



COMPARATIVE STUDY OF STRESS INVESTIGATION BETWEEN MOTHERS AND FATHERS OF AUTISTIC CHILDREN

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ABSTRACT

Parenting a child with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) often entails significant psychological, social, and emotional challenges. This study aimed to compare the stress levels of mothers and fathers of autistic children. A sample of 100 parents (50 mothers and 50 fathers) was assessed using the Stress Assessment Questionnaire (SAQ) developed by Dr. V. V. Varma. Results revealed that mothers reported significantly higher stress than fathers ($t = 4.59, p < .001$). These findings highlight the differential burden of caregiving between mothers and fathers, emphasizing the need for gender-sensitive interventions and support systems.

Keywords: autism, parental stress, mothers, fathers, stress assessment

1. INTRODUCTION

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a developmental condition characterized by persistent deficits in social communication and restricted, repetitive patterns of behaviour (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Raising a child with ASD poses unique challenges that can place considerable stress on parents (Hayes & Watson, 2013). Parental stress is a critical factor influencing not only the mental health of parents but also the overall family functioning and the developmental outcomes of children.

Mothers and fathers may experience these challenges differently. Research indicates that mothers often assume the primary caregiving role and report greater psychological strain compared to fathers (Hastings et al., 2005; Karst & Van Hecke, 2012). Stress levels are influenced by factors such as caregiving responsibilities, emotional attachment, and social support system.

The present study focuses on Indian parents, where traditional caregiving roles may further exacerbate stress differences between mothers and fathers. By using the Stress Assessment Questionnaire (SAQ) developed by Dr. V. V. Varma, the study investigates whether mothers of autistic children experience higher stress compared to fathers.

1.14 Objective

To compare stress levels between mothers and fathers of autistic children.

1.2 Hypothesis

Mothers of autistic children will experience significantly more stress compared to fathers of autistic children.

2. Methodology

2.1 Participants

The study sample consisted of 100 parents (50 mothers and 50 fathers) of children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder. Participants were selected using purposive sampling from special schools and therapy centres catering to children with ASD in India. All participants provided informed consent.

2.2 Tool

The Stress Assessment Questionnaire (SAQ) developed by Dr. V. V. Varma was used to measure parental stress. It consists of 40 statements rated on a 5-point Likert scale, where higher scores show greater stress levels. The tool has a reliability of 0.78, and its content validity has been established with clinical groups in India.

2.3 Procedure

Parents were individually administered the SAQ. Data were collected, scored, and statistically analysed using independent samples t-test to examine differences in stress between mothers and fathers.

3. RESULT

TABLE 1
MEAN, STANDARD DEVIATION, DEGREES OF FREEDOM, T-VALUE, AND SIGNIFICANCE LEVEL OF STRESS SCORES AMONG MOTHERS AND FATHERS OF AUTISTIC CHILDREN.

Spouse	N	Mean	SD	df	t-value	p-value
Mother	50	167	17.03	98	4.59	p < .001
Father	50	152	15.64			

The results indicate that mothers (M = 167, SD = 17.03) reported significantly higher stress compared to fathers (M = 152, SD = 15.64), with the difference being highly significant (t = 4.59, p < .001).

4. DISCUSSION

The findings confirm the hypothesis that mothers of autistic children experience greater stress compared to fathers. This outcome is consistent with earlier research (Dabrowska & Pisula, 2010; Hastings et al., 2005), which shows that mothers often bear the primary caregiving responsibilities, contributing to elevated stress levels.

Cultural expectations in India, where mothers are typically more engaged in direct caregiving and educational responsibilities, may explain this gender disparity. Fathers may experience stress in other domains, such as financial provision, but these may not manifest as strongly in the SAQ scores.

The results underscore the need for support programs tailored to the unique roles of mothers and fathers. Interventions such as parental counselling, stress management workshops, and community support groups can mitigate the caregiving burden.

5. CONCLUSION

This comparative study demonstrates that mothers of autistic children report significantly higher stress levels than fathers. The findings highlight the importance of developing gender-sensitive interventions to support parents in managing stress and improving family well-being.

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