

A Comparative Study of Depression and Anxiety of the Mothers of Disabled Children and Ways of Their Cognitive Emotion Regulation

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Abstract

The present study had an objective to find out the level of depression and anxiety of the mothers of disabled children and ways of their cognitive emotion regulation. 20 mothers who have disabled child were chosen for fulfilling the objective. State Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI), Beck Depression Inventory (BDI) and Cognitive Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (CERQ), were administered on them. These tests were also administered on the control group consisting 20 mothers who have normal child. Results indicate that the mothers having disabled child have greater level of Anxiety and Depression. It was also found that the mothers of disabled child are low in the ways of Cognitive Emotion Regulation like Positive Reappraisal, Positive Refocusing, Putting into Perspective and Refocus on Planning.

KEYWORDS: Disabled children, Anxiety, Depression, Cognitive Emotion Regulation.

Depression refers to a low mood state leading to minimum activity, which affects an individual's thought, feelings and sense of well being. Hopelessness and helplessness, guilt, restlessness and worthlessness- are the common feeling experienced by depressed people. Focusing on negative feelings, overpowering stress, marital and family problem, death of a loved one- all can contribute to depression. Activities which were once satisfying may now lose its importance; overeating or loss of appetite may be inevitable accompanying with loss of energy. Excessive sleeping, wakefulness or attempts to suicide may be seen. Marika(1999) found that mothers of disabled children have significantly more depressive symptoms than mothers of normal children. Studies by Olsson and Hyang(2001), Singer and Floyd(2006),- indicated the higher level of depression in mothers of disabled children in comparison to mothers of normal children. Motamedi (2007) has also found that the stress of child's disability shows itself in the form of depression, and causes the mother's performance to drop.

Anxiety may be referred to an inner unpleasant state of turmoil, often accompanied by somatic complains like poor concentration, muscle tension and restlessness. A situation which is stressful for a person to provoke anxiety, may seems to be apparently normal to another. Lack of social support, history of mental illness(personal of family), relationship dilemma , stressful life events like having a disabled child- all may lead to experience of anxiety. Irrational fear and worry may accompany feeling of apprehension or anticipating the worse. Irritability, headache, shortness of breath or sweating also go along with the primary symptoms. Hastings (2003) has found higher level of anxiety in mothers of disabled children than their fathers. Bromley et al (2004) has also indicated the level of distress among parents of disabled children.

In general, emotion regulation can be understood as "all the extrinsic and intrinsic processes responsible for monitoring, evaluating and modifying emotional reactions

especially their intensive and temporal features, to accomplish one's goals"(Thompson 1994). The regulation of emotions through cognitions is inextricably associated with human life and helps to control emotions after the experience of stressful events.

Cognitive emotion regulation refers to the conscious, cognitive strategies of handling the inflow of emotionally arousing information (Garnefski et al, 2001;Thompson, 1991). Cognitive processes may help us to regulate or emotions, especially negative, and prevent us from getting inundated by them. Morgan et al (2010) have reported that mothers of disabled children often use self blame as a coping strategy. It was also reported that acceptance, positive refocusing on planning and catastrophizing to a high level related to increased stress cross sectional and positive reappraisal was related to decreased stress. Accepting and catastrophizing were related to increase stress and positive reappraisal was related to decrease stress prospectively in parents of disabled children. Garnefski et al(2001) also reported that use of acceptance, rumination, positive refocusing, refocusing on planning, and catastrophizing to a greater extent by mothers of disabled children leads to more stress, whereas using positive reappraisal more often was related to less stress. Prospectively, acceptance and catastrophizing were related to more stress, whereas positive reappraisal was related to less stress.

Keeping this backdrop in mind, the present project was an attempt to find out whether the mothers having disabled children experience greater level of anxiety and depression than mothers of normal children. This project also tried to find out whether there is a difference in cognitive emotion regulation of mothers having disabled children than the mothers of normal children.

