

PARENTING STRESS AMONG PARENTS OF TEENAGERS AND EFFECT OF MODERATION

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ABSTRACT

Background: Adolescence is a transition period mainly known for substantial biological, psychological and social changes; this is also a time of eruption of major controversies and conflicts in interpersonal relations due to that considerable stress and ambivalence emerges. This stress is often experienced as a negative force that causes disturbances and tension in parent-child relationships. There are various factors which contribute to this parenting stress like disturbed routine, financial issues, study and career issues, conflicting ideologies and excessive use of phone and internet.

Aim: The study aimed to assess the level of Parenting Stress among Parents of Teenagers and to reduce that stress through moderation.

Methods: The study was conducted on 200 parents (100 couples) of ninth and tenth class students from two schools of Gorakhpur city of UP, India selected through a random sampling method. The major objectives were to assess the prevalence of parenting stress among parents of teenagers, to compare the parenting stress among mothers and fathers of teenagers, to find out major stress-causing issues in parents of teenagers, and to conduct some workshops for parents to reduce parenting stress. The tools used for data collection were (1) perceived stress of parenting teens, a self-constructed scale to assess the stress level of parents, (2) workshops designed and conducted to reduce parenting stress and (3) feedback form to ensure the effectiveness of workshops.

Results: The results showed that the majority of parents showed high to moderate levels of parenting stress. The findings of the present study also revealed that mothers and fathers in high levels of stress reflect significantly different parenting stress. It had been observed that for the majority, parents' routine disturbances, financial stress, excessive use of phone, ideological differences, study, career, and conflicting values were among the major stress-causing issues.

Conclusion: The study was found to be useful to understand the etiology of stress in parents of teenagers and effective for reducing their stress by improving parenting skills and facilitating healthy parent-teenager relationships.

Keywords: parenting stress, stress areas, teenagers

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INTRODUCTION

Adolescence, a phase of life universally acknowledged for apparently remarkable changes. Significant neurodevelopmental changes along with underlying endocrine changes are taking place in this phase that are responsible for increasing height, muscle mass, body proportion and development of sexual characteristics.

Simultaneous to these changes psychosocial and emotional changes are also recorded with increasing cognitive and intellectual capabilities that improve the logical, abstract and moral thinking of adolescents and catalyse their need of independence and assertiveness. Teenagers increasingly demand more autonomy over their decisions, emotions and actions to disengage from

parental control and also to influence the socio-cultural environment with conscious efforts.

Divergence of views of parents and adolescents are higher than in previous periods. Supportive empirical evidence acclaim that adolescence is a period of major controversies and conflicts in interpersonal relations due to that considerable stress and ambivalence emerges. This stress is often experienced as a negative force that causes disturbances and distension in parent child relationships. This stress is on the both ends of relationships, on the end of parents it is termed as parenting stress. Parenting stress is conceptually distinct from other forms of stress that a parent might experience such as financial hardship, work stress or negative life events. Though stress associated with the parental role and other life stressors are frequently related. Negative feelings associated with parenting are directly attributable to the demands of parenthood (Deater-Deckard, 1998)[1].

In principal parenting stress is not experienced only because of child rearing, but also due to the social and environmental circumstances, responsibilities, and everyday life. The term “parental stress” signifies that there is a greater context for the stress parents experience (Belsky, 1984)[2] demonstrate various factors which contribute to this stress may be financial burden of parents, marital discords, career issues, time perspective and health issues. Characteristics of adolescents that may contribute are expanded logical reasoning, changed views, unrealistic expectations and rebellious values. Greater demands of independence and identity attainment are also the significant contributors behind controversies with parents.

Many parents dread the onset of adolescence that their child will become hostile and rebellious and begin to defy family. The diminished emotional closeness and increased demand for privacy and autonomy are also the matters of parental stress. Adolescents are torn by conflicting feelings, on the one hand they are eager to be free and on the other expect someone behind for support and taking care of them. Teenagers are attracted to signs of adulthood such as freedom to go out, explore and experiment with the larger world. Although they want to make decisions on their own, they need someone to bear the erroneous consequences of their decisions.

Psychologists single out the following causes of parent adolescent conflicts:

- Instability of parental attitude
- Over care and excessive guardianship
- Disrespect of independence rights
- Conflict over authority

Common reactions of adolescents to above situations

- Reaction of opposition
- Reaction of refusal
- Reaction of isolation

Parents of adolescents become excessively cautious of their parenting because they know the critical nature of the stage, as it is a period of personality and identity formation. The process of identification taking place in this stage and parents play a very crucial role in that right strategies and practices adopted by them result into the strong personality development in teenagers.

