

Parental Stress and Sexual Intimacy Among Parents of Children with Id: A Correlation Study

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Abstract

The present study explored the association of parental stress with sexual intimacy among parents of children with ID using a quantitative, cross-sectional, correlational research design. For this study, the Parenting Stress Scale (Berry & Jones, 1995) and the sexual intimacy subscale of the Personal Assessment of Intimacy in Relationships (PAIR) Inventory (Schaefer & Olson, 1981) were administered to 140 married parents (age range 25-35 years) in Chennai, India. The descriptive statistics indicated that on average respondents reported a level of parental stress of 65.62 (SD = 13.206) and a level of sexual intimacy of 96.32 (SD = 22.681). There was evidence of a strong negative correlation between parental level of stress and a couple's sexual intimacy level ($r = -0.745$, $p < 0.01$). The null hypothesis was rejected, thereby indicating the need for specialized mental health intervention and couple intervention in order to reduce caregiver distress and stabilize the marriage. Limitations include regional focus and exclusion of older/uneducated participants. Future research could explore diverse populations and other psychosocial factors such as coping strategies.

Keywords: Parental stress, Sexual Intimacy, Intellectual disability, Marital relationship.

1. Introduction

Life with an intellectually disabled child is unique, and the positive and negative attributes of their disability affect family life in ways not usually expected. Intellectual disability is defined as a severe impairment in the ability to think, understand and carry out daily routines or tasks, starting before age eighteen. It affects about 1 in 100 worldwide. There are some problems with medicine, education, or social services. Problems include following lessons, knowing what happens next, and sticking to schedules. This means that families have to deal with the many systems of care and services available including medical services, education, and other community based services. There are many examples of how prior systems and the open classroom today have helped children develop and succeed, but a lot of stress remains for parents. Parents often experience stress, which sometimes also influences the relationships they have with their children and their partners/spouses as well. The following section presents findings on the state of closeness in these parents' homes, introduces research linking stress to closeness and family well-being.

In a world where acceptance and optimism reign, family life becomes something different after an ID diagnosis. The parents usually have to adjust once notified about the diagnosis, whether it is the result of a test that was done early on or when the child is missing developmental milestones later. At first there's the shock and disbelief or grieving what you imagined the future would be, you know, your plans for life. Slowly, though, it starts to coalesce, around therapy sessions, individual education plans at school, and fighting hard within these arcane, bewilderingly slow-moving institutions. Over and over, studies have shown that households affected by such things give more than other people. They spend more hours taking care of their kids than do moms and dads raising kids not facing this. The financial challenges can involve buying the equipment, paying hourly care, or having a lower income because it is challenging to do a lot of work. Parents report that even in the midst of that, there are still some deep connections, some true moments of joy, and that it can be empowering.

Concept of Parental Stress and Sexual Intimacy

Definitions Parental Stress

- **Anastopoulos, Guevremont, Shelton, & DuPaul, 1992; Deater-Deckard et al., 1998; Hastings, Daley, Burns, & Beck, 2006:** High parenting stress is an important environmental risk variable. It has been associated with numerous undesirable outcomes, including parent depression
- **Bornstein 2002:** Parenting stress is defined as a negative psychological response to the obligations of being a parent and is often characterized by parent report of stress due to the responsibilities of caring for a child.
- **Abidin, 1995:** Parenting stress (also called childrearing stress) can be attributed to the behavior of the child, to parental difficulty in managing parenting tasks, or to dysfunctional interaction between child and parent

Definitions Sexual Intimacy

- **Sascha Settegast (2024):** Argues that sexual activity aims at a specific form of intimacy, wherein partners allow each other to cross personal boundaries, involving a "physical intrusion of the other deep into our personal space and the very heart of our privacy".
- **Brock & Jennings (2007):** Sexual closeness, seen as one-way people share their sexuality together, might involve physical touch like holding hands or embracing. At times, it includes acts such as kissing or wrapping arms around each other gently. On some occasions, direct contact involving private body parts forms part of this connection between two individuals.

2. Review of literature

Munawar Chalid.et.al (2025) Parents' stress ties to their schooling, knowhow, and mind set about kids' dental care especially when those kids have intellectual disability (ID). A study looked into this using a snapshot style approach. It included 104 moms and dads from two special needs schools in Bandung, Indonesia. Info was gathered, and then checked for links using Spearman's Rank plus Kendall's way of measuring agreement. When tested together, school background, awareness, and outlook linked up with parent strain a strong signal at $p = 0.0008$ and $W = 0.205$. That means child oral hygiene efforts connect to parental pressure not just one-on-one but also all factors combined.

