

Understanding Stress Mitigation Techniques For Mothers Caring For Visually Challenged Children

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Abstract

Caring for visually impaired children introduces complex emotional, physical, and psychological challenges that significantly impact maternal well-being. This study investigates stress management strategies among 150 mothers of visually challenged children using structured interviews and surveys, focusing on their socio-economic backgrounds, stressors, support systems, and the effectiveness of various coping mechanisms. Findings reveal that the primary sources of stress include concerns over the child's health, emotional demands, financial pressures, and limited support. Family and friends are the most crucial support sources, while professional services are underutilized. Effective coping strategies involve self-care, establishing routines, and seeking emotional support, whereas professional help and task delegation are seen as less effective. An intervention was implemented for 50 mothers, which showed significant improvement in stress management. The study emphasizes the need for tailored support systems to enhance maternal resilience and offers insights into practical approaches to improve their quality of life.

Keywords: Maternal stress,ss Visually challenged children, Strategy, Emotional well-being, Self-care.

INTRODUCTION

Mothers of visually challenged children often experience heightened parenting stress due to factors like reduced emotional interaction, communication difficulties, and strained family dynamics (Ahmadpanah, 2004). Raising a visually challenged child involves unique challenges that impose significant emotional, physical, and psychological demands on mothers, affecting their overall well-being. Effective stress management is crucial for these mothers to provide necessary support and care for their children while maintaining their own health and resilience.

Research highlights the complex nature of the stress these mothers face, driven by the constant need for vigilance, specialized care demands, and the emotional strain of managing their child's condition. Studies show that mothers of visually challenged children experience higher levels of anxiety and depression than those of sighted children (Sen and Yurtsever, 2007; Brezin, 2005), leading to negative self-perceptions and unfavorable feelings toward their children (Gabler, 2013). Therefore, adopting effective coping strategies is essential for their well-being. Key strategies to reduce stress include building support networks, practicing self-care, establishing routines, and accessing resources. Mothers who engage in self-care and seek social support report better mental health outcomes and increased resilience (Marshall et al., 2012).

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To find out the socio economic background of the selected samples.
2. To identify the main stressors experienced by mothers of visually challenged children.
3. To evaluate the support system from family, friends, support groups and professionals.
4. To investigate the coping strategies employed by these mothers.

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

Research Design:

The study employs a cross-sectional survey designed to investigate stress management among mothers of visually challenged children. The research aims to identify the sources of stress, evaluate the effectiveness of various coping strategies, and explore the role of support systems.

Sampling Design:

For the present study, purposive sampling technique from various age groups, educational backgrounds, and employment status was adopted in selecting the sample. Mothers of Visually Challenged children residing in Chennai city alone were purposely selected for the study. The study includes a sample of 150 mothers of visually challenged children for survey and among them 50 mothers were chosen to study the effectiveness of various strategies. The participants were selected from Little Flower Convent School for the Blind and St. Louis school for deaf and the Blind, Chennai. The data has been collected only after getting the willingness to participate in the survey.

Tools Used for the Study and Analysis of Data:

The primary tool for data collection, developed based on existing literature and validated through a pilot study with a small sample of 10 participants. The structured questionnaire with details pertaining towards sources of stress, role of family, friends, support groups, coping strategies and its effectiveness was used to collect the data. Data were analysed using percentage and 't' test. The results are presented below.

Hypothesis: Ho1: There is no significant difference in problem focused strategy, emotional focused strategies, positive thinking strategies and decision making strategies among mothers of visually challenged children before and after the training program is rejected.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results of the study were analysed and discussed under the following headings

- I. Socio economic background of the families
- II. Sources of stress
- III. Role of Support Systems
- IV. Coping Strategies and its Effectiveness
- V. Impact of training programme

I. Socio economic background of the families:

This aspect includes the type of family, number of family members, age, educational level, occupation of family members and family income and is depicted in Table 1.

