



A Study of Stress Perceived by the Parents of Mentally Challenged Children from Low and Middle Social Class

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ABSTRACT The present paper assessed and compared the type and level of perceived stress by the parents of 150 mentally challenged children across their social class. Sample was drawn randomly in equal proportions from mild, moderate and severe categories of mental challenge. The levels of parental stress were assessed by using Family Interview for Stress and Coping in Mental Retardation (Section-I). The findings of the present paper revealed that LIG parents of both genders were more stressed than those from MIG on marital issues, other interpersonal issues and financial implications. Both mothers and fathers of LIG and MIG made extra efforts for the care of their child; their leisure time and activity get equally affected and perceived equal stress because other family members are being neglected; had continuous vigilant on the disturbed behavior of the child; had equal family worries, social life altered equally as well as perceived same level of social embarrassment.

INTRODUCTION

Birth of a new child in a family is a time for celebration and joy. Parents have so many dreams and aspirations for their newly born child but eventually if the child is born with mental retardation/challenge, then it can be a traumatic and shattering event for a family. Mental retardation/challenge is a complex clinical condition in which people have intelligence below normal that limits their ability to function normally. Children with mental retardation/challenge may have problems with communication, taking care of themselves, daily living social skills, community interactions, directing themselves, health, safety and work. According to the definition in the American Psychiatric Association's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual* (DSM-IV), a mentally retarded person is significantly limited in at least two of the following areas: self-care, communication, home living, social/interpersonal skills, self-direction, use of community resources, functional academic skills, work, leisure, health, and safety. Mental retardation/challenge varies in

severity. The DSM-IV-TR classified four different degrees of mental retardation: mild, moderate, severe and profound. These categories are based on the person's level of functioning and IQ Scores. Children with an IQ score below 70–75 because of impaired general intelligence, often have difficulties in coping with some life situations which require adjustments and are called "mentally retarded/challenged".

Chronic conditions of disability, both medical and emotional, make extra demands on parents, resulting in stress (Tew and Laurence 1975; Breslau et al. 1982; Miller et al. 1992). There is perhaps no event more devastating to a family than a child born with a birth defect and in a family, parents are seen as the main or primary caregivers of their children. They have major influence on the way and things every child learns while growing up. Children imitate by observing what their parents do in day to daily life (Papalia and Olds 1992). And no doubt parenting of a child with mental retardation is not an easy job, as the presence of mentally retarded child in the family leads to greater burden on the family (Peshawaria et al. 1995). Presence of a mentally challenged child shakes the foundation of the whole family. The birth of a child with disability is often an unexpected event that requires considerable adjustment by the family. Family members of children with mental challenge are often perceived to experience harmful psychological effects especially parents,

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they are found with unstable emotionality, constant grief, psychological ill health and unsatisfactory social health. As the child grows, the physical demands placed on parents may increase. The time and physical energy required for positioning, toileting, bathing, eating and dressing may place an additional burden on parents and other family members. Parents face many problems related to social, marital, and psychological problems.

The intensity of problems or stress faced by the parents may vary as per the economic strata of a family. According to several researchers, parents who experience greater economic stress also experience greater parenting stress (Kotelchuck 2006; Santiago et al. 2012; Sturge-Apple et al. 2014). Shortage of resources, including food, medication, durable medical equipment, and apparel can add to the stress of raising children with disabilities. In this way family's income could be a determining factor of the family stress. Therefore, in order to analyse how social class is a determining factor of parental stress and how it affects the various components of stress, the present research study was planned.

Objectives

1. To assess and compare the type and level of perceived stress among parents of mentally challenged children across their social class.
2. To investigate statistical differences in the type and level of perceived stress among parents of mentally challenged children across their social class.

METHODOLOGY

Locale

The present research was carried out exclusively in Delhi. The capital of India, Delhi, was purposively selected as it is one of the region nearest to researcher that has an appreciable number of RCI (Rehabilitation Council of India) recognized special schools meant exclusively for MR children. Out of the 9 RCI recognized institutes for MR children in Delhi, 3 institutes namely NIMH (National Institute for Mentally Handicapped), Manovikas and CBS Memorial were randomly selected as research base for the present paper.

