**A STUDY ON THE PSYCHO-SOCIAL PROBLEMS FACED BY PARENTS OF DIFFERENTLY ABLED CHILDREN DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

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**Abstract**

Current Covid-19 pandemic has disrupted life in every corner of the world and will likely affect those children with pre-existing disabilities. About 40% of differently abled students are planning to drop out of the schools because of difficulties they are facing in online education. The entire education system has shifted to online, which is not compatible with disabled children. The main objectives of this study are to study about the psychological, social and financial problems faced by the parents of differently abled children, to study about the disabilities in children and mental health status of the respondents. The research design refers to the overall strategy that you choose to integrate the different components of the study in coherent and logical way, thereby, ensuring you will effectively address the research problem; it constitutes the blueprint for the collection, measurement and analysis of data. The researcher used purposive sampling for the research study. 6o samples were selected for this study. The researcher identified that, 40% of the respondents have child with other disabilities. The researcher opined that 34% of the respondents always felt anger when handling behavioural problems of child because the burden of stress is great for parents of those with special needs. Majority of the respondents are happy to take care of their disable children even though they are losing sleep at night. Most of the parents have bonding with their children. That brings hope happiness in their life.

**Keywords:** Disability, Social Isolation, Anxiety, Stress, Psychological, Financial

**Introduction**

Current Covid-19 pandemic has disrupted life in every corner of the world and will likely affect those children with pre-existing disabilities. The social distancing measures implemented by many countries have caused social isolation among children and had resulted in increased anxiety, stress and relapse of pre-existing issues. The world suddenly underwent a major and abrupt change with the advent of Covid-19, a virus outbreak that was termed as a pandemic y the World Health Organisation in March 2020. Children with developmental disabilities are likely to be even more vulnerable to the negative mental health consequences of the pandemic as they may have limitations in understanding the rationale for pandemic-related changes such as disruptions to routine and school closure. Innovations are required in the provision of service delivery to these children and their parents. A system of online clinics and volunteer-based psychological interventions should be set up as an immediate priority to mitigate the effects of Covid-19 on children with mental health issues.

The better the mental health of the caregiver, the better the care will be provided. During the outbreak of Covid-19, a significant increase in depression and anxiety symptoms was recorded, with a high prevalence of depressive symptoms among caregivers of CWD. Families of children with disabilities suffered mental and parenting stress which influenced their state of anxiety, this might be related to that parents need to spend more time and efforts to take care of their children.

**Review of Literature**

According to **Dalia Zahaika, Diana Daraweesh, Sondos Shqerat** in the article “Challenges facing family caregivers of children with disabilities during Covid-19 pandemic”. Covid-19 has caused heavy losses around the world, according to the World Health Organization, this virus is a causative agent of a disease that affects humans and may lead to mild and different symptoms from one person to another. Symptoms may appear and may not appear, so everyone is advised to take precautions and preventive measures such as physical and social distancing and wearing mask. The pandemic led to great changes in all aspects of life which affected all people especially vulnerable groups such as elderly, patients with chronic diseases and persons with disabilities and their families.

**Lakshmi and Anita** conducted a study on “Family cohesion and adaptability among couples with differently abled kids in special schools. Study used simple random sampling to collect 50 respondents. Self- prepared questionnaire was used to collect the data constructed and family adaptability and cohesion evaluation scale was also administered to study the same. The results revealed that all respondents were worried about their children’s future. Half of the respondents were always burdened by their children. Half of the respondent’s social life was not frequently limited, but to some extent they were relaxed. Family cohesion revealed that 60% had good family cohesion and 40% of the respondents had poor family cohesion.

**Research Methodology**

The specific objectives of this study are to study the psycho-social problems faced by the parents of differently abled children, to study the financial problems of parents of differently abled children, to study about the disabilities in children and to study the mental status of respondent. The researcher used purposive sampling for the research study. 60 parents were selected for the study, those who are residing near Palakkad municipality.

**Results**

Most of the respondents were in the category of 50-60 age and from rural areas.86% of the respondents are living in a nuclear family. 72% of the respondents are worried about their child’s future and career due to the child’s disability. But half of the respondents never felt hopelessness when they are taking care of the children. Some of the respondents believed that the society has negative attitude towards disabled children. 56% of the respondents reported that their children have occupational difficulties and they have faced adjustment issues within family circle because the family members are not accepting the child. 72 % of the respondents stated that they are spending lot of money for their child’s treatment and other facilities. More than half of the respondents stated that the reason for disability is birth complications.34 % of the respondents always felt anger when handling behavioural problems of child because the burden of stress is great for parents of those with special needs. Majority of the respondents opined that their children suffering with multiple disabilities. So, their parents felt sadness whenever they are taking care of their children.

**TABLE NO. 1 FEEL STRESSED WHILE HANDLING THE CHILD**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Particulars** | **Frequency** | **Percentage** |
| Always | 12 | 20 |
| Often | 12 | 20 |
| Sometimes | 11 | 18 |
| Seldom | 4 | 7 |
| Never | 21 | 35 |
| Total | 60 | 100 |

The above table shows that the stress felt while handling the child. In this table 35% of the respondents never felt stress at all.20 % of the respondents always and often felt stress. 18% of the respondents sometimes felt stress and 7% of the respondents seldom felt stress when they are taking care of their children.

**Discussion**

During the outbreak of Covid-19, parents of disabled children suffered mental and behavioural problems. A lack of routine and the attached uncertainty can make children with disabilities feel more anxious, grumpy, restless and develop unpleasant feelings. These reasons highly influence on parents of these children. Stress experienced by parents can negatively affect their children. During this pandemic, differently-abled children are being exposed to violent discipline. Fear of physical illness and home confinement with social isolation were cited as contributing factors. Apart from these difficulties, most of the parents suffered financial problems because of the disabled child’s treatment and supportive facilities. Many of these disabled children are not accepted by their family members and relatives. Social stigma still prevents in our society to accommodate and accept these children. Disabilities in children pose a lot of challenges, fear and worries for the parents and care givers.

**Conclusion**

This study tried to find out challenges faced by parents of disabled children while caring for them. The result of this study provides some evidence that the parents are facing psychological problems because of having a disabled child. This study suggests psychological problems it will be helpful for them to develop sound body and mind. The organization should provide some income generating program which will help the parents to cope up with their economic problems, if the organization provides some counselling session for the parents it will encourage them to be strong and to cope with social problems. They need support from various social systems like from their own family, community and government as well. In this field social worker have several important roles to play among the differently abled children as well as their family especially to their care givers. If more people involved in this field for helping affected children, they can bring changes to many lives as well as to many families.

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