



Parents of Boys with Physical Disabilities: Their Level of Anxiety and Contentment with Life

Maryam Khurshid¹ Hafsah Riaz² Saima Waqar³ Waqas Ahmed⁴ Aamna Shahid⁵

Abstract: When parents learn they are pregnant, they typically envision a healthy, fully grown child with a promising future. However, all the joy and satisfaction of having a kid turns into despair and sorrow when the parents are informed later in the pregnancy that the child is abnormal. The birth of a child with physical and mental disabilities is extremely difficult and interferes with the family's regular activities. Boys who are physically disabled from birth or due to a family injury face significant obstacles for their parents and siblings. The primary goal of the study was to examine the connection between life satisfaction and anxiety among parents of boys with physical disabilities. Sixty parents of male children with physical disabilities from the Nishtar Hospital in Multan made up the sample. Data was gathered using the snowball sampling approach. Mothers and dads of children with physical disabilities were also compared. Study factors are measured using the Anxiety and Satisfaction with Life Scale. The results of the study show that anxiety and life satisfaction are significantly correlated negatively. Furthermore, among parents of boys with physical disabilities, there is a notable gender difference in worry and life satisfaction.

Key Words: Anxiety, Life Satisfaction, Father and Mother of Physically Handicapped Boys

Introduction

Regular physical activity in children with physical disabilities is important for their future health and well-being. Current health guidelines recommend that children engage in 60 minutes or more of physical activity daily (World Health Organisation, 2013). A male child with physical disability by birth or by some injury in a family may face stressful experiences for the parents and siblings throughout life. The delivery of a child with a physical disability, particularly a male child, can be very difficult for the family, particularly for the parents' level of life satisfaction. The entire family eventually experienced psychological distress due to the impairment brought on by an illness or accident. Regardless of the type of condition, having a disabled child causes challenges for the family. These challenges mainly include the child's handicap, relationships with family and the social environment, financial status, lifestyle, educational background, and mental health. Studies have shown that mothers play a more active role, deal with more psychological issues, and put in more effort to resolve all of these challenges. Mothers and fathers have different expectations and experiences when raising a disabled child. Parents of children with severe physical disabilities, particularly those of male children, may face a variety of difficulties that can lead to extreme psychological strain. Most people with physical disabilities in South Asia, particularly in Pakistan, are typically taken care of by their families. Because of this, their parents are more susceptible to bodily worry, low life satisfaction, and emotional issues; as a result, the birth of a disabled child also causes fluctuations in their personal domestic lives. Researchers in line with research by Hastings and Johnson (2001) found no difference

¹ Lecturer, Department of Psychology, International Islamic University, Islamabad, Pakistan.
Email: msmaryamkhurshid@gmail.com

² Lecturer, Department of Psychology, International Islamic University, Islamabad, Pakistan.
Email: hafsah.riaz@iiu.edu.pk

³ Psychologist, National Institute of Rehabilitation Medicine, Islamabad, Pakistan.
Email: samiwaqar23@gmail.com

⁴ MS, Department of Psychology, International Islamic University, Islamabad, Pakistan.
Email: aaminah.shahid79@gmail.com

⁵ PhD, Department of Psychology, International Islamic University, Islamabad, Pakistan.
Email: waqas.ahmad@gmail.com

in stress levels between parents of children with physical disability and those who participated in intensive home-based behavioural intervention for their young child. Few studies have examined how parents are affected by the severity of ABA. In contrast to our results, earlier research by Schwichtenberg and Poehlmann (2007) revealed that mothers of children reported higher levels of depression symptoms, and mothers who were more involved in their child's physical disability intervention program reported higher levels of personal stress.

Literatures suggest that the parents of disabled children often have symptoms of anxiety. Literatures also suggest that there are differences in life satisfaction-related issues between both parents of children with developmental disabilities, as both suffer from family social support or family functioning. Paternal and maternal life satisfaction were mostly linked with aspects of family functioning as perceived by themselves and their spouses Eikeseth et al., (2015). Anxiety is common in parents, especially in mothers of boys with physical disability (Dyson, 2010). Caring for a boy with disabilities is a unique situation that commonly results in higher levels of parenting anxiety. Parental perception of a child as 'difficult' is related to poor maternal psychological strength. It was found that the anxiety among parents of physically problematic boys was much higher and varied from that of their normal counterparts.