TABLE 1

Socio Economic background of the families (in percent)

S.No	Particulars	Frequency (N=150)	Percentage
1	Age of the mothers of Visually impaired children		
	21 – 30 years	40	26.7
	31 – 40 years	60	40
	41 – 50 years	50	33.3
2	Educational Level		
	High School	50	33.3
	Undergraduate	70	46.7
	Postgraduate	30	20.0
3	Employment Status of the mothers		
	Employed	80	53.3
	Unemployed	70	46.7
4	Family Income (Annual) (As per Economic Survey, 2019-20)		
	Low Income (Below Rs 70,069)	45	30.0
	Middle Income (Rs 70,137 to Rs 8,45,955)	75	50.0
	High Income (Above Rs 8,46,023)	30	20.0

5	Marital Status		
	Married	100	66.7
	Single	20	13.3
	Divorced/Widow	30	20.0

The study revealed that majority (40 per cent) of the mothers were aged between 31 to 40 years and were predominantly undergraduates (46.7 per cent) with a middle-income background (50 per cent). A majority of the selected mothers were employed (53.3 per cent) and living with husband (66.7 per cent).

II. Sources of Stress for mothers of visually challenged children :

Table 2 summarizes the mothers of visually challenged children face multifaceted stressors, with physical, emotional, financial, and support-related challenges

TABLE 2

Sources of Stress of selected respondents			
S.No	*Stress Factor	Frequency (N=150)	Percentage per cent
1	Physical factors		
	Lack of strength to handle all jobs	143	95.3
	Health issues	130	86.7
	Sleep deprivation	140	93.3
	Increased physical demands	121	80.7
2	Emotional factors		
	Single parenting	50	33.3
	Neglected feeling	120	80.0
	VC Child's tantrums	135	90.0
	Fear of future	141	94.0
	Guilt and self-blame	56	37.3
	Emotional distress of the child	94	62.7
3	Financial factors		
	Poor salary	80	53.3
	Unemployment/ Inability to work	70	46.7
	No financial support from family	100	66.7
	High cost of special services	112	74.7
	Lack of dual income	100	66.7
4	Lack of Support		
	For household chores	139	92.7
	Moral support in child rearing	90	60.0
	Broken family	111	74.7
	Social isolation	121	80.7
5	Child's Health and Development		
	Child's health issues	150	100.0
	Child's development issues	150	100.0
	Behavioural challenges	120	80.0

* multiple responses

The study revealed that primary sources of stress among mothers of visually challenged children (VCC) experience significant stress from multiple sources. Notably, all respondents reported stress due to their child's health issues and developmental issues, highlighting the importance of their children's well-being in their lives. Furthermore, **behavioural challenges** related to child's health and development contribute to stress for 80 per cent of respondents. Managing these challenges requires significant emotional and physical resources, intensifying the overall stress experienced by parents, especially mothers which demands the nature of addressing behavioural issues in children with disabilities (Baker et al. 2003).

Regarding Physical factors majority of the mothers reported, lack of strength to handle all jobs (95.3 per cent) as a major source of stress followed by sleep deprivation (93.3 per cent), health issues (86.7 per cent) and caring for a child often increased physical demands (80.7 per cent).

Regarding emotional factors 94 per cent of the mothers reported fear of child's future followed by

child's tantrums (90 per cent), neglected feelings (80 per cent), emotional distress of the child affects (62.7 percent), guilt and self-blame and single parenting contribute to stress for 37.3 per cent and 33.3 per cent respectively, highlighting internalized blame and the challenges of managing alone. Gupta et al. (2012) reported that single mothers face significant stress due to the dual burden of care giving and financial support, often internalizing guilt, self-blame for their child's condition, fear of the future regarding their child's independence and well-being (Thurston, 2011), substantial stress caused by managing behavioral issues such as tantrums (Emerson et al. 2006) and feel emotionally neglected and unsupported, exacerbating their stress (Sloper and Turner, 1993). Collectively, these studies underscore the critical need for comprehensive support systems to alleviate the emotional burden on these parents.

Financial factors significantly contribute to stress among parents of visually challenged children. **High cost of special services** is the most prominent financial stressor, affecting 74.7 per cent of respondents which highlights the substantial financial burden placed on families needing specialized care and resources (**Sen and Yurtsever, 2007**) followed by **no financial support from family** and **lack of dual income**, both affecting 66.7 per cent of respondents, further exacerbate financial stress. These issues reflect the economic vulnerabilities faced by single-income families and the critical role of extended family support can play in mitigating financial difficulties, as noted by **Brandon (2007)**. **Poor salary** and **unemployment/inability to work** impact 53.3 per cent and 46.7 per cent of respondents, respectively, highlighting the intersection of economic instability and care giving responsibilities, consistent with findings by **Parish et al. (2004)**.