Sample

The list of mildly, moderately and severely mentally challenged children enrolled in NIMH, Manovikas and CBS Memorial was procured from their Directors. From the list, 50 mentally challenged children were randomly selected from all three levels of mental challenge viz. mild, moderate and severe mental challenge. Thus, the sample for the present research comprised of 150 mentally challenged children and their families.

Tools

Self-designed general questionnaire was used to study the socio-demographic and socio-economic characteristics of respondents. Type and level of perceived stress in the families of mentally challenged children were assessed by employing Family Interview for Stress and Coping in Mental Retardation Scale, Section-I (Girimaji 1999) developed at NIMHANS. The scale entails detailed assessment of the stress in families with mentally challenged children. The items included in Section-I of the scale helps to assess perceived stress among parents of mentally challenged children.

Procedure and Data Analysis

The Directors of the selected institutions were contacted, who provided all the necessary required details pertaining to the enrolled MR children and their families. The required samples were drawn and then, first common meeting was organized by the researcher with the families of MR children. Meeting was organized in the institute itself, to explain the purpose of the research. The parents were contacted for data collection on the place of their choice- institute or their home where they were interviewed and observations made by the researcher. The data collected was classified and tabulated in accordance with the objectives to arrive at meaningful and relevant inferences. Analysis was done by taking levels of mental challenge as control. The data was analyzed using statistical techniques like frequency, percentage, mean and small sample t-test.

RESULTS

Distribution pattern of parents on perceived level of stress across their social class can be

clearly seen from the Tables 1(a) and 1(b). In case of extra inputs for care, it was noted from low income families that more percentage of fathers of mildly, moderately and severely challenged children (56%, 60%, 60% respectively) were having low level of stress as compared to mothers. At moderate level, majority were of mothers who had mildly and moderately challenged children (92% and 80%). Whereas, from middle income families majority of mothers (82.67%) as compared to fathers (38.67%) were at moderate level of stress and out of which mothers of mildly, moderately and severely challenged children contributed almost equal percentage that is 80 percent, 84 percent, 84 percent respectively. Overall, majority of mothers from both low and middle income families (84% and 82.67%) perceived moderate level of stress. It was good to note that only very few parents were found to be at high level.

Under the component decrease leisure time and activity it was noticed that among low income families, leisure time and activities of more proportion of all the fathers were minimally affected as compared to mothers. Leisure time and activity of more percentage of mothers of severely challenged children (40%) were found to be affected more. Similar trend was observed in middle income families too. It was observed that overall leisure time and activities of more proportion of mothers from middle income families (68%) and fathers from low income families (42.67%) were found to be somewhat affected.

Under the subscale neglect of others it was found that majority of LIG fathers as compared to mothers of mildly, moderately and severely challenged children (100%, 88% and 84%, respectively) minimally felt that they were not able to give proper time to other family members and neglected them due to paying more attention towards mentally challenged child. But most of the mothers were found at minimal level. Quite different picture was found in middle income families. They reported that more proportion of mildly challenged children's mothers (64%) minimally felt that others family members are getting neglected. Besides this almost equal proportion of mothers from both the families and fathers from middle income families (94.67%) were recognized at minimal level.

Table 1(a) depicts that more mothers (58.67%) as compared to fathers (44%) reported mild disturbed behavior of children. Among all, more

proportion of mothers of moderately challenged children (64%) were at mild level and from low income families. Same picture was reflected by the middle income families, where the majority of mothers of moderately challenged children (76%) reported mild disturbed behavior of their child. In all, nearly equal proportion of mothers and fathers from both the income group felt that disturbed behavior of their child was mild.

Under the personal distress component, more percentage of mothers of mildly and moderately challenged children from low income families were found to be mildly distressed (occasional, or transient periods of distress). Whereas, from middle income families, a completely different picture was drawn, majority of mothers of moderately and severely challenged children (80%, 76% respectively) were mildly distressed. It was also analyzed that more proportion of mothers (70.67%) and fathers (68%) from middle income class were at mild level of personal distress.

On the subscale marital problems, it was observed that almost all mothers and fathers from LIG and MIG irrespective of their child's level of mental challenge had mild marital difficulties attributable to child's condition.

Under the component other interpersonal problems, from low income families it was revealed that majority of mothers and fathers (96%, 82.67% respectively) had moderate level of interpersonal problems. However, from middle income families, majority of fathers of mildly and moderately challenged children (96%) had moderate interpersonal problems but in case of severely challenged children, majority of mothers (92%) had moderate level of interpersonal problems. Results also predicted that majority of mothers from low income families (96%) had moderate and majority of mothers from middle income families (92%) had mild interpersonal problems.