Mothers and fathers of boys with physical disabilities associate hedonic affect with internalised roles. Life satisfaction is a notion that describes affect in everyday life. Self-reported life satisfaction measures how satisfied a person is with a certain aspect of life and can be used as a social indicator. A physically disabled boy's family faces a number of difficulties, including low life satisfaction, recurrent anxiety, emotional and physical crises, disrupted plans, interpersonal family conflicts, and, last but not least, rising expenses. Today, researchers are very interested in examining how physically disabled boys' anxiety and life satisfaction affect their parents and other family members, particularly their siblings. According to Drogomyretska et al. (2020), having a son with a physical disability causes parents to experience a variety of mental and psychological concerns as well as severe emotional issues like anxiety and low life satisfaction. Interactive family concerns and, finally, the rising costs. Similar to other parts of Asia, particularly Pakistan, a male child serves as a symbol of family support.

The present study is an attempt to highlight life satisfaction among parents due to the difficult and challenging role of parenting and a high level of anxiety because of their physically disabled son. In this connection, the current study may provide the basis for parents and family counselling for parents of disabled male children. For the present study, hypotheses are formulated on the basis of the previous literature review:

Methodology

Research Design

A cross-sectional survey design was used for this study.

Hypothesis

- ▶ There is an inverse relationship between anxiety and life satisfaction among parents of physically handicapped boys.
- ▶ Mothers show high scores on anxiety as compared to fathers of physically handicapped boys.
- ▶ Mothers show low scores on life satisfaction as compared to fathers of physically handicapped boys.

Sample

Using the snowball sampling technique, 60 parents of boys with physical disabilities were chosen from Nishtar Hospital in Multan. The parents were between the ages of 20 and 45. Boys with physical disabilities between the ages of two and thirteen were chosen for the current study, and their parents are attending for both psychological and physical therapy. Mothers and fathers of boys who are physically disabled by birth or injury were required for inclusion.

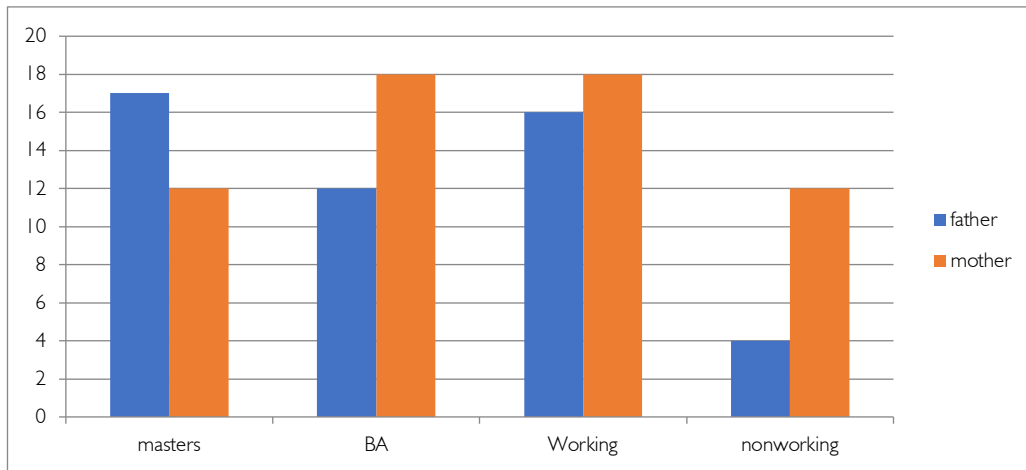
Figure 1

Figure 1 shows a graphical representation of the father's and mother's education and working status.

Research Instruments

The following instruments, along with a demographic data sheet, were used.

Beck Anxiety Inventory (BAI): BAI was used for the present study to assess parents' anxiety about physically handicapped boys. It has 21 self-report items to measure anxiety symptoms on a 4-point Likert-type scale (Beck, 1993).

The Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS): It was developed by Diener et al. (1985) and was used to assess the samples' satisfaction with their lives. This is a 7-point Likert scale with five items. The scoring range is from 31 to 35

Procedure

The researcher contacted the study's participants from Psychology and Physiotherapy department of Rehabilitation center Islamabad. Mothers and fathers of boys with physical disabilities, who were willing, become the part of present research, participated in this study. After receiving consent from the relevant Rehabilitation center authorities, the data collection process began. The Mothers and fathers of boys with physical disabilities were given a debriefing about the research and asked for their verbal approval. They were asked to give honest answers for the fulfilment of the research.

Ethical Consideration

Ethical approval was obtained from the Ethical Review Board, Department of Psychology, IIUI, and the Ethics Committee of the International Islamic University, Islamabad. In addition, all necessary information was provided to the participants, and a written declaration of consent was taken, with full assurance of privacy and confidentiality throughout the process and for the collected data. To ensure confidentiality, the data collected were not shared with anyone, and the names of the participants were not mentioned anywhere in the report or data file.

