

Parental Stress During COVID-19

Laltanpuii^{1,2}, VK Roy³, Lukima S.⁴

¹Phd in Nursing Scholar, Mizoram University

²Faculty of College of Nursing, RIPANS, Mizoram

³Associate Professor, Department of Zoology, Mizoram University

⁴Lecturer, Regional Nursing College, Guwahati, Assam

Corresponding Author: Laltanpuii

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ABSTRACT

Background: Parents experience everyday stressors related to their role as parents. Parenting during the COVID-19 epidemic is challenging since parents must fulfil a variety of responsibilities.

Objectives: The primary objective of this study is to assess parents' stress levels and the coping mechanisms they use.

Method: A Cross-sectional survey was done among 215 parents of private primary school pupils in the area of Aizawl Municipal Corporation from March 11 to April 6, 2022. By employing the Parental Stress Scale by Berry and Jones in 1995 and the Brief COPE scale by Carver, C.S., in 1997, an online survey was used to assess the parents' stress levels and determine their coping mechanisms.

Result: According to the study's findings, the average parental stress level is 41.30. Mothers (41.82) were found to be more stressed than fathers (39.78). The stress level of working parents was found to be greater (M = 41.54) than that of unemployed parents (M = 40.87). Parents who have divorced experience more stress (M = 46) than parents who are single, widowed, or married (M = 43.71, M = 41, or M = 40.87, respectively). Acceptance, positive reframing, religion, active coping, planning, use of emotional support, and use of instrumental support were the coping mechanisms that the parents most frequently employed.

Conclusion: The findings highlight the need to enhance the mental well-being of caregivers who are vulnerable to parenting stress during a time of crisis.

Keywords: Coping strategy, Covid-19, Parenting, Stress

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 suppressive measures have had an impact on children's and parents' health and well-being around the world. Parental roles underwent a significant transformation as a result of measures taken to protect individuals from the COVID-19 epidemic.

Covid-19 contributes the fear, uncertainty, and stress in parents. Parents are having difficulties because of the closing of schools, financial status and uncertain situation. ^[1] It is a significant source of stress for many parents and children. ^[2] Many parents believed that COVID-19's

effects would result in more stress for them as parents and would impair their relationships with their children, increasing the possibility of using harsh discipline. ^[3]

Parental stress is defined as an adverse psychological reaction to an experienced imbalance between the emotional and practical requirements of parenting and the family resources accessible to meet them. ^[4]

Parents frequently experience stress related to parenting. It manifests when parental demands surpass the anticipated and real resources that are available to them. ^[5] Even in ordinary circumstances, many parents experience pressures associated with their

parental responsibilities. [6] Due to the difficulties caused by the closing of schools, parents of school-aged children now have more time demands and are burdened with childcare. [7] These are stressful for parents as they have to balance personal life, work, and raising children. [8] A survey by BIC Cello in India shows that 80% of parents feel that they are spending more time with their children on educational activities. [9] Parental stress is increased by challenging life situations. [10] Stress related to parenting has an adverse effect on parenting and the quality of the parent-child relationship. [11] It is important to pay special attention to the mental well-being of parents. It is a significant topic that must be focused on to ensure children's healthy development and the lifetime physical and mental health of parents and children. [12]

Coping strategies are developed to identify ways to reduce stress. Individuals adopt different coping styles to cope with the stressful situation. Unexpected stressful situations such as the pandemic may cause a particular load on the parents coping resources. [13]

Many parents can deploy successful coping strategies that mitigate the deleterious effects of parenting stress on care giving. Parents' skills and capacities for regulating their thoughts and emotions are crucial to their parenting stress levels and coping strategies when dealing with stressors. [14]

Taking into consideration, the investigators were interested and felt the need to determine parental stress among parents and coping strategies used to manage stress.

Problem Statement

“Parental Stress during Covid-19.”

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are:

1. To determine parental stress among parents.
2. To compare the parental stress across their role as a parent.

3. To identify the coping style adopted by the parent

MATERIALS & METHODS

The research approach adopted for the study was cross-sectional study, it was conducted in selected private schools of Aizawl Municipal Corporation area among parents who have school-age children of primary section in a selected private schools in the area of Aizawl. The distribution and filling of the questionnaire were conducted from 11th March 2022 to 6th April 2022, during the third wave of Covid-19 in Mizoram. The study comprised of 215 parents who have fulfilled the inclusion criteria drawn by convenient sampling technique. The online questionnaire developed on Google Forms was administered through social media to be filled in by the parent. The three-part questionnaire sought data on basic socio demographic factors, such as age, parental role, education level, occupation, marital status, the parental stress level and the coping strategy of the parent. Parental stress scale (Berry & Jones, 1995) was used to measure stress level of parents. [15] It consists of eighteen items about their relationship with their child, wherein ten items address negative and stressful aspects of parenting and eight address parental rewards and each item is rated on a 5-point likert scale ranging from (1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=undecided, 4=agree, and 5=strongly agree). Overall possible scores on the scale range from 18 – 90. The higher the score, the higher the measured level of Parental stress. For the purpose of analysis, any parent reporting a score of 33-49 (which was $\pm 1SD$ of median) was considered to have moderate parental stress and those reporting below 33 was considered to have low parenting stress and those reporting more than 49 were considered to have high parenting stress. Brief COPE scale [16] was used to assess coping strategies consists of 28 items, and each item is rated on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from “I have not been doing this at all (score 1)” to “I have been doing this a lot

