



Stress and Aggressiveness among Mothers of Children with Disabilities

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the relationship between stress and aggression in 100 mothers of children with disabilities. Findings showed high stress levels and moderate aggression, but no significant correlation between the two ($r = .25$, $p = .550$). The results suggest that other factors, such as coping mechanisms and social support, may play a more influential role in managing aggression.

Introduction

Parenting children with disabilities is particularly challenging, as it involves additional mental, emotional, and financial stress. Determining whether to support mainstream education for children with special needs remains a difficult and debated issue. Children with disabilities may require constant supervision, specialized therapies, medical attention, and individualized education plans. These responsibilities can limit the mother's ability to engage in self-care, pursue employment, or maintain a healthy social life, contributing to feelings of isolation, fatigue, and emotional exhaustion. Moreover, societal stigma and lack of adequate support systems can further intensify these pressures. Parenting children with disabilities is particularly demanding, adding emotional, mental, and financial strain beyond the typical challenges of parenting. These children often face a higher risk of mental health issues, and parents must make difficult decisions about educational placement, such as regular versus institutional schooling. Training focuses on improving skills like personal grooming, social behaviour, academics, and basic job skills, each with both simple and complex components.



Parenting a child with disabilities presents unique emotional and practical challenges that can significantly impact a caregiver's mental health. Mothers, often the primary caregivers, face chronic stress due to the demands of constant care, medical needs, educational planning, and limited personal time. These pressures can lead to emotional exhaustion, isolation, anxiety, depression, and sometimes aggressiveness, which may be internalized or affect relationships. Societal stigma and insufficient support systems further worsen the burden. Baker et al. (2002) reported that mothers of children with developmental disabilities face elevated levels of parenting stress, primarily driven by behavioural challenges, limited access to respite care, and societal stigma. Similarly, Emerson (2003) highlighted that social disadvantage and inadequate support systems further intensify this stress.

Olsson & Hwang (2001) reported that mothers of children with intellectual disabilities are more prone to depression, anxiety, and emotional exhaustion. These emotional states, if prolonged, can affect the mother's ability to respond sensitively to her child, sometimes leading to irritability or aggressive behaviour. Pelchat et al. (2007) suggest that chronic caregiving stress can lead to negative coping mechanisms, including increased anger and interpersonal conflict. In high-stress environments, mothers may exhibit verbal or emotional outbursts due to accumulated frustration, even if they deeply care for their child. Studies indicate that the type and severity of a child's disability play a significant role in influencing maternal stress levels. For instance, mothers of children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) report higher stress compared to those with children who have physical impairments (Hayes & Watson, 2013). Peer and Hillman (2014) found that strong social support and access to mental health services help reduce stress and aggression in mothers, while isolation, financial strain, and limited care services significantly raise psychological distress.

Measures and Methods

Procedure and Participants

In this study, an exploratory cross-sectional research design was used to assess stress and aggression among mothers of children with disabilities. Previous research suggests that these mothers experience higher levels of stress and aggression compared to mothers of typically developing children. The study included a sample of 100 mothers, aged between 25 and 45 years, who were the primary caregivers of children diagnosed with various disabilities, including intellectual disabilities, autism spectrum disorder, Down syndrome, and cerebral palsy. Data were collected from Budd's School, special education schools, and a rehabilitation centre.



Measures

Mothers of Sociodemographic Information: A self-designed questionnaire gathered participants' background information, including the mother's demographic details, family structure, the child's age, gender, and time since diagnosis.

Perceived Stress Scale: developed by Cohen et al. (1983), is a 10-item tool used to assess how individuals aged 12 and above perceive and respond to stress. It helps measure the emotional impact of stress-inducing life events through self-evaluation.

The Aggression Questionnaire: Buss & Warren (2000) is a widely used self-report tool that assesses aggression across four scales: Physical Aggression, Verbal Aggression, Anger, and Hostility. Anger links the other forms of aggression, and the tool has demonstrated strong reliability and stability.

Data Analysis

Data were analysed using SPSS version 22. Descriptive statistics summarized participant demographics and variable distributions. A paired samples t-test compared mean stress and aggression scores, while Pearson correlation assessed the relationship between the two variables. Statistical significance was set at $p < 0.05$ with a 95% confidence level.

Result

Table 1: Sociodemographic Information

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Mother Age	100	1.00	4.00	2.7600	1.09286
Marital Status	100	1.00	3.00	1.4200	.69892
Work of Mother	100	1.00	2.00	1.6200	.48783
Types of Family	100	1.00	2.00	1.4600	.50091
Ethnicity	100	1.00	3.00	1.5400	.78393
Educational Background	100	1.00	4.00	2.2400	1.01623



Economic Status	100	1.00	3.00	1.9600	.72363
Caregiving Duration	100	1.00	2.00	1.2600	.44084
Child Gender	100	1.00	2.00	1.7800	.41633
Child Age	100	1.00	4.00	2.2400	.91143
Childbirth Order	100	1.00	3.00	1.3600	.52262
Valid N (listwise)	100				

Note: This included 100 observations of mothers of children with autism.