Results

Table 1

Alpha Reliability Coefficient for Anxiety and Life Satisfaction Scales (N = 60)

Scale	No of Items	α
Anxiety	21	.75
Life Satisfaction Scale	5	.72

Table 1 shows Alpha Reliability for anxiety and life satisfaction Scales. Internal consistency of both scales was satisfactory.

Table 2*Correlation between Anxiety and Life Satisfaction Scales among Parents of Physically Handicapped Boys (N = 60)*

	Anxiety	p
Life satisfaction	-.71	.01

Table 2 represents a significant negative relationship between anxiety and life satisfaction. It shows that if anxiety is high, then life satisfaction is low among fathers and mothers of physically handicapped boys.

Table 3*Mean, Standard Deviation, and t-Values for Anxiety and Life Satisfaction between Father and Mother of Physically Handicapped Boys*

Scale	Fathers (32)		Mothers (28)		t(df)	p	Cohen's d
	M	SD	M	SD			
Anxiety	13.09	3.04	15.73	4.09	.46(58)	.01	0.732
Life satisfaction	15.93	4.10	13.45	3.16	.67(58)	.02	0.677

The result in Table 3 shows a significant difference in anxiety and life satisfaction between fathers and mothers of physically handicapped boys. Mother shows a significant increase in anxiety and a decrease in life satisfaction as compared to fathers.

Discussion

In their day-to-day lives, parents of boys with physical disabilities face a variety of challenges. Nurturing young kids is a difficult and exhausting task, particularly for guys with physical disabilities. Because of their particular demands and psychological distress, these issues may proliferate numerous times. With the advent of a baby boy with a disability, fathers and mothers begin to experience high levels of anxiety and low levels of life satisfaction, which may worsen over time. The increased medical, educational, and rehabilitative needs of these kids may also result in higher costs during the developing stage, which could be another cause of worry.

The current study's findings point to a relationship between life satisfaction and anxiety in parents of male children with physical disabilities. The current findings are corroborated by previous research in this area. For example, a study found that parents of children with developmental disabilities experience anxiety, fatigue, and low life satisfaction in addition to impaired physical functioning that affects their social and psychological adjustment (Cohen & Williamson, 2008). Parents with children with mental disabilities experience stress, worry, and life satisfaction issues that affect their psychological adjustment and psychological adaptation. After such a once-in-a-lifetime occurrence, they hardly feel accustomed to life. As a result, these parents' quality of life may also be affected. This study also examined the impact of gender on life satisfaction and anxiety levels among parents of male children with physical disabilities. The present results were consistent with this idea. According to the study, both fathers and mothers had higher levels of life satisfaction; however, because of the differences in their daily activities and responsibilities, their perceptions of life satisfaction differed.

According to Koller et al. (2014), fathers typically bear the financial and social burden while moms are overburdened by their everyday responsibilities. Several other studies (Weiss, 2002; Zaidman-Zait et al., 2017) have shown how informal social support protects parents' mental health when they have disabled children. Our findings also showed that among different types of informal support, friends' support was more effective in helping parents of autistic children manage stress and mental health issues, which is consistent with previous research (Ekas et al., 2010). In a previous study, An et al. (2018) discovered that informal social network applications were the main source of emotional, social, and informational support for parents of children with ASD in Kazakhstan. Many of these parents have become close friends, and there is a strong sense of solidarity and camaraderie among them. Parents of such unusual children must change their perceptions of perfection and handicap, become more educated and empowered, and learn how to love

their special daughters without conditions. Furthermore, it is important to recognise the enormous moral obligation of raising a daughter. Children exhibit a wide range of behaviors, skills, and manners that they picked up from their parents. If a child is raised by happy and healthy parents, they may learn how to live a complete and healthy life in society. Parents having sons with special needs must view them as children first, rather than focusing on their disabilities.

Conclusion

The study's findings supported the idea that anxiety and life satisfaction are related, but that gender has no bearing because both parents—mother and father—experience high levels of worry and low levels of life satisfaction. The results of this study may be useful for therapeutic, counselling, and rehabilitation services. Involving the parents and other family members of boys with disabilities in their rehabilitation plans has been a guiding principle for counsellors and psychologists.

Recommendations

Recommendations presented in the following lines can be utilised to enrich parental coping strategies for anxiety-free upbringing of physically handicapped boys in their home.