(score 4)". The higher score indicates greater coping by the respondents. The Institutional Human Ethics Committee reviewed and approved this study. Participants have given written consent before participating in the study.

Sampling technique: Aizawl Municipal Corporation (AMC) is divided into 19 wards. 2 wards were randomly selected and 2 local council areas were randomly selected from two wards. All 7 private schools from 4 local council areas were included in this study. Considering the objectives of the study and consultation with statistician and experts, it was decided to allot samples based on the total number of primary students in the schools, using the proportionate allocation method. The total number of students in 7 schools is 1082 and estimated sample proportion is 12% from each school. The sample size was calculated using Raosoft sample size calculator providing a confidence level of 95% and a margin of error of 6% and it was estimated to be 215.

Null Hypothesis

H0 There is no significant difference in the stress level between the father and mother.

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

The data entry was done in Microsoft offices excel and IBM SPSS Statistics Version 20 was used to analyze the data. Mean and standard deviation were used to generate a descriptive analysis for continuous data, and frequencies and percentages were used for categorical data. The independent "t" test was applied to investigate the differences in the stress level of parents across their role as a parent.

RESULT

In the present study, majority of the parents are in the age group of 31-40 years (46%) and 41-50 years (43%). 76% of the participants are mothers and 26% of the participants are fathers. 68% of the parents have graduate or above graduate education and 64% of the parents are employed. The majority (86%) of the parents are currently married and all of the parents (100%) belong to Christianity. 51% of the parents have one child who is in the primary section. (Table1)

Table 1: Basic socio-demographic characteristics N=215

Sl no	Characteristics	f	Percentage
1	Age of the parent:		
	21-30	19	9
	31-40	99	46
	41-50	93	43
	51-60	4	2
2	Role of the parent:		
	Father	55	26
	Mother	160	74
3	Education of the parent:		
	Primary	10	5
	Middle	6	3
	Secondary	17	8
	Higher secondary	35	16
	Graduate & above	147	68
4	Occupation of the parent:		
	Employed	137	64
	Unemployed	78	36
5	Marital status:		
	Married	185	86
	Divorced	10	5
	Single parent	14	7
	Widowed	6	3
6	Number of children (school aged- primary level):		
	1	109	51
	2	66	31
	3	32	15
	4	8	4

Table 2 shows the mean level of parental stress for all the samples is 41.30. Youngest parents who are in the age group of 21-30 reported higher parental stress. Mothers were found to have higher stress (M=41.82, SD=8.11) than the stress level of fathers (M=39.78, SD=8.24). The stress level among employed parents was found to be higher (M=41.54, SD=8.52) than the stress

level of unemployed parents (M=40.87, SD=7.58). Married parents have reported experiencing lower stress levels than parents who were divorcees, single parents, and widowed parents. Parents having 1 child have higher parental stress levels (M=41.76, SD=7.99) than parents who have more than one child.

Table 2: Level of parental stress across subgroup N=215

Sl No	Characteristics	M(SD)
1	Total sample	41.30(8.18)
2	Father	39.78 (8.24)
	Mother	41.82(8.11)
3	Age of the parent: 21-30	44.58 (9.82)
	31-40	41.66(8.43)
	41-50	40.26(7.47)
	51-60	41 (7.12)
4	Education of the parent: Primary	41.10 (7.77)
	Middle	39.67(7.00)
	Secondary	42.65(4.92)
	Higher secondary	42.71(9.40)
	Graduate & above	40.88(8.27)
5	Occupation of the parent: Employed	41.54(8.52)
	Unemployed	40.87(7.58)
6	Marital status Married	40.87(8.04)
	Divorced	46 (10.71)
	Single parent	43.71(8.28)
	Widowed	41(5.40)
7	Number of children (school aged-primary level) 1	41.76(7.99)
	2	40.65(8.34)
	3	41.69(8.53)

Table 3: Comparison of the level of parental stress according their role as a parent

Sl no	Characteristics	Parenting stress		
		Low scores <33	Moderate scores 33-49	High scores >49
1.	Total Participants	46 (21.39%)	136(63.25%)	33(15.34%)
2	Father	25(45.45%)	23(41.8%)	7(12.7%)
	Mother	21(13%)	113(70.62%)	26(16.77%)

Data in Table 3 shows the comparison of the level of parental stress according their role as a parent. The present study found that among mothers, 16.77 % experienced high

stress (score >49) while 13% had low level of stress (score<33). Among fathers, high stress was seen in 12.7% and 45.45% of father reported low stress level.