Lack of support is another significant stressor, with household chores being the highest, affecting 92.7 per cent of respondents with immense physical and time demands on parents, a situation exacerbated by insufficient external support (Firkowska-Mankiewicz, 2002). Social isolation, impacting 80.7 per cent of respondents, reflects the emotional toll of reduced social interactions and community engagement, corroborating findings by Kazak and Wilcox (1984) and Beckman, (1991). Broken family structures and lack of moral support in child-rearing, affecting 74.7 per cent and 60 per cent of respondents respectively, highlighting the stress of managing the responsibilities without adequate emotional or familial support.

III. Role of Support Systems.

Table 3 highlights the pivotal role of various support systems in alleviating stress for mothers of visually challenged children (VCC)

TABLE - 3
Role of Support System (In percent)

*Support System	Number of respondents N = 150	Percentage of respondents
Family Support	100	66.7
Friends	80	53.3
Support Groups	70	46.7
Professional Services	60	40.0

* multiple responses

The above Table exhibits that the most significant source of support comes from family, with 66.7 per cent of mothers reporting it as vital. This underscores the importance of familial bonds and the emotional and practical assistance they provide followed by friends (53.3 per cent) highlighting the value of social connections and peer support in managing stress. The mothers reported that support groups (46.7 per cent) offer shared experiences and emotional solidarity. It was also noted that professional services are less frequently utilized, possibly due to a lack of awareness about available guidance. Gupta et al. (2012) report that single mothers experience significant stress due to caregiving and financial responsibilities, highlighting the importance of comprehensive support systems from family and support groups, including professional services, to alleviate their burden (Turner, 1993).

IV. Management Strategies to control stress (Before and After Intervention Program)

The management strategies were provided to fifty mothers of visually impaired children, focusing on various aspects such as problem-focused strategies, emotion-focused strategies, positive-focused strategies, and decision-making strategies. Under the requirement of the study, before and after the strategies were implemented over a three months period, during which the mothers were guided to follow a list of specific interventions. The results showed a significant improvement, with mothers reporting a better ability to identify their problems, reduce overthinking, and effectively manage their stress levels as outlined in Table 4.

Table 4: Management strategies (In Percent)

Management strategies		Before (N=50)	After (N=50)
Problem focused strategies	paring a list of daily activities	0	58
	ng realistic about time frames	70	98
	king time off/short break with regard to the life changes	16	72
	ect commitments very carefully	94	98
	nd-set to Suicide is not the solution and to face the problems	12	78
Emotional focused strategies	tend and balance the problem	39	58
	oritize children and own needs.	18	73
	nage anger and anxiety	4	68
	cept that I don't have to accomplish everything	10	57
	gage directly in things that matter	0	80
Positive Thinking strategies	nquer fear about my child's future	12	69
	reases happiness and self confidence	17	78
	proves Health	13	58
	itive attitude towards negative thoughts	7	64
	olved all activities	7	79
	proved Mental Strength in facing society	0	68
	cepts good sources	20	72
Decision Making strategies	od sleep during night time	18	69
	locating Responsibilities	0	61
	iving Meals with family members together	12	60
	eryday Talking and spending time with children	45	84

Under the requirement of the study regarding problem focused strategies the implementation of these showed significant improvement among the mothers of visually challenged children were ninety eight per cent of the selected respondents being realistic about time frames and selected commitments very carefully each respectively, followed by mind-set to suicide is not the solution and to face the problems (78 per cent), taking time off/short break with regard to the life changes (72 per cent) and preparing a list of daily activities (58 per cent) after intervention.

Regarding emotional focused strategies for mothers of visually challenged children before and after the programme, it was noted that engaging themselves directly in things that matter (from 0 to 80 per cent) followed by prioritizing child's and own needs over non-essential tasks (from 18 to 73 per cent), fear about child's future (from 12 to 69 per cent), pretend and balance the problem (39 to 58 per cent) and accept that I don't have to accomplish everything (from 10 to 57 per cent).