The picture under the dimension, effect on siblings and other family worries reveals that majority of parents from LIG had no effect on siblings and other family worries due to the child's condition. Moreover, from the middle income families' mothers who had children with moderate and severe level of mental challenge and had no effect on siblings and family worries were more in percentage (96%, 92% respectively). It can be concluded that both mothers and fathers from middle income families (90.67% and

Table 1(a): Frequency and percentage distribution of LIG parents of mentally challenged children on the type and level of perceived stress

Areas of perceived stress	Subscales	Levels of stress	Score range	LIG (n=75)											
				Mildly challenged children (n ₁ =25)				Moderately challenged children (n ₂ =25)				Severely challenged children (n ₃ =25)			
				Mothers	Fathers	Mothers	Fathers	Mothers	Fathers	Mothers	Fathers	Mothers	Fathers	Mothers	Fathers
				n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Daily Care	Extra Inputs for Care	Nil	0-3	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
		Low	4-7	1	4.00	14	56.00	3	12.00	15	60.00	3	12.00	7	28.00
		Moderate	7-11	23	92.00	10	40.00	20	80.00	10	40.00	20	80.00	63	84.00
		High	12-15	1	4.00	1	4.00	2	8.00	0	0.00	2	8.00	5	19.00
	Decreased Leisure Time and Activity	Very high	16+	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
		Nil	0-2	3	12.00	2	8.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	3	12.00
		Minimal	3-5	11	44.00	16	64.00	8	32.00	11	44.00	10	40.00	29	38.67
		Somewhat	6-8	11	44.00	7	28.00	14	56.00	14	56.00	15	60.00	40	53.33
	Neglect of Others	Definitely	9-11	0	0.00	0	0.00	3	12.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
		Totally	12+	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
Disturbed Behaviour	Neglect of Others	Nil	0-2	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
		Minimal	3-5	16	64.00	25	100.0	15	60.00	22	88.00	13	52.00	44	58.67
		Somewhat	6-8	9	36.00	0	0.00	7	28.00	1	4.00	12	48.00	28	37.33
		Definitely	9-11	0	0.00	0	0.00	3	12.00	2	8.00	0	0.00	3	12.00
	Disturbed Behaviour	Totally	12+	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
		Nil	0-1	8	32.00	16	64.00	3	12.00	8	32.00	3	12.00	14	18.67
		Mild	2-3	14	56.0	8	32.00	16	64.00	13	52.00	14	56.00	44	58.67
		Moderate	4-5	2	8.00	1	4.00	3	12.00	2	8.00	5	20.00	10	13.33
	Family Emotional Stress	Severe	6-7	1	4.00	0	0.00	1	4.00	2	8.00	3	12.00	5	6.67
		Very high	8+	0	0.00	0	0.00	2	8.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	2	2.67
Marital Problems	Family Emotional Stress	Nil	0-8	10	40.00	15	60.00	7	28.00	10	40.00	9	36.00	10	40.00
		Mild	9-17	15	60.00	10	40.00	15	60.00	12	48.00	11	44.00	13	52.00
		Moderate	18-26	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	3	12.00	2	8.00
		Severe	27-35	0	0.00	0	0.00	1	4.00	1	4.00	2	8.00	0	0.00
	Marital Problems	Very severe	36+	0	0.00	0	0.00	2	8.00	2	8.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
		Nil	0-6	0	0.00	1	4.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	1	4.00
		Mild	7-13	24	96.00	24	96.00	25	100.0	25	100.0	24	96.00	24	96.00
		Moderate	14-20	1	4.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	1	4.00	0	0.00
	Other Inter-personal Problems	Severe	21-27	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
		Very high	28+	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
Other Inter-personal Problems	Other Inter-personal Problems	Nil	0-2	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
		Mild	3-5	2	8.00	5	20.00	1	4.00	3	12.00	0	0.00	5	20.00
		Moderate	6-8	23	92.00	20	80.00	24	96.0	22	88.00	25	100.0	20	80.00
		Severe	9-11	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
	Other Inter-personal Problems	Very severe	12+	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
		Nil	0-3	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
		Low	4-7	1	4.00	14	56.00	3	12.00	15	60.00	3	12.00	15	60.00
		Moderate	7-11	23	92.00	10	40.00	20	80.00	10	40.00	20	80.00	6	24.00
	Total (n=75)	High	12-15	1	4.00	1	4.00	2	8.00	0	0.00	2	8.00	4	16.00
		Very high	16+	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00

Table 1(a): Contd...