1. Self-control abilities Training will equip parents with useful coping mechanisms to handle challenging circumstances and prepare them for the new responsibilities involved in raising special needs children.
2. This study may serve as a springboard for policymakers to provide counselling services that cater to the requirements of parents of challenged children and help them manage and adapt to a variety of social and psychological demands.

References

- An, S., Chan, C. K., & Kaukenova, B. (2020). Families in transition: Parental perspectives of support and services for children with autism in Kazakhstan. *International Journal of Disability, Development and Education*, 67(1), 28–44. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1034912X.2018.1499879>
- Beck, A. T., Epstein, N., Brown, G., & Steer, R. (1993). Beck Anxiety Inventory. *Journal of consulting and clinical psychology*. <https://doi.org/10.1037/t02025-000>
- Cohen, S., & Williamson, G. (2008). Perceived stress in a probability sample of the US. In S. Spacapan & S. Oskamp (Eds.), *The social psychology of health: claremont symposium on applied social psychology*.
- Diener, E., Emmons, R. A., Larsen, R. J., & Griffin, S. (1985). The Satisfaction with Life Scale. *Journal of personality assessment*, 49(1), 71–75. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327752jpa4901_13
- Drogomyretska, K., Fox, R., & Colbert, D. (2020). Brief report: Stress and perceived social support in parents of children with ASD. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 50(11), 4176–4182. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-020-04455-x>
- Dyson, L. L. (1997). Fathers and mothers of school-age children with developmental disabilities: parental stress, family functioning, and social support. *American Journal of Mental Retardation: AJMR*, 102(3), 267–279. [https://doi.org/10.1352/0895-8017\(1997\)102<0267:FAMOSC>2.0.CO;2](https://doi.org/10.1352/0895-8017(1997)102<0267:FAMOSC>2.0.CO;2)
- Eikeseth, S., Klintwall, L., Hayward, D., & Gale, C. (2015). Stress in parents of children with autism participating in early and intensive behavioral intervention. *European Journal of Behavior Analysis*, 16(1), 112–120. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15021149.2015.1066566>
- Ekas, N. V., Lickenbrock, D. M., & Whitman, T. L. (2010). Optimism, social support, and well-being in mothers of children with autism spectrum disorder. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 40(10), 1274–1284. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-010-0986-y>
- Gallagher, S., Phillips, A. C., Oliver, C., & Carroll, D. (2008). Predictors of psychological morbidity in parents of children with intellectual disabilities. *Journal of Pediatric Psychology*, 33(10), 1129–1136. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jpepsy/jsn040>
- Gohel, M., Mukherjee, S., & Choudhary, S. K. (2011). Psychosocial impact on the parents of mentally retarded children in Anand District. *Healthline*, 2(2), 62. https://www.iapsmgc.org/index_pdf/50.pdf
- Hastings, R. P., & Johnson, E. (2001). Stress in UK families conducting intensive home-based behavioral intervention for their young child with autism. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 31(3), 327–336. <https://doi.org/10.1023/a:1010799320795>
- Heron, K. (2003). Special Children, Challenged Parents: The struggles and Rewards of Raising a Child with a Disability. *Education & Treatment of Children*.
- Koller, H., Richardson, S. A., & Katz, M. (1992). Families of children with mental retardation: comprehensive view from an epidemiologic perspective. *American Journal of Mental Retardation: AJMR*, 97(3), 315–332.
- Schwichtenberg, A., & Poehlmann, J. (2007). Applied behaviour analysis: does intervention intensity relate to family stressors and maternal well-being? *Journal of Intellectual Disability Research: JIDR*, 51(Pt 8), 598–605. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2788.2006.00940.x>
- Vitaliano, P. P., Zhang, J., & Scanlan, J. M. (2003). Is caregiving hazardous to one's physical health? A meta-analysis. *Psychological Bulletin*, 129(6), 946–972. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.129.6.946>
- Weiss, M. J. (2002). Hardiness and social support as predictors of stress in mothers of typical children, children with autism, and children with mental retardation. *Autism*, 6, 115–130. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362361302006001009>
- World Health Organization. (2003). *Health and development through physical activity and sport* (No. WHO/NMH/NPH/PAH/03.2). World Health Organization.
- Zaidman-Zait, A., Mirenda, P., Duku, E., Vaillancourt, T., Smith, I. M., Szatmari, P., Bryson, S., Fombonne, E., Volden, J., Waddell, C., Zwaigenbaum, L., Georgiades, S., Bennett, T., Elsabaggh, M., & Thompson, A. (2017). Impact of personal and social resources on parenting stress in mothers of children with autism spectrum disorder. *Autism: The International Journal of Research and Practice*, 21(2), 155–166. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362361316633033>