Methodology:

Sample - A group (Group A) of 20 mothers of disabled children were selected and a group (Group B) of 20 mothers of normal children were selected purposively as subjects to fulfill the aim of the present project. The educational level of the participants were at least 10th grade and they were free from any mental or physical disability. All the participants were married (divorced or widow women were not included in the study), unemployed and belong to lower socio economic status.

Tools used-

1) State Trait Anxiety Inventory (Speilberger et al, 1983)-The State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI) is a psychological inventory based on a 4-point Likert scale and consists of 40 questions on a self-report basis. The STAI measures two types of anxiety - state anxiety, or anxiety about an event, and trait anxiety, or anxiety level as a personal characteristic. The STAI measures two types of anxiety - state anxiety, or anxiety about an event, and trait anxiety, or anxiety level as a personal characteristic. For the present project only the Trait anxiety of the subjects were assessed.

2) Beck Depression Inventory (Beck et al, 1961)-is a 21-question multiple-choice self-report inventory, one of the most widely used instruments for measuring the severity of depression.

3) Cognitive Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (Garnefski et al, 2001) – It is a multidimensional questionnaire constructed in order to identify the cognitive emotion regulation strategies. It measures nine different coping strategies namely Self Blame,

Acceptance, Focus on Thought, Positive Refocusing, Refocus on Planning, Positive Reappraisal, Putting into Perspective, Catastrophizing, and Blaming Others.

Result and Discussion-

Concerning the objectives of the present project Mean, SD and ‘t’ test has been computed to discover whether there are in difference in Anxiety, Depression and ways of Cognitive Emotion Regulation of mothers having disabled children than mothers having normal children.

TABLE 1: Mean and SD of different variables of Group A(mothers of disable children) and Group B(mothers of normal children)

| Variable | | Mean | SD | |
|------------------------------|--------------------------|---------|-------|------|
| Trait anxiety | Group A | 45.70 | 5.40 | |
| | Group B | 39.65 | 4.71 | |
| Depression | Group A | 22.60 | 8.01 | |
| | Group B | 12.60 | 1.84 | |
| Cognitive Emotion Regulation | Self blame | Group A | 12.46 | 3.36 |
| | | Group B | 13.95 | 2.22 |
| | Acceptance | Group A | 11.60 | 3.15 |
| | | Group B | 13.45 | 2.23 |
| | Focus on thought | Group A | 12 | 3.02 |
| | | Group B | 12.61 | 1.66 |
| | Positive refocusing | Group A | 10.15 | 2.90 |
| | | Group B | 14.55 | 2.11 |
| | Refocus on planning | Group A | 12.18 | 3.48 |
| | | Group B | 14.65 | 1.73 |
| | Positive reappraisal | Group A | 10.65 | 2.12 |
| | | Group B | 14.15 | 2.00 |
| | Putting into perspective | Group A | 10.18 | 2.45 |
| | | Group B | 12.6 | 1.71 |
| | catastrophizing | Group A | 11.85 | 2.30 |
| | | Group B | 11.85 | 1.42 |
| Blaming others | Group A | 10.40 | 2.91 | |
| | Group B | 13.20 | 2.03 | |

Table 2: Mean difference in different variables of Group A and Group B

| Variables | | Mean | t value | Significance level | |
|------------------------------|------------|---------|---------|--------------------|-----------------|
| Trait Anxiety | Group A | 45.70 | 5.35 | .000 | |
| | Group B | 39.65 | | | |
| Depression | Group A | 22.60 | 5.437 | .000 | |
| | Group B | 12.60 | | | |
| Cognitive Emotion Regulation | Self blame | Group A | 12.46 | 1.652 | Not significant |
| | | Group B | 13.95 | | |
| | Acceptance | Group A | 11.60 | 2.14 | 0.04 |