Areas of perceived stress	Subscales	Levels of stress	Score range	LIG (n=75)															
				Mildly challenged children (n ₁ =25)				Moderately challenged children (n ₂ =25)				Severely challenged children (n ₃ =25)							
				Mothers		Fathers		Mothers		Fathers		Mothers		Fathers					
n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	Total (n=75)					
Social Stress	Effect on Siblings and Other Family Worries	Nil	0-4	24	96.00	25	100.0	18	72.00	18	72.00	22	88.00	20	80.00	64	85.33	63	84.00
		Mild	5-9	1	4.00	0	0.00	7	28.00	7	28.00	3	12.00	5	20.00	11	14.67	12	16.00
		Moderate	10-14	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
		Severe	15-19	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
	Altered Social Life	Very high	20+	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
		Nil	0-8	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	2	8.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
		Mild	9-17	13	52.00	0	0.00	3	12.00	3	12.00	7	28.00	5	20.00	23	30.67	8	10.67
		Moderate	18-26	12	48.00	25	100.0	19	76.00	22	88.00	16	64.00	18	72.0	47	62.67	65	86.67
	Social Embarrassment	Severe	27-35	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
		Very severe	36+	0	0.00	0	0.00	3	12.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	2	8.00	0	0.00	2	2.67
		Nil	0-6	25	100.0	25	100.0	20	80.0	20	80.00	25	100.0	21	84.00	70	93.33	66	88.00
		Mild	7-13	0	0.00	0	0.00	2	8.00	2	8.00	0	0.00	4	16.00	2	2.67	6	8.00
Social Stress	Effect on Siblings and Other Family Worries	Moderate	14-20	0	0.00	0	0.00	1	4.00	1	4.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	1	1.33	1	1.33
		Severe	21-27	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	2	8.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	2	2.67
		Very high	28+	0	0.00	0	0.00	2	8.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
		Nil	0-2	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
	Altered Social Life	Mild	3-5	8	32.00	7	28.00	4	16.00	7	28.00	9	36.00	8	32.00	21	28.00	22	29.33
		Moderate	6-8	0	0.00	0	0.00	2	8.00	1	4.00	0	0.00	2	8.00	2	2.66	3	4.00
		Severe	9-11	17	68.00	18	72.00	19	76.00	17	68.00	16	64.00	15	60.00	52	69.33	50	66.67
		Very severe	12+	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
					Total (n=75)		Total (n=75)		Total (n=75)		Total (n=75)		Total (n=75)		Total (n=75)				
					n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%			

Table 1(b): Frequency and percentage distribution of MIG parents of mentally challenged children on the type and level of perceived stress