Aylin Kurt (2025) Research points to challenges in sexual growth among kids with intellectual disabilities yet seldom looks at how this affects family stress. The current work explored factors tied to such strain during a child's puberty phase. Information came from 815 caregivers of youngsters between ages 10 and 18 facing cognitive delays, gathered over ten months starting May 2021. Results using statistical

modelling revealed the variables accounted for 60% of differences in reported pressure, significant at p less than 0.001. Prior knowledge about sex development had the greatest positive link; meanwhile, experiences of harassment were clearly tied to worse outcomes. Results suggest that learning on this topic enables families to handle teen issues better using practical understanding instead of assumptions.

Bahar Aksoy, et.al (2025). Mother child bonds, marriage quality, also attachment patterns in moms of kids with intellectual disabilities versus those without this study looked at differences using family systems ideas. It included 100 mothers of children with intellectual challenges plus 114 raising typical learners. Results showed higher average scores for parenting stress, avoidant bonding, anxious attachment, but also fear based connection among moms of disabled children ($p < 0.001$). In contrast, relationship satisfaction levels were clearly greater in the group with typically developing offspring ($p < 0.001$). Mothers of CID face more child conflict, less marital harmony, or increased likelihood of anxious bonding compared to those with TDC. Given how a mother's stable emotional connection influences her bond with kids or partner satisfaction, improving such aspects appears key to supporting balanced family dynamics under family systems theory

3. Research methodology

3.1 Research question:

The study was attempted to find the relationship between parental stress and Sexual Intimacy among parents of children with intellectual disabilities (id).

3.2 Objectives

- To evaluate how much stress parents, feel when raising kids with intellectual disabilities
- To assess how satisfied these parents feel with their sexual intimacy, using clear feedback from personal experiences.
- To explore the correlation between parental stress and sexual intimacy in this population

3.3 Hypothesis:

H_0 : There is no significant relationship between Parental stress and sexual Intimacy among parents of children with intellectual disabilities (ID)

4. Research design:

The study will employ a quantitative correlational research design to investigate the relationship between parental stress and sexual intimacy among parents of children with intellectual disabilities (id). Parental stress was the independent variable while sexual intimacy was the dependent variable.

4.1 Sampling technique:

Through purposive sampling (Judgmental sampling). Participants will include both mothers and fathers of children with intellectual disabilities who report varying levels of stress related to caregiving. Sample for the study consisted of 140 parents aged 25–30 years

4.2 Data collection:

- Data will be collected through offline questionnaires distributed to the participants.
- Participants will provide demographic information, followed by responses to the two standardized scales.

4.3 Tool description:

- Parental stress was measured with the Parenting Stress Scale (PSS), created by Berry and Jones in 1995. The instrument consists of 18 items divided into two parts first part targets stress with 12

statements, whereas the second reflects positive aspects through 6 items. Research shows solid reliability, as internal consistency falls between $\alpha = 0.79$ and 0.91 for overall scores; additionally, stability over time is confirmed by a test–retest value of $r = 0.83$ after six weeks. Evidence supports its structure, given notable links to PSI subtests ($r = 0.45$ – 0.75); furthermore, it aligns meaningfully with measures like children's behavioural issues or mothers' depressive symptoms ($r = 0.20$ – 0.40).

- Sexual Intimacy was assessed via the PAIR scale developed by Schaefer and Olson in 1982. This tool contains 36 questions six for each area: emotional, intellectual, leisure related, sexual and social connection with the current research zeroing in on the sexual aspect. Reliability is solid, showing Cronbach's alpha values between 0.80 and 0.90 across domains; scores also remain stable over time, with retest correlations from 0.70 to 0.85 within a three-month gap. Evidence for its accuracy comes from factor studies backing a five-part model, links to similar measures like the DAS (correlations around 0.50 – 0.70), along with clear distinctions shown between struggling and well-functioning relationships.

4.4. Statistical analysis:

The Data collected has been evaluated with the assistance of the Statistical Package (SPSS). A covariance analysis was done using the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient to provide both strength and direction (i.e., positive or negative) for each variable's relationship with one another.

4.5 Inclusive criteria:

- The participants in the age range of 25–35 years were selected.
- The sample will involve mothers and fathers.
- Parents who voluntarily consent to participate in the study.

4.6 Exclusive criteria:

- The sample does not include people who are uneducated.
- Single parents and separated, divorced or widowed individuals will be excluded because marital sexual intimacy is considered.
- Parents who have been diagnosed with psychiatric disorders that may influence stress or intimacy will be excluded.

