfaction than for those with high marital satisfaction. Therefore, we can conclude that marital satisfaction had an indirect effect on parenting stress. It is necessary for parents to educate together and build strong family relationships. Therefore, social workers work with families to improve their communication and problem-solving skills, support families, and develop coping mechanisms that help maintain a positive attitude while building social connections and support networks must be developed.

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