

Psychological Stress Differences among Parents of Children with Intellectual Disabilities in Jordan

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Abstract:

The current study aimed to identify the level of psychological stress among parents of children with intellectual disabilities and differences due to the variables: relationship with the intellectually disabled child, gender, and severity levels of intellectual disability. The sample consisted of (80) parents of children with intellectual disabilities who were intentionally chosen from the city of Zarqa in Jordan. Having verified its validity and reliability, scale of psychological stress, prepared by the author, was utilized in this study. The results showed that psychological stress level among parents of children with intellectual disabilities in Jordan was high, and the results showed statistically significant differences in the level of psychological stress among the participants due to the impact of the relationship with the intellectually disabled child in favor of mothers, and gender in favor of females, and severity levels of intellectual disability in favor of the moderate and the severe. The study recommended the need to draw the attention of officials in care centers for children with intellectual disabilities to provide training programs and activities for parents of children with intellectual disabilities to reduce the level of psychological stress them, especially mothers.

Keywords: Psychological stress, parents of children with intellectual disabilities, Jordan.

1. Introduction

The psychological stress is one of the human phenomena that occur to man in various attitudes and times, requiring him re-compatibility with the environment, and this phenomenon, like most other psychological phenomena such as anxiety, conflict, frustration, aggression. The psychological stresses are not necessarily a negative phenomenon, and therefore, an individual cannot escape, because that would mean a lack of effectiveness and efficiency of the individual, and then lead to a failure in life.

A lot of researchers such as Arabeyat (1994) and Alkhafsh (2001) indicated that this era is characterized by psychological stress for it has a plenty of hard social and economic changes, which affected the values in all its forms and types. So, patterns of negative behavior emerged because of the disorders that affected the human relations on the one hand, and deficiencies in individual skills for addressing stressful situations and deal with them on the other hand; therefore some individuals may resort to isolation, introversion, alienation and social exclusion from other people as a preventive measure protecting them from dispensable stress and difficulties.

Mathny and Aycock (1993) defined psychological stress as a set of situations, events or ideas that lead one to feel nervous, usually springs from the individual's belief that he/she is incapable and with lack of resources in achieving demands, with which he is unable to cope. Aldhimat (2008) confirmed that psychological stress is a relative concept based on the individual response, abilities and awareness of the events and situations, psychological stress socially, economically and culturally affects the individual, resulted in a set of physical, behavioral and cognitive symptoms.

Hence, the psychological stress among the parents of the intellectually disabled children refers to the bad influence resulted from a disabled child, and forming the negative characteristics among the parents, resulted in undesirable intellectual, emotional reactions, claiming the stress and distress, anxiety, grief and sorrow. They may suffer from some of the psychological and physical symptoms that deplete their energies, and weaken their focus while working.

Many researchers confirm that the parents of disabled children have requirements beyond those faced by parents of normal children, and those requirements are generally a factor of tension among parents (Morin and Carl, 2004). Thus, since the first moment in which the family is aware of the case of a disabled child through the diagnostic team, pediatrician, or whatever means the family becomes psychologically stressful and feels that they are in inescapable severe crisis.

Arabeyat and Zyoudie (2008) see that the presence of undesirable disabled child is a permanent source of stress, as it requires considerable efforts and unbearable additional parental care, so the parents begin to suffer from negative feelings, and family problems, in addition to organic and psychological deficiency accompanying psychological stress. Abdel Moneim (2006) assured that the current events and surrounding changes greatly affect the family, requiring in turn making parallel changes by family members. To cope and coexist with this reality according to the requirements of everyday life, the mother is going to be the social entity surrounding the child in spite of the different attitudes, values and beliefs of intellectual disability forms, so the mother' reactions

to the presence of an intellectually disabled child may vary depending on the social and economic circumstances of the family as well as the mother's educational level, age and work.

The family that cares for an intellectually disabled child needs to cope with him, paying attention to regular medical examination and care givers, which require more stress on the family. These requirements increase the stress experienced by the parents, and could destabilize the couple's relationship, so the family members should get used to the new circumstances of having an intellectually disabled child (Annie and Georgette, 2008).

More attention paid to studies of psychological stress among families of those with special needs, where Jerar (1988) suggests that mothers of children with severe intellectual disability face psychological stress more than those of children with mild intellectual disability. Malkoush and Yahya (1995) indicated that parents of disabled children face a high degree of psychological stress caused by the presence of a disabled child in the family. Hastings (2003) demonstrated that level of psychological stress among parents of intellectually disabled children was high and the study did not show differences due to the relationship with intellectually disabled children.

