

The Interplay of Parental Stress and Mental Health in Shaping Parenting Behaviours and Child Development in Ekiti State, Nigeria

Ayobami Alice Agboola, Samuel Ayodele Akeredolu, & Ruth Morenike Odewumi,
Counselling Psychology Department, Bamidele Olumilua University of Education, Science and
Technology, Ikere-Ekiti, Ekiti-State, Nigeria.

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Abstract: *Parenting constitutes an essential responsibility in shaping a child's emotional, cognitive, and social growth in the contemporary era of the 21st century. This research endeavor sought to explore the complex relationship between parental stress and mental health in influencing parenting behaviors and child development within Ekiti State, Nigeria. A descriptive survey design was employed for the study. The target population comprised “all parents residing in Ekiti State, with a sample of 300 parents selected through simple random sampling techniques. The instrument utilized for data collection was a self-constructed questionnaire, which underwent validation by three experts in the fields of Guidance and Counseling, Early Childhood Education, and Educational Measurement. A pilot study was conducted involving 20 parents who were not part of the primary study, and the reliability of the instrument was assessed using Cronbach’s Alpha, resulting in a coefficient of 0.81, indicating a high degree of internal consistency. The data gathered were subjected to inferential statistical analysis, with all hypotheses evaluated at a significance level of 0.05. The results demonstrated a significant positive correlation between parental stress and parental mental health. Additionally, findings indicated a significant negative correlation between parental stress and parenting practices. The analysis further revealed a significant correlation between parental mental health and parenting practices. The study concluded that parenting practices serve as significant predictors of child development. Consequently, it is recommended that parents be offered stress management and counseling support, which would enable them to effectively navigate financial pressures, work obligations