Research reviews pertaining to the area specify that parenting stress is caused by various child and parent characteristics and circumstances which determine the overall level of pressure parents might experience in the parenting role. Stephen A. Small et al, (1988)[3] conducted a study to assess adolescent autonomy and parental stress and revealed that parents of early adolescents reported significantly more stress than parents of preadolescents or middle adolescents. Parents of first-born children reported significantly more stress than did more experienced parents. Researchers consistently demonstrate a strong association between parenting stress and multiple parent, child, and family outcomes, including parental mental health and well being (e.g. Farmer & Lee 2011)[4], child emotional and behavioural issues (e.g. Anastopoulos, Guevremont, Shelton & Du Paul, 1992)[5], parenting behaviours (e.g. Putnick et al 2008)[6], and family functioning (e.g. Deater-Deckard & Scarr, 1996)[7]. The accumulation of stressors can lead to greater difficulties for parents and children (Appleyard, Egeland, VanDulmen, & Sroufe, 2005)[8]

Morales and Guerra (2006)[9] discovered that cumulative stress over time was related to decreased academic achievement and increased symptoms of depression among children. Similar effects have been found for adults — cumulative stress is related to increased instances of mental disorders in adults (Sameroff, 2000)[10]. Researchers also have examined how financial stress and parenting intersect for families with

adolescents (Hardaway & Cornelius, 2014[11], Ponnet, Leeuwen, & Wouters, 2014[12]; Ponnet et al., 2013)[13]. Economic hardship can increase maternal psychological distress, which can negatively affect parenting of adolescents through actions such as attempts to exert more control over the adolescent's behavior (Hardaway & Cornelius, 2014). Less optimal parenting methods, such as harsh or arbitrary discipline, are associated with an increase in problem behaviors like drinking in adolescents (Ponnet, Leeuwen, & Wouters, 2014; Ponnet et al., 2013). Herein starts a cycle: Financial strain can lead to less optimal parenting practices, which are associated with an increase in child problem behaviors (Ponnet, Leeuwen, & Wouters, 2014; Ponnet et al., 2013), which in turn increase the parent's experiences of stress.

The major objectives of this investigation were:

- to assess the prevalence of parenting stress among parents of teenagers
- to compare the parenting stress among mothers and fathers of teenagers
- to find out major stress causing issues in parents of teenagers
- to conduct some workshops for parents to reduce parenting stress.
- to compare the level of stress after implementation of workshops.

METHODS

Sample size and Sampling technique:

A sample of 200 parents (100 couples) of students of two schools of Bareilly city of UP, India, was selected through a random sampling method. For the purpose, the permission of school authorities was taken and lists of students of 9th and 10th classes were collected, out of that 100 students were selected randomly and their parents were contacted telephonically to seek their consent to be the part of study.

PROCEDURE

Purpose of the study was explained and assurance of confidentiality was given. Finally study had

been carried out in the following steps :

1. The research tool was sent to parents with necessary instructions to clear their doubts and filled tools were collected with the help of students
2. The workshops were planned and reviewed.
3. A group of 30 parents (18 mothers and 12 fathers) having high stress was selected to conduct the workshops.
4. After the conduction of workshops the feedback was obtained and the "perceived stress of parenting teens" scale was readministered to this group to evaluate post test effects.

MEASURES

1. "Perceived stress of parenting teens" a self constructed scale.
2. Workshops to reduce parenting stress.
3. Feedback form to ensure the effectiveness of workshops.
1. "Perceived stress of parenting teens" scale was specifically developed on wide literature and reviews, contains a total 45 items, covering various areas causing stress for parents. Scoring of these items was done through a 3 point scale. Lower to higher score ranges can be from 45 to 135, low scores were indicative of low stress and high scores were showing high stress. Face validity of the scale was ensured with the help of experts.
2. Workshops: Total four workshops were planned and conducted with the aims of improving parenting skills and attitudes and reducing parental stress and anxieties. Highlighting features of workshops were-
 - knowledge building
 - improving parenting skills
 - focused problem solving abilities
 - stress reduction strategies
 - enhancing emotional stability and mental harmony

Keeping in mind these features workshops were planned. Brief outline is illustrated below

Workshops	Brief description
Workshop I	Know your teens, distribution of fact sheets, quiz and group discussion on challenges faced by parents.
Workshop II	Discussion on conflicts between parents and teenagers, suggestions and presentation, activity on drawings of relationships.
Workshop	Presentation on aetiology of stress and conflicts, group discussion on stress

III	causing issues, suggestions by experts ,relaxation activities.
Workshop IV	Presentation on stress reducing strategies, talk on ways of boosting relationships, story completion activity, role play.

These were one day workshops of 5-6 hours of duration, conducted over a period of almost one month with the help of experts along with the researcher.