While Sherbini (2003) showed that mothers of intellectually disabled females are suffering from high psychological stress, especially those related to the future of the child. Rozonova (2008) confirmed that the psychological stress level was high among the families of children with autism spectrum disorder, and the study showed no differences attributed to the relationship with the disabled child and gender. Lundy (2011) and Darling, Senatore and Strachan (2012) pointed that the psychological stress level among the families of children with special needs was high.

McStay, Trembath and Dissanayake (2014) confirmed that the psychological stress level of parents of autistic children was moderate, and the results showed no differences due to gender in the level of psychological stress among fathers and mothers. While the results of Sabah and Abdel Haq (2013) revealed a correlation between psychological stress and family relationships among the family of intellectually disabled child; this relationship confirms that the intellectually disabled child's family enjoys intellectual health that allows it to resist the psychological stress through family cohesion in times of crises, including a disabled child crisis.

The author conducted the current study to identify the level of psychological stress among Jordanian family of intellectually disabled children.

2. Statement of the problem

The present study aims to identify the level of psychological stress among parents of children with intellectual disabilities in Jordan, and the differences according to the variables of the relationship with disabled children, gender and severity level of disability. The problem lies in answering the following questions:

1. What is the level of psychological stress among parents of children with intellectual disability?
2. Are there statistically significant differences ($\alpha = 0.05$) in the psychological stress among parents of children with intellectual disability due to the variable of relationship with the disabled child?
3. Are there statistically significant differences ($\alpha = 0.05$) in the psychological stress among parents of children with intellectual disability attributed to the gender of the intellectually disabled child?
4. Are there any statistically significant differences ($\alpha = 0.05$) in the psychological stress among parents of children with intellectual disability attributed to the severity level of disability?

3. Significance

The importance of the current study highlighted through enriching the theoretical literature about children with intellectual disabilities, because of the lack of Arab studies on this point, and the development of specialized scale in investigating psychological stress levels among families of children with intellectual disability. The study briefs officials of education and care centers for children with intellectual disabilities on the importance of reducing the level of psychological stress among families; which contributes to the development of plans, programs and means that help meet the needs of families of children with intellectual disabilities.

4. Methodology

Descriptive and survey approach adopted in the current survey, which qualitatively and quantitatively depicts the reality through answering the questions of the study through psychological stress scale.

4.1. Population and sampling

The study population consisted of all parents of children with intellectual disabilities in the city of Zarqa in Jordan, but the sample consisted of ($n=80$) parents of children with intellectual disabilities who were intentionally chosen from care centers for people with special needs in the city of Zarqa; in the second semester for the academic year 2014/2015. The participants distributed according to the variables: relationship with disabled child, gender and severity level of disability, as shown in Table (1).

Table 1: Distribution of study sample according to the variables

Variables	Group	Frequency	Percentage
Relationship with disabled child	Father	41	51.3%
	Mother	39	48.8%
Gender of disabled child	Male	40	50.0%
	Female	40	50.0%
Level of disability	Mild	27	33.8%
	Moderate	28	35.0%
	Severe	25	31.3%
Total		80	100.0%

4.2 Instrument

Psychological stress scale was developed based mainly on standards of psychological stress among families of children with special needs in general, such as the study of Khafsh (2001), Al-Mutairi (2006) and Albadiratt (2006) and the study of Almaaytah (2007) for making the paragraphs commensurate with the domains of the scale. Having verified its validity and reliability, the psychological stress scale, in its final draft, consisted of (50) paragraphs distributed randomly to four dimensions: The stress associated with the characteristics of children with intellectual disabilities (1, 10, 6, 15, 20, 23, 26, 30, 32, 35, 42, and 48), the stress associated with the support services (2, 7, 16, 18, 31, 38, 40, 44, 46, and 50), the stress associated with the personal and psychological aspect (3, 8, 12, 14, 21, 24, 25, 29, 39, 43, 45, and 47), the stress associated with family and social aspects (4, 5, 9, 11, 13, 17, 19, 22, 27, 28, 33, 34, 36, 37, 41, and 49). The responder checks each paragraph on a scale of three degrees, namely, (highly applied, medium, and low), the scale corrected by giving the following weights, respectively (3, 2 and 1) for the above mentioned degrees that reflect the paragraphs (5, 44, 46 and 49).

4.3 Validity

To verify the validity of the psychological stress scale, the first draft was reviewed and evaluated by ten reviewers, more experienced in special education, psychology and measurement and evaluation in Jordanian Universities, where they were asked to check the appropriateness of the paragraphs (items) and to make sure of the language and the appropriateness of the instrument to achieve the study objectives. In light of the views and suggestions of the evaluators, the required modifications were made with agreement percentage (80%), and the final draft consisted of (50) paragraphs.