Areas of perceived stress	Subscales	Levels of stress	Score range	LIG (n=75)											
				Mildly challenged children (n ₁ =25)				Moderately challenged children (n ₂ =25)				Severely challenged children (n ₃ =25)			
				Mothers		Fathers		Mothers		Fathers		Mothers		Fathers	
				n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Daily Care	Extra Inputs for Care	Nil	0-3	0	0.00	1	4.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	1	1.33
		Low	4-7	3	12.00	15	60.00	2	8.00	14	56.00	3	12.00	13	52.00
		Moderate	7-11	20	80.00	7	28.00	21	84.00	10	40.00	21	84.00	12	48.00
	Decreased Leisure Time and Activity	High	12-15	2	8.00	2	8.00	2	8.00	1	4.00	1	4.00	0	0.00
		Very high	16+	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
		Nil	0-2	2	8.00	4	16.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	1	4.00
	Neglect of Others	Minimal	3-5	5	20.00	14	56.00	7	28.00	13	52.00	10	40.00	12	48.00
		Somewhat	6-8	18	72.00	7	28.00	18	72.00	12	48.00	15	60.00	12	48.00
		Definitely	9-11	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
	Disturbed Behaviour	Totally	12+	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
		Nil	0-2	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
		Minimal	3-5	14	56.00	24	96.00	12	48.00	23	92.00	16	64.00	24	96.00
Family Emotional Stress	Personal Distress	Somewhat	6-8	11	44.00	1	4.00	13	52.00	2	8.00	9	36.00	1	4.00
		Definitely	9-11	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
		Totally	12+	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
	Marital Problems	Nil	0-1	3	12.00	8	32.00	0	0.00	6	24.00	2	8.00	9	36.00
		Mild	2-3	16	64.00	11	44.00	19	76.00	13	52.00	8	32.00	8	32.00
		Moderate	4-5	3	12.00	5	20.00	5	20.00	5	20.00	13	52.00	6	24.00
	Other Inter-personal Problems	Severe	6-7	3	12.00	1	4.00	1	4.00	1	4.00	2	8.00	2	8.00
		Very high	8+	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
		Nil	0-8	10	40.00	9	36.00	5	20.00	7	28.00	5	20.00	8	32.00
	Emotional Stress	Mild	9-17	14	56.00	16	64.00	20	80.00	18	72.00	19	76.00	17	68.00
		Moderate	18-26	1	4.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
		Severe	27-35	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	1	4.00	0	0.00
Total (n=75)	Daily Care	Very severe	36+	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
		Nil	0-6	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
		Mild	7-13	24	96.00	24	96.00	25	100.00	25	100.00	24	96.00	24	96.00
	Marital Problems	Moderate	14-20	0	0.00	1	4.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	1	4.00	1	4.00
		Severe	21-27	1	4.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
		Very high	28+	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
	Other Inter-personal Problems	Nil	0-2	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
		Mild	3-5	23	92.00	24	96.00	23	92.00	24	96.00	23	92.00	19	76.00
		Moderate	6-8	2	8.00	1	4.00	2	8.00	1	4.00	2	8.00	6	24.00
	Total (n=75)	Severe	9-11	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
		Very severe	12+	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
		Nil	0-3	0	0.00	1	4.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00

92%) who had no effect on siblings and other family worries were more when compared with LIG.

In the subscale altered social life, social life of majority of LIG fathers altered moderately. Whereas, among middle income families more proportion of fathers reported mildly altered social life. In all, 86.67 percent of LIG fathers had moderately altered social life while 94.67 percent of fathers from MIG had mildly altered social life.

In the case of social embarrassment, among LIG majority of mothers (93.33%) as compared to the fathers (88%) felt no social embarrassment. Only 4 percent fathers of severely challenged children from low income families felt mild level of social embarrassment. Contrasting with low income families, in middle income families' majority of fathers (97.33%) as compared to mothers (92%) felt no social embarrassment. In total it was observed that more percentage of mothers from low income families (93.33%) and fathers from middle income families (97.33%) felt no social embarrassment due to the child's condition.

On the financial stress, it was noticed that in low income families the number of fathers who experienced severe level of financial stress were more than mothers. Only few parents experienced moderate level of stress. Mothers and fathers of moderately challenged children were more who had experienced severe level of financial stress. But in middle income families, 64 percent of fathers were under moderate level. Here, at mild level, proportion of mothers and fathers of severely challenged children were more (72%) as compared to others. Overall view across family's income showed that 69.33 percent of mothers from low income families were severely stressed whereas, 62.67 percent of fathers from middle income families were at mild level of financial stress.

Analysis across family's social class (Table 2) revealed that both mothers and fathers from low income and middle income families irrespective of child's degree of mental challenge differs significantly in marital problems, interpersonal problems and financial implications. It was noticed that parents of both the genders from low income families were more stressed on marital problems, other interpersonal problems and financial implications as compared to middle income families.

DISCUSSION

It can be clearly observed from the Table 2 that both mothers and fathers from low income families were more stressed on few components like marital problems, other interpersonal problems and financial implications. In this context, Sameroff et al. (1987) reported that lower socio-economic status of the family is reported to be associated with more stress because of fewer resources. Several researchers also found that parents who experience greater economic stress also experience greater parenting stress (Kotelchuck 2006; Santiago et al. 2012; Sturge-Apple et al. 2014). The reason of significant differences in marital problem domain might be more marital conflicts among parents from low income families, when mothers and fathers were analyzed across their economic status then it was observed that among low income families irrespective of child's level of mental challenge parents perceived more marital conflicts because of less support from their counterparts and family, improper communication and poor understanding amongst them.