Regarding positive focused strategies for mothers of visually challenged children before and after the programme it was noted that increases happiness and self-confidence (from 17 to 78 per cent) followed by accepts good sources (from 20 to 72 per cent), good sleep during night time (from 18 to 69 per cent), improve mental strength in facing society (0 to 68 percent), positive attitude towards negative thoughts (7 to 64 per cent) and improve health (from 13 to 58 per cent).

Regarding decision focused strategies for mothers of visually challenged children before and after the programme, it was noted that everyday talking and spending time with children (from 45 to 84 per cent) followed by allocating responsibilities (from 0 to 61 per cent) and having meals with family members together (from 12 to 60 per cent).

Overall, the study proves that with proper interventions focusing on different aspects of stress management—problem-solving, emotional regulation, positive thinking, and decision-making—mothers of visually challenged children can significantly improve their ability to cope with stress. This highlights the need for tailored support systems and targeted interventions to enhance maternal resilience, well-being, and the overall quality of life for these mothers and their families.

5. Impact of training on intervention programme acquired by the selected mothers of children with visual impairment T test (before and after)

The impact of training on intervention programs for mothers of children with visual impairment was analyzed through a t-test comparing pre-training and post-training scores across various strategies is presented in Table 5.

Table 5 impact of training on intervention program acquired by the selected mothers of children

Impact of training	Mean	N	Std.	Std.	Df	t	Sig. (2-
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Programme				Deviation	Error Mean			tailed)
Problem focused strategies	Before	0.64	50	0.72	0.10	49	-52.518	0.000
	After	6.00	50	0.00	0.00			
Emotional focused strategies	Before	1.10	50	0.89	0.13	49	47.066	0.000
	After	7.00	50	0.00	0.00			
Positive Thinking strategies	Before	0.38	50	0.57	0.08	49	157.249	0.000
	After	13.00	50	0.00	0.00			
Decision making strategies	Before	0.12	50	0.44	0.06	49	128.037	0.000
	After	8.00	50	0.00	0.00			

The ‘t’ value found from the analysis of the mean score of before and after stress management programme among the mothers of visually impaired children is -52.515 for problem focused strategies, 47.066 for emotional focused strategies, 152.249 for positive thinking strategies and 128.037 for decision making strategies. It was also revealed that “p” value or significant value is 0.000 ($p < 0.05$) indicates that the training program had a significant impact on the use of problem-focused strategies, emotional-focused strategies, positive thinking strategies, and decision-making strategies among the selected mothers of visually impaired children. There exists a significant difference between the mean scores of before and after intervention programme at a 5 per cent level of significance rejecting the null hypothesis. Hence the null hypothesis “**H₀₁: There is no significant difference in problem focused strategy, emotional focused strategies, positive thinking strategies and decision making strategies among mothers of visually challenged children before and after the training program is rejected**”

CONCLUSION

The study reveals that mothers of visually challenged children face significant stress from various sources, including their child's health, physical and emotional demands, financial pressures, and lack of support. Predominantly, these mothers are aged between 31 to 40 years, with an undergraduate education and a middle-income background. Employment and marital status further influence their stress levels, with most mothers employed and living with their husbands. Child health issues and developmental challenges are primary stressors, requiring considerable emotional and physical resources. Physical factors such as lack of strength, sleep deprivation, and health issues further compound their stress, necessitating comprehensive physical coping strategies.

Emotional factors, including fear of the child's future, child's tantrums, neglected feelings, and guilt, significantly impact these mothers. Financial pressures from high costs of special services, loss of dual income, and poor salary further strain these families. Lack of support, both practical and emotional, is a critical issue. Building a support network, utilizing respite care, and advocating for services are crucial strategies to alleviate this stress. Child health and development-focused strategies, such as early intervention programs and professional collaboration, are universally adopted and highly effective, emphasizing the importance of these interventions in improving developmental outcomes. Overall, the study underscores the multifaceted challenges faced by mothers of visually challenged children and the need for a combination of emotional, physical, financial, and practical support to manage their stress effectively.

FURTHER STUDY

It would be more helpful to study the role of support systems, including family, friends, support groups and professional services, in alleviating stress for parents of visually challenged children. It explores how different support systems contribute to parental coping and well-being.

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