4.4 Reliability

The reliability of the instrument was verified by the method of (test-retest), where it was applied to a pilot sample numbered (25) parents of children with intellectual disabilities in the city of Zarqa in Jordan, with two weeks interval between first and second application/test. Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated between the scores of respondents and the total reliability coefficient of the instrument was (0.90). The second method conducted by calculating of the internal consistency coefficient (Cronbach's Alpha) of the total scale = (0.95). These are considered appropriate values for achieving the objectives of the study.

5. Results

Results of the first question: What is the level of psychological stress among parents of children with intellectual disability? To answer this question, arithmetic means and standard deviations calculated for the psychological stress among parents of children with intellectual disabilities, as shown in table (2).

Table (2): Means and standard deviations of psychological stress among parents of children with intellectual disabilities in descending order according to means

Rank	No	Domain	Mean	Standard deviation	Level
1	3	Stress of personal and psychological aspect	2.43	0.54	High
2	1	Stress of characteristics of children with intellectual disability	2.37	0.42	High
3	4	Stress associated with family and social aspects	2.33	0.39	Med.
4	2	Stress associated with support services	2.31	0.30	Med.
Total psychological stress			2.36	0.40	High

Table (2) shows that the means ranged from (2.31) to (2.43), where "Stress of personal and psychological aspects" ranked the first and the highest arithmetic mean (2.43) and a standard deviation (0.54) and high level, while "Stress associated with support services" got the fourth place with a mean (2.31) and a

standard deviation (0.30) and a medium level, and the arithmetic mean of the total psychological stress among parents of children with intellectual disability was (2.36) and a standard deviation (0.40) with high level.

The results of the second question: Are there statistically significant differences ($\alpha = 0.05$) in the psychological stress among parents of children with intellectual disability due to the variable of relationship with the disabled child? To answer this question, the means and standard deviations calculated for the psychological stress among parents of children with intellectual disabilities due to the relationship with the intellectually disabled child, and T-test conducted to indicate the differences between the means, as shown in table (3).

Table (3): Means, standard deviations, and test the "T" of the impact of the relationship variable for disabled children on the psychological stress among parents of children with intellectual disabilities

Domains	Relations with disabled child	No.	M.	St. D	T-value	Freedom degrees	Sig. level
Stress of characteristics of children with intellectual disability	Father	41	2.14	.425	-5.902	78	.000
	Mother	39	2.60	.240			
Stress associated with support services	Father	41	2.13	.306	-7.280	78	.000
	Mother	39	2.51	.111			
Stress of personal and psychological aspect	Father	41	2.13	.581	-6.143	78	.000
	Mother	39	2.74	.231			
Stress associated with family and social aspects	Father	41	2.11	.408	-6.456	78	.000
	Mother	39	2.56	.175			
Total psychological stress	Father	41	2.13	.419	-6.599	78	.000
	Mother	39	2.60	.178			

Table (3) shows no statistically significant differences ($\alpha = 0.05$) due to the impact of the relationship variable with intellectually disabled child in all domains and in the total score, and the differences were in favor of mothers, which means that mothers of children with intellectual disabilities suffer more from psychological stress than parents.

The results of the third question: Are there statistically significant differences ($\alpha = 0.05$) in the psychological stress among parents of children with intellectual disability attributed to the gender of the intellectually disabled child? To answer this question, arithmetic means and standard deviations were calculated for psychological stress among parents of children with intellectual disabilities, according to the gender of a disabled child, T-test conducted to indicate the differences between the means, as shown in table (4).

Table (4): Means, standard deviations, and "T" test for the impact of the gender of an intellectually disabled child on the psychological stress among parents of children with intellectual disabilities

Domains	Gender	N	M	St. D	T value	Freedom degrees	Sig. level
Stress of characteristics of children with intellectual disability	Male	40	2.24	.391	-3.015	78	.003
	Female	40	2.50	.399			
Stress associated with support services	Male	40	2.23	.305	-2.774	78	.007
	Female	40	2.41	.267			
Stress of personal and psychological aspect	Male	40	2.26	.537	-3.011	78	.004
	Female	40	2.61	.490			
Stress associated with family and social aspects	Male	40	2.21	.378	-3.023	78	.003
	Female	40	2.46	.364			
Total psychological stress	Male	40	2.23	.389	-3.073	78	.003
	Female	40	2.49	.376			

Table (4) indicates no statistically significant differences ($\alpha = 0.05$) due to the impact of the gender of the intellectually disabled child in all domains and in the total score, and differences were in favor of females; which shows an increased level of psychological stress among parents of children with intellectual disabilities for intellectually disabled female children.