In other interpersonal problems component, it was noted that mothers from low income families were found to be blamed more for the child's condition. People without knowing the biological reason blamed mother, it was all due to the lack of awareness, education and knowledge among low income families. Among fathers from low income families also other interpersonal problems were identified more, it was all due to lack of understanding, non-cooperativeness and quarrels among family members on child related issues and disagreements. This finding is in accordance with The 'Family Stress Model' (Simons 1994; Conger et al. 2000) who proposed that the experience of poverty is one of the more important factors that can put severe strains on spousal relationships, bringing about feelings of depression and increasing family dysfunction.

Under the component financial implications, differences among the parents of low and middle income families were found. It was probably because of the low financial status of low income families, their income was not found to be appropriate as per their needs. Also, no savings were made by the parents from low income families because all of their money had been spent on the treatment of their child.

Besides all these components parents from both low and middle income families irrespec-

Table 2: Mean differences in the stress perceived by the parents of mentally challenged children across family's income

Subscales of stress	Mothers of mildly challenged children (n ₁ =50)			Mothers of moderately challenged children (n ₂ =50)			Mothers of severely challenged children (n ₄ =50)			Fathers of mildly challenged children (n ₅ =50)			Fathers of moderately challenged children (n ₃ =50)			Fathers of severely challenged children (n ₆ =50)		
	Low	Middle	t	Low	Middle	t	Low	Middle	t	Low	Middle	t	Low	Middle	t	Low	Middle	t
	inco-me fami-lies n _{1a} =25	inco-me fami-lies n _{1b} =25		inco-me fami-lies n _{2a} =25	inco-me fami-lies n _{2b} =25		inco-me fami-lies n _{3a} =25	inco-me fami-lies n _{3b} =25		inco-me fami-lies n _{4a} =25	inco-me fami-lies n _{4b} =25		inco-me fami-lies n _{5a} =25	inco-me fami-lies n _{5b} =25		inco-me fami-lies n _{6a} =25	inco-me fami-lies n _{6b} =25	
	Mean (S.D)	Mean (S.D)		Mean (S.D)	Mean (S.D)		Mean (S.D)	Mean (S.D)		Mean (S.D)	Mean (S.D)		Mean (S.D)	Mean (S.D)		Mean (S.D)	Mean (S.D)	
Extra inputs for care	9.04 (1.02)	9.01 (1.89)	0.06	10.80 (1.5)	10.76 (2.15)	0.04	12.2 (2.27)	11.98 (1.88)	0.16	6.40 (2.14)	5.86 (2.97)	1.90	7.23 (1.3)	6.80 (1.89)	1.14	7.89 (3.14)	7.89 (2.22)	0.00
Decreased leisure time and activity	6.50 (1.94)	6.32 (2.21)	0.10	8.12 (1.92)	7.65 (2.14)	1.11	9.65 (3.03)	8.75 (0.99)	1.23	5.20 (2.04)	5.85 (2.76)	0.57	6.04 (2.3)	6.95 (2.75)	0.88	7.01 (1.5)	7.98 (1.23)	0.90
Neglect of others	5.34 (2.69)	5.20 (2.53)	0.57	6.60 (0.91)	6.3 (2.34)	0.02	8.17 (2.58)	7.33 (3.2)	1.45	4.2 (1.87)	4.35 (2.87)	0.28	4.68 (1.73)	5.53 (2.24)	1.09	5.50 (3.97)	6.47 (2.78)	1.90
Disturbed behaviour	3.43 (1.85)	2.85 (1.62)	1.78	4.68 (2.36)	4.05 (1.24)	0.46	6.84 (0.99)	6.17 (3.02)	0.87	1.89 (1.45)	0.92 (1)	1.36	2.50 (1.76)	2.00 (2.01)	0.57	3.22 (1.78)	3.02 (1.78)	0.36
Personal distress	8.97 (3.13)	8.34 (2.9)	0.89	10.80 (9.57)	10.44 (2.38)	0.28	12.96 (7.87)	12.63 (1.38)	0.37	8.56 (4.05)	8.20 (2.29)	0.70	10.50 (9.44)	10.16 (2.78)	0.14	12.34 (5.38)	12.17 (1.08)	0.46
Marital problems	2.90 (3.38)	1.70 (3.70)	2.40*	5.16 (1.77)	2.35 (2.87)	4.89*	7.23 (8.30)	3.03 (1.67)	5.76*	1.88 (1.62)	0.85 (1.89)	2.12*	4.18 (2.69)	1.59 (2.98)	4.55*	5.67 (7.95)	2.27 (1.21)	4.67*
Other interpersonal problems	3.21 (1.41)	1.50 (0.92)	3.56*	4.65 (2.97)	1.89 (1.45)	4.77*	6.23 (2.98)	2.76 (1.23)	4.78*	1.88 (1.83)	0.67 (0.85)	2.89*	3.55 (3.15)	1.44 (1.89)	3.24*	4.78 (2.99)	2.32 (1.16)	3.88*
Effect on siblings and other family worries	3.56 (0.92)	3.18 (2)	0.60	5.13 (2.54)	5.03 (2.47)	0.13	7.20 (1.55)	6.98 (1.37)	0.22	2.96 (1.1)	2.48 (1.87)	0.80	4.64 (2.90)	4.37 (2.00)	0.38	6.56 (3.50)	6.34 (0.93)	0.50
Altered social life	7.56 (3.1)	7.12 (3.02)	0.38	8.96 (8.04)	8.19 (2.88)	0.78	10.12 (7.12)	9.22 (3.48)	1.25	5.86 (2.12)	6.20 (2.61)	1.10	6.74 (6.57)	7.29 (1.78)	1.11	7.44 (6.29)	8.32 (2.98)	1.89
Social embarrassment	1.09 (1.35)	0.98 (1.49)	0.09	2.10 (4.55)	1.95 (1.1)	0.32	3.67 (1.75)	2.78 (1.32)	1.34	0.76 (0.97)	0.65 (1.11)	0.40	1.83 (4.28)	1.43 (1.23)	0.70	3.2 (0.65)	2.32 (1.32)	1.94
Financial implications	6.97 (2.88)	5.73 (2.72)	3.89*	8.43 (2.86)	7.32 (2.11)	2.87*	9.53 (3.73)	8.39 (2.4)	2.87	6.76 (2.7)	5.56 (1.83)	2.52*	8.1 (3.33)	6.84 (1.89)	3.46*	9.32 (4.07)	8.16 (2.56)	2.75*