3.Feedback forms: The following were the criteria of feedback forms-

- knowledge enhancement
- facilitate problem solving abilities

- improve stress management abilities
- improve parenting skills
- improve emotional stability and control
- improve relations with their teenagers
- overcome stress and anxieties.

RESULTS

Table-1: Prevalence of parenting stress among parents of teenagers

Levels of stress	Range of scores	% of parents
Low	45-75	23
Moderate	76-105	47
High	106-135	30

As evident from the table 30% of the parents were having high levels of stress and majority 47% were in moderate levels of stress and 23% were in

low levels of stress. These figures indicate that the majority of parents were experiencing moderate to high levels of parenting stress.

Table-2 : Parenting stress among fathers and mothers of teenagers

Levels of stress	Range of scores	% of parents	
		Fathers	Mothers
Low	45-75	22	25
Moderate	76-105	51	42
High	106-135	27	33

Comparative percentages of fathers and mothers have been depicted in the above table. Data indicated that 22% fathers and 25% mothers were in low parenting stress, while 51% fathers and

42% mothers were in moderate stress and 27% fathers and 33% mothers were in high parenting stress levels.

Table-3 : Comparison of mothers and fathers on different levels of parenting stress.

Low level of stress

Groups	N	Mean	S D	't'Value	p-value	Remark
Father	22	55.90	6.41	1.63	109	Non Significant
Mother	25	55.80	10.46			

Moderate level of stress

Groups	N	Mean	S D	't'Value	p-value	Remark
Father	51	91.62	8.67	2.06	042	Non Significant
Mother	42	87.92	8.53			

High level of stress

Groups	N	Mean	S D	't'Value	p-value	Remark
Father	27	121	9.17	3.47	001	Significant
Mother	33	114	6.52			

As reflected in the above table differences in t values between the scores of mothers and fathers in low and moderate levels of stress were found to be insignificant. Whereas the difference oft value

was found significant in high levels of stress. Therefore it can be inferred that stress of fathers and mothers was different in high levels of parenting stress.

Table- 4: Percentage distribution of parents falling in different levels on major stress areas

Stress areas	Percentage distribution of respondents lying in different levels		
	High	Moderate	Low
Study and career related issues	61	15	14
Behavioural and ethical issues	40	35	25
Financial stress	70	26	4
Friendship influences	38	32	30
Cleaning, dressing issues	32	48	20
Disturbance in routine (sleep/ health/ food habits)	73	18	9
Communication issues	45	20	35
Ideological differences (conflict/values)	69	11	20
Excessive use of net and phone	70	14	16

As the above table depicted, high stress causing areas among more than 60% of parents were disturbed routine, financial issues, study and career issues, conflicting ideologies and excessive use of phone and internet. For 40-45%

parents behavioural, ethical and communication issues were the major stressors. Whereas 30-40% parents reported friendship, cleaning and dressing issues highly stress causing.

Table 5: Feedback responses of parents (Percentage distribution of parents response on 3 points (N=30)

1 - not helpful, 2- somehow helpful, 3- very helpful

Feedback criteria	1	2	3
enhance knowledge	-	5%	95%
facilitate problem solving abilities	-	12%	88%
improve stress management abilities	-	21%	79%
improve parenting skills	-	16%	84%
improve emotional stability and control	-	27%	73%
improved relationships with teenagers	-	22%	78%
overcome stress and anxieties	-	28%	72%

Feedback responses of parents depicted in the above table reflect that most of the parents found workshops highly helpful and effective. Almost all of them admitted that these kinds of workshops will be helpful to enhance knowledge of developmental issues, develop problem solving

approach, facilitate stress management, boost parenting skills and improve emotional harmony and will help to reduce and manage stress of parenting and contribute to the improvement in relationships with teenagers.

Table - 6: Comparison of pretest and post test scores of experimental group on parenting stress (N=30)

Groups	N	Mean	S D	t'Value	p-value	Remark
pre test	30	120.20	8.65	5.354	0.00*	significant
post test	30	105.50	8.80			

Pre and post test t values mentioned in the above table were significantly different. Mean score of pretest condition was 120.20, which was changed to 105.50 in post test condition that indicates the lowering down of stress, that again strengthened the feasibility and affectivity of workshop sessions.

DISCUSSION

The following conclusions can be drawn on the basis of findings of this research ; about 77% of parents showed high to moderate levels of parenting stress only 23% showed low levels of stress. It has been observed that mothers and fathers reflect significantly different parenting stress in high levels. As the findings of the study

suggest more than 60% of parents found routine disturbances, study and career issues, financial burden, and conflicting values were among the major stress causing issues. Feedback of parents on workshops conducted and significant differences in pre and post test conditions, showing reduction of stress also highlights the feasibility and utility of such programs to deal with stress causing issues and also to ease the parent adolescent relationships.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

None declared

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