The results of the fourth question: Are there any statistically significant differences ($\alpha = 0.05$) in the psychological stress among parents of children with intellectual disability attributed to the severity level of disability? To answer this question, arithmetic means and standard deviations calculated for psychological stress among parents of intellectually disabled children based on the severity level of disability, as illustrated in table (5).

Table (5): means and standard deviations of psychological stress among parents based on the severity level of disability

	Group	N	M	St. D
Stress of characteristics of children with intellectual disability	Mild	27	1.96	.350
	Moderate	28	2.44	.284
	Severe	25	2.72	.122
	Total	80	2.37	.415
Stress associated with support services	Mild	27	2.00	.249
	Moderate	28	2.43	.194
	Severe	25	2.53	.094
	Total	80	2.31	.299
Stress of personal and psychological aspect	Mild	27	1.91	.501
	Moderate	28	2.57	.390
	Severe	25	2.83	.175
	Total	80	2.43	.540
Stress associated with family and social aspects	Mild	27	1.96	.379
	Moderate	28	2.41	.246
	Severe	25	2.65	.106
	Total	80	2.33	.390
Total psychological stress	Mild	27	1.95	.357
	Moderate	28	2.46	.264
	Severe	25	2.68	.111
	Total	80	2.36	.403

Table (5) shows ostensible variation in the means and standard deviations of psychological stress among parents of intellectually disabled children because of the different groups of severity level of disability, one-way analysis of variance conducted to indicate the statistical differences between means, as shown in table (6).

Table (6): one-way analysis of variance for the impact of severity level of disability on the psychological stress

Domains and instrument	Source	Sum of squares	F.D	Mean of squares	F-value	Sig. level
Stress of characteristics of children with intellectual disability	Between groups	7.869	2	3.934	52.949	.000
	Within groups	5.721	77	.074		
	Total	13.590	79			
Stress associated with support services	Between groups	4.238	2	2.119	57.505	.000
	Within groups	2.837	77	.037		
	Total	7.075	79			
Stress of personal and psychological aspect	Between groups	11.694	2	5.847	39.575	.000
	Within groups	11.377	77	.148		
	Total	23.071	79			
Stress associated with family and social aspects	Between groups	6.373	2	3.187	43.546	.000
	Within groups	5.635	77	.073		
	Total	12.008	79			
Total psychological stress	Between groups	7.329	2	3.665	51.457	.000
	Within groups	5.484	77	.071		
	Total	12.813	79			

Table (6) reveals no statistically significant differences at the significance level ($\alpha = 0.05$) due to the severity of disability in all domains and in the total instrument, and posterior comparisons (Scheffé's method) used to indicate the statistically significant differences between means, as shown in table (7).

Table (7): Scheffé's method for the impact of severity level of disability on the psychological stress

Domains and instrument	Group	M	Mild	Moderate	Severe
Stress of characteristics of children with intellectual disability	Mild	1.96			
	Moderate	2.44	-.48(*)		
	Severe	2.72	-.77(*)	-.28(*)	
Stress associated with support services	Mild	2.00			
	Moderate	2.43	-.43(*)		
	Severe	2.53	-.53(*)	-.10	
Stress of personal and psychological aspect	Mild	1.91			
	Moderate	2.57	-.66(*)		
	Severe	2.83	-.91(*)	-.26	
Stress associated with family and social aspects	Mild	1.96			
	Moderate	2.41	-.45(*)		
	Severe	2.65	-.69(*)	-.24(*)	
Total psychological stress	Mild	1.95			
	Moderate	2.46	-.50(*)		
	Severe	2.68	-.73(*)	-.23(*)	

* Significant at the significance level ($\alpha = 0.05$).