5. Result

This chapter discusses the results and interpretation of the analysis done to understand the relationship between Parental Stress and Sexual Intimacy among Parents of Children with Intellectual Disabilities.

Table 1

Descriptive statistics showing the mean and standard deviation of Parental Stress and Sexual Intimacy among Parents of Children with Intellectual Disabilities.

Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation	N
Parenting Stress	65.62	13.206	140
Sexual Intimacy	96.32	22.681	140

The descriptive table 1 shows the mean and standard deviation for the variables. Parenting Stress Scale has a sample $N=140$, mean= 65.62 and standard deviation= 13.206 . Personal Assessment of Intimacy in Relationships (PAIR) Inventory has a sample $N=140$, mean= 96.32 and standard deviation= 22.681 .

Table 2
Correlational analysis showing the relationship between Parental Stress and Sexual Intimacy among Parents of Children with Intellectual Disabilities.

Variables	Pearson’s correlation	r value	Decision
Parental Stress	1	-.745**	Rejected (H ₀)
Sexual Intimacy			

****Correlation is significant at 0.01 level (2-tailed)**

Table 2 shows the values of Pearson's correlation among the two variables. There appears to be a strong negative correlation between Parental Stress and Sexual Intimacy ($r = -0.745$, $p < 0.01$). This suggests that as parental stress increases, sexual intimacy decreases among parents of children with intellectual disabilities.

As per the statement of the earlier mentioned hypothesis given that there exists a substantial correlation between parental stress and sexual intimacy in both female and male parents, the null (H₀) has been rejected. That is, statistically speaking, there is a statistical relationship to demonstrate that there are significant correlations between parental stress and sexual intimacy of parents with children with ID, at the .01 level.

6. Discussion

The present study showed a statistically meaningful negative correlation between parenting stress and sexual intimacy (Pearson $r = -0.745$, $p < 0.01$). Parenting stress was measured using the Parenting Stress Scale (M= 65.62, SD= 13.206), and level of sexual intimacy was measured using the sexual intimacy subscale of the PAIR Inventory (M= 96.32, SD= 22.681). similar to previous studies showing that chronic caregiving demands, such as emotional exhaustion and inequitable roles for parents of children with ID, reduce relational energy, physical intimacy, and marital satisfaction (Kijak, 2020; Harley et al., 2011), Chronic stress may shift attention away from the partner and towards the child, resulting in fatigue, irritability, and withdrawal that decrease intimacy. Implied by these findings are the need for couple counselling, stress management programs, and peer support groups, to reduce the strain of parental caregiving responsibilities, and the impact on the marital relationship. By managing parental stress effectively, it is possible to promote family resilience and relational quality to the benefit of the parents and the child with ID. Future research could examine mediators such as resilience or social support in other contexts and areas.

7. Summary

The study sought to examine the link between parental stress and sexual intimacy in families of children with ID. Raising such a child often brings unending care demands, deep emotional strain, although societal expectations also play a role. Marital dynamics might shift under these conditions, yet each family responds differently. How couples maintain closeness can depend on unseen internal balances. This study determines the correlation between the two variables. No relationship has been found between parent’s stress levels and sexual intimacy between parents of children with ID. All participants were informed about the study prior to participating, and were assured their identity would remain confidential; were informed that they have the ability to withdraw from the study at their discretion. Data for the study was collected with the help of two standardized questionnaires Parenting Stress Scale (PSS) - Berry & Jones (1995) and Personal Assessment of Intimacy in Relationships (PAIR) Inventory -Schaefer& Olson (1981). Pearson's correlation

was obtained between the two variables: - parental stress and sexual intimacy using the SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences).

8. Conclusion

The present study shows significant correlation between the scores obtained using the said questionnaires, and indicates a Negative correlation between the two variables, i.e., that parental stress and sexual intimacy. When care demands grow heavier, emotional and intimate connection often fades between spouses. Support focused on mental health, shaped around family needs, might bring couples closer while lifting daily strain. Outcomes suggest relief in pressure could gently reshape relationship quality over time

9. Limitations

- The research focused on one region alone, meaning results might not apply everywhere. Although India has many young adults, the number included here stayed quite low.
- Information came strictly from Chennai, limiting wider conclusions. The data was collected by only Chennai.
- Similar research could be done for other population and different ethnic group.
- The participants above 35 years were not included for the study.
- The sample will not involve uneducated people.

10. Recommendations

- Looking ahead, future work could involve participants drawn from various areas, increasing both size and diversity.
- While comparing mothers with fathers, researchers might explore differences in experiences or responses.
- To deepen insight into how family's function, factors like resilience, ways of handling stress, and satisfaction within marriage could come into focus.

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