The sociodemographic characteristics of the 100 mothers of children with disabilities who participated in the study were analysed. The participants' ages were categorized into four groups, with a mean score of 2.76 (SD = 1.09), indicating that most mothers were in the middle age range. A majority of the respondents were married (M = 1.42, SD = 0.70), and 62% were unemployed or full-time caregivers (M = 1.62, SD = 0.49). Regarding family structure, most lived in nuclear families (M = 1.46, SD = 0.50). The sample was ethnically diverse, with the majority belonging to the first coded ethnic group (M = 1.54, SD = 0.78). Educational background showed a mean of 2.24 (SD = 1.02), suggesting that most mothers had completed secondary education. In terms of economic status, the mean score was 1.96 (SD = 0.72), indicating that most participants came from lower to middle-income households. Most mothers had been providing care for less than five years (M = 1.26, SD = 0.44). Regarding the children, slightly more were female (M = 1.78, SD = 0.42), and their ages were mostly in the mid-childhood range (M = 2.24, SD = 0.91). In terms of birth order, the majority of the children were first-born (M = 1.36, SD = 0.52).

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics: Aggression and Stress

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Aggression	100	100.00	380.00	190.9286	66.93332
Stress	100	203.00	256.00	225.0000	19.89416



Note: Aggression and stress scores are based on total responses to 28 and 10 items, respectively. Higher scores indicate greater levels of aggression or stress. N = 100 participants.

The aggression scores, based on 28 questionnaire items, ranged from 100 to 380, with a mean of 190.93 (SD = 66.93). This indicates a moderate level of aggression on average among the mothers, with substantial variation between participants. The total stress scores, based on 10 questionnaire items, ranged from 203 to 256, with a mean of 225.00 (SD = 19.89). This suggests that overall stress levels were relatively high among the respondents, but the distribution was more tightly clustered than for aggression, as reflected by the smaller standard deviation.

Table 3: Correlation between Aggression and Stress

		Aggression	Stress
Aggression	Pearson Correlation	1	.250
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.550
	N	100	
Stress	Pearson Correlation	.250	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.550	
	N	100	

Note: The correlation was positive but not statistically significant ($r = .250$, $p = .550$, $N = 100$).

Table 3 shows the Pearson correlation between aggression and stress among mothers of children with disabilities. The results indicate a positive but weak correlation between aggression and stress, $r(100) = .25$, $p = .550$. However, this relationship was not statistically significant, suggesting that higher levels of stress were not reliably associated with higher levels of aggression in this sample.

Discussion

The study examined stress and aggression levels among mothers of children with disabilities and explored the relationship between these two psychological factors. The sociodemographic profile of the 100 participating mothers highlights key factors influencing their caregiving experiences. Most were middle-aged, married, and either unemployed or full-time caregivers, indicating substantial time devoted to childcare. The majority lived in nuclear families and had completed secondary education, with many



reporting lower to middle-income status. These factors suggest potential limitations in support and resources. Most mothers had been caregiving for less than five years, often for first-born, school-aged children. These circumstances may contribute to elevated stress, especially for those new to caregiving or with limited social and financial support.

The descriptive statistics for aggression and stress among the 100 mothers indicate varying levels of psychological responses. Aggression scores, based on 28 questionnaire items, ranged widely from 100 to 380, with a mean of approximately 190.93 (SD = 66.93). This suggests a moderate level of aggression on average, with considerable individual differences among participants. Stress scores, derived from 10 items, were higher on average, with a mean of 225.00 (SD = 19.89) and a narrower range between 203 and 256. This indicates that stress levels were generally elevated and more consistent across the sample compared to aggression. Mothers of children with disabilities showed moderate aggression levels but consistently high stress. Stress appears to be a more common and uniform experience, while aggression levels vary more across individuals, possibly due to differences in coping or circumstances.

The Pearson correlation analysis revealed a positive but weak relationship between aggression and stress among the mothers, with a correlation coefficient of $r = 0.25$. However, this association was not statistically significant ($p = 0.55$), indicating that within this sample, higher stress levels were not reliably associated with increased aggression. The study indicates that stress alone does not predict aggression in mothers of children with disabilities, suggesting that other factors, like coping skills or social support, may influence this relationship.

Limitations

While this study provides important insights into the psychological experiences of mothers caring for children with disabilities, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the use of a cross-sectional design limits the ability to infer causality between stress and aggression. Second, the use of self-report questionnaires may introduce social desirability or response bias, especially regarding sensitive emotions like aggression. Although a positive correlation was observed between stress and aggression, the lack of statistical significance suggests that other mediating or moderating factors (e.g., coping strategies, social support, mental health status) may influence this relationship and were not explored in the current study.

Conclusion

The study found no statistically significant relationship between stress and aggression among mothers of children with disabilities. This suggests that aggression is influenced by factors beyond stress alone, such



as coping mechanisms and social support. Understanding these complex emotional dynamics is essential for developing effective interventions to support caregivers.

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all participants, specifically mothers of children with autism, before their inclusion in the study.

Data Availability Statement: The data collected for this study involving mothers of children with autism are not publicly available due to the privacy policies and ethical guidelines of Lovely Professional University.

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Conflict of Interest

None

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