Table (7) shows no statistically significant differences ($\alpha = 0.05$) between mild disability on the one hand and each of moderate and severe disability on the other hand, where differences were in favor of both moderate and severe. There were statistically significant differences ($\alpha = 0.05$) between the moderate and severe disability, where differences were in favor of the severe disability in the stress associated with the characteristics of intellectually disabled children, the stress associated with the family and social aspects, and the total psychological stress. There were also statistically significant differences ($\alpha = 0.05$) between mild disability on the one hand and each of moderate and severe disability on the other hand, where differences were in favor of both moderate and severe disability in the stress associated with the support services and the stress of personal and psychological aspect

6. Discussion

- The results showed that the mean of psychological stress level among parents of children with intellectual disabilities was (2.36) and of high level. This is due to the suffering of the parents to take appropriate decisions for their intellectually disabled child, as they are responsible for his/her upbringing and care and provide services to him/her. The parents must provide the intellectually disabled child with all his needs and desires and satisfy them; thereby they face a state of tension, frustration, anxiety and despair for his/her life; which contributes to increasing the level of psychological stress. The current study is consistent with Malkoush and Yahya (1995) which showed that parents of intellectually disabled children face a high degree of psychological stress caused by the presence of an intellectually disabled child in the family. Hastings (2003) also showed that the level of psychological stress among parents of children with autism spectrum disorder was high, as well as Rozonova (2008), which showed that psychological stress level was high in the families of children with autism spectrum disorder. The results of the current study also agreed with the results of Lundy (2011) and Darling, Senatore and Strachan (2012), which demonstrated a high level of psychological stress among the families of children with special needs.

- In terms of domains, the results showed that the domain of "Stress of personal and psychological aspect" ranked the first with the highest arithmetic mean (2.43) and high degree of estimation. This is due to the parents' association with social relations that make them feel frustration, despair and shame of their intellectually disabled child. Hence, these relations assuredly lead to negative emotions, lower life satisfaction and lack of happiness and desist from the practice of activities of daily life; it is also likely to have a deep psychological impact on them and a worse mental and physical health. While the domain "Stress associated with support services" ranked the fourth place with a mean (2.31) and moderate level of disability. Perhaps this is due to the development witnessed by the special education field in recent times and the spread of the role of care centers for the intellectually disabled in Jordan, which facilitated the provision of services and support and assistance to the family in the education of the intellectually disabled children.

- The results showed statistically significant differences in the level of psychological stress among parents of children with intellectual disabilities due to the impact of the relationship variable with disabled child in all domains and in the total score, where differences were in favor of mothers. This can be justified in the light of mothers' link and connection with their children and their responsibility for them, and the suffering they have from training their child on the social and communicative skills and interaction with the community, where the intellectual disability results in unfamiliar behaviors such as stereotypical behaviors and defecation disorders,

sleep disorders, eating disorders and self-mischief, and other attempts to put on and take off clothes, hence mothers facing extreme difficulties in the management of these behaviors which contribute to raising the level of psychological stress among them. The current results are inconsistent with the results of Hastings (2003) and the study of Rozonova (2008) that showed no differences in the level of psychological stress among families due to the relationship with disabled children.

- The results of the current study revealed statistically significant differences in the level of psychological stress among parents of children with intellectual disabilities attributed to the impact of gender of the intellectually disabled child in all domains and in the total score, where differences were in favor of females. This is due to the state of anxiety and fear for the future of intellectually disabled female children, as well as the fear of assault or exploitation by others in the future. The current results agreed with the results of Alsherbini (2003), which revealed the existence of statistical differences in the level of psychological stress among mothers of children with intellectual disabilities attributed to gender in favor of females. The current results are inconsistent with those of Rozonova (2008) and McStay, et al (2014) that showed no differences in the level of psychological stress among families of children with autism due to gender of the disabled child.

- The current results showed statistically significant differences in the level of psychological stress among parents of children with intellectual disabilities due to the impact of severity level of disability, where the differences were in favor of the moderate and the severe. This can be due to the permanent source of problems and stress lived and suffered by parents from the presence of a moderate and severe intellectually disabled child; as moderate and severe intellectually disabled child requires considerable care, extra efforts and financial demands that outweigh what is provided to a mild intellectually disabled child. This makes parents unable to afford to the requirements of psychological, economic and social needs of the moderate and severe intellectually disabled child; which is reflected on the level of psychological stress and dimensions. The results of the current study are consistent with those of Jerar (1988), which showed that mothers of children with intellectual disability face severe psychological stress more than mothers of children with mild intellectual disability.

7. Recommendations

The author of the current study made some recommendations summarized as follows:

1. The need to draw the attention of officials in the care and service centers for children with intellectual disabilities to provide training programs and activities for parents of children with intellectual disabilities to reduce the level of psychological stress they have, especially mothers.
2. The need to direct charity and cooperative associations and businessmen to provide financial and economic support to families of children with moderate to severe intellectual disability; to ensure providing all needs and requirements of their children for reducing the level of psychological stress and how to deal with it.
3. Conducting similar studies in light of other variables, with larger population and sample, and utilizing other instruments such as observation and interview.

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