Note: 1. * stands for significant at 0.05 level

2. Higher the score, higher the level of stress

tive of their family's income made extra efforts for the care of the child, their leisure time and activity get equally affected and perceived stress because of neglecting other family members; had continuous vigilant on the disturbed behavior of the child, had equal family worries, social life altered equally as well as perceived same level of social embarrassment.

CONCLUSION

The findings of the present paper suggest that family's social class influence the type and level of stress perceived by parents upto some extent. Parents of both genders who belonged to LIG were found to be significantly more stressed as compared to their counterparts in some of the subscales i.e. marital problems, other interpersonal problems and financial implications. Whereas, stress of both mothers and fathers irrespective of their social class were found to be unaffected under the components extra efforts for the care of the child, neglect of others. Their leisure time and activity also get equally affected; had equal family worries and continuous vigilant on the disturbed behavior of the child; besides this their social life altered equally as well as perceived same level of social embarrassment.

The findings indicate that there is a strong need to develop such services which are subservient to the needy families so as to allay their stress. Educational level of family should be improved so that they become aware of some of the scientific facts behind the birth of the child. It is very much true that love and care can never be compared with anything. No doubt parents love their child irrespective of their social class but among LIG some misunderstandings may develop between couples due to their low educational status, and of course because of poverty, LIG are facing more financial burden due to more expenses and less income of their family. Sometimes they are unable to go for any type of medication because of the financial strain. For such type of families government institutes are proving helpful. So, parents should admit their child in government institutes running especially for mentally challenged children Like NIMH, C.B.S, memorial for their upliftment. Although parents' from both social class gives equal love and care to their special need child but if posi-

tive environment is to be made at home, both parents develop proper understanding, cooperation and interaction among themselves then, their condition can become less strained or stressed.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Efforts to be made by parents of both genders to increase their education level which make them more aware regarding the real cause of child's situation, and thereby leading to no disputes in families, especially among low income families.
2. It is recommended that the schools may have to consider the possibility of recruiting qualified counselors for providing guidance and counseling sessions to the families.
3. Families with MR children irrespective of their social class should be helped in terms of food security, income generation and in providing information about the Rights of the child, so as to be able to better look after their special need child.

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