Table 4: Mean, standard deviation and independent 't' test on parental stress among parents across their gender.

Variable	Mean	Standard deviation	Standard Error of Difference	't' value	Level of significance
Mother	41.82	8.11			
Father	39.78	8.24	1.28	1.59	NS

Data presented in table 4 shows mean and standard deviation of father and mother. The mean stress score of mothers (41.82) is higher than the mean stress of father

(39.78). The calculated value of 't' is lower than the critical value of 't' at the required level of significance. Hence the null hypothesis is accepted.

Table 5: Coping style scores (Brief Cope-28) adopted by parents N=215

Sl No	Brief COPE coping style	Mean+ SD
1	Acceptance	5.91+1.57
2	Religion	5.90+1.56
3	Positive reframing	5.82+1.58
4	Active coping	5.73+1.49
5	Planning	5.61+1.55
6	Use of emotional support	4.91+1.64
7	Use of instrumental support	4.72+1.57
8	Self-distraction	4.49+1.51
9	Venting	4.15+1.48
10	Self-blame	4.13+1.55
11	Humor	4.05+1.64
12	Behavioral disengagement	3.27+1.44
13	Denial	3.32+1.49
14	Substance use	2.61+1.18

Data in Table 5 shows the coping styles adopted by the parent. Of the coping styles studied, the most frequently used strategies of the present findings were acceptance (72.09%), positive reframing (69.76%), religion (69.76%), active coping (68.62%), planning (64.65%), use of emotional support (48.37%) and use of instrumental support (43.72%) using the particular coping style on a moderate (“I do this most of the time”) to frequent (“I do this all the time”) basis. Self-distraction (36.27%), humor (30.23%), self-blame (30.23%), venting (27.91%), denial (18.60%), behavioral disengagement (18.13%), and drug use (9.30%) were the other 7 coping mechanisms that were utilized less frequently. (See Table 5)

DISCUSSION

Our findings reported younger parent’s age group (21-30) reported higher stress as stress tends to decrease with age and that younger people seem to be more influenced by stressors than older people which is consistent with recent research that has reported that young age has more parental stress level in compare with higher age group.^[17]

The present study found that among mothers, 16.77 % experienced high stress (score >49) while 13% had low level of stress (score<33). Among fathers, high stress was seen in 12.7% and 45.45% of father reported low stress level. Mothers are more vulnerable to stress in life situations which might increase levels of parenting stress. This call for particular psychosocial

attention to be paid to mothers and parents must play an equally active role in the parenting process. The consistent findings in recent studies are that mother reported significant high stress level than their male counterpart.^[18]

The present study found parents who are currently married (M=40.87) have experience low parental stress than those who were divorcee (M=46), single parent (M=43.71) and widowed (M=41) which may indicate the influence of emotional support from a partner during life crisis period where married parents reported experiencing lower stress levels than parents who were divorcees, single parents, and unmarried parents. Similar findings were seen in a study married have reported lower levels of stress than single individuals.^[19]

The present study reported higher stress level among working parent (M=41.54) compared to non working parent (M=40.87). The findings was in line with the study conducted by Rajgariah R, 2021 on parenting stress among working and non working mothers concluded that both working and non-working mothers experienced parental stress but higher proportion of working mothers experienced parenting stress compared to non-working mothers and mothers often experience more stress than fathers when attempting to balance employment and domestic activities.^[20]

The present study identified the frequency of different coping styles adopted by the participants and found acceptance (72.09%) as the most common coping behavior, with

a significant proportion of the participants finding comfort and relief in religious practice (69.76%). Substance use (9.30%) as a coping mechanism was minimal among the participants.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study led to a conclusion that the various levels of parenting stress exist among the participants. Majority of the participants experiencing a moderate level of parental stress during the pandemic, though both fathers and mothers experienced parental stress but mothers reported higher levels of parental stress compared to fathers, which may be a result of unequal household and childcare obligations that exacerbate stress and the vulnerability of women in crisis situations.

As the majority of the participants have moderate parental stress levels, they tried to manage their stress and resorted to active coping strategies (acceptance, positive reframing, religious coping, active coping, and planning) more than avoidant strategies (denial, self-blame, and alcohol or substance use) which indicate the coping strategy adopted by the parents was effective in stress management.

Among mothers, the most commonly used strategy is religious coping which is followed by acceptance, and substance consumption was used as the least coping strategy. The most frequently used strategy among fathers is active coping which is followed by acceptance and denial was the least coping strategy.

It is necessary to give support to vulnerable young parents and extensive look into the stressors of the parents which may decline quality of parenting and may result in variety of negative outcome in their children.

Declaration by Authors

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