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|--|--------------------------|---------|-------|------|-----------------|
| | | Group B | 13.45 | | |
| | Focus on thought | Group A | 12 | .77 | Not significant |
| | | Group B | 12.61 | | |
| | Positive refocusing | Group A | 10.15 | 5.47 | .000 |
| | | Group B | 14.55 | | |
| | Refocus on planning | Group A | 12.18 | 2.87 | .01 |
| | | Group B | 14.65 | | |
| | Positive reappraisal | Group A | 10.65 | 5.31 | .000 |
| | | Group B | 14.15 | | |
| | Putting into perspective | Group A | 10.18 | 3.61 | .001 |
| | | Group B | 12.6 | | |
| | Catastrophizing | Group A | 11.85 | 0 | Not significant |
| | | Group B | 11.85 | | |
| | Blaming others | Group A | 10.40 | 3.47 | .001 |
| | | Group B | 13.20 | | |

In the present study it is found that depression level of Group A(disabled children's mother) and Group B (normal children's mother) are significantly different, which shows that the disabled condition of their child makes them sad most of the time and sometimes they feel discouraged about their future than they used to. It can be assumed that due to their state of mind they get very little pleasure from the things which they used to enjoy earlier and feel guilty most of the time. The mothers of disabled children gets irritated, have appetite problem, feels worthlessness, gets fatigued, and sometimes have suicidal thoughts which makes them depressed. Which also supports the previous study (Marika,1999) that significant differences in depression symptoms between the disabled and control parent group were found in most symptoms and parents in the control group were significantly more happy, glad, satisfied, proud, grateful, happy for their child, pleased and hopeful.

Research (Mankowski, 2007)has shown elevated mood, anxiety, and stress in mothers of children with developmental disabilities. In the present study it has also been found that the level of anxiety of the mothers having disabled children is significantly higher than the mothers of normal children- also supports the previous findings that due to the presence of a lifelong stressful factor, that is the presence of a disable offspring, has increased the level of anxiety in the participants of group A. Also it can be said that the lower socio economic status of these mothers may play a significant role in their life as if they want a better treatment for their children then they face economic problems, which grows their anxiety level.

When experiencing a negative life event, we may be inclined to have thoughts of blaming ourselves or we may, instead, blame others. We may dwell on our feelings by ruminating or we may try to accept or positively reappraise the situation. From the present study in cognitive emotion regulation, the data shows that the mean and SD of self blame is lower in Group A than Group B which indicates that the mothers of disabled children does not feel that they are the only one to blame for the condition of their children and does not feel that they are the one who is responsible for what has happened , due to which they can tolerate the blames which they face from their surroundings in the society. In the acceptance variable of cognitive emotion regulation the mean score of the mothers of group A is less than the group B as they may do not

think that they have to accept what has happened and the whole situation. May be they have a feeling of hope that they can change the situation of their children and their own life.

Present study indicates that the mothers of disable children are low in their positive refocusing than the mother of normal children. It can be easily assumed that the presence of an overwhelming and lifelong stressful factor occupies them so much , which increases their level of depression ,that they could spend limited time on thinking about other positive aspects of life. This finding has been supported by Kumar (2015). The mothers of disable children are low in their refocus on planning. In the past decades, people (especially of those belonging to lower socioeconomic status) had may misconception about the causes of mental disability. Today the scenario has been changed. Due to education and different awareness campaign of the government, people nowadays are becoming more aware. But the knowledge or fact that disability is congenial and although some of them could be helped to improve their situation, but no one can be cured and have a normal life- may be this awareness is limiting the participants of group A about thinking the steps to deal with this stressful factor.

Positive reappraisal means thinking or attaching positive meaning to the event in terms of personal growth. When someone commits a mistake by himself and has to pay a cost for this- he may positively reappraise the situation as it has given him a lesson and he could be more careful in future. But cases like having a disabled child, which is no fault of their own, and where also nothing could be gained in terms of personal growth- have lowered the scores of the participants of Group A. A lower score in the domain of putting into perspective which means thoughts of playing down the seriousness of the event when compared to other events, by mothers of disable children may be indicative of their adaptive defense mechanism in terms of denying the seriousness of the situation. Hastings et al (2005) also reported about this kind of denial coping. Finally a low score by the mother of the disabled children in blaming other may indicate that they feel guilty and assume at least some responsibility for this negative stressful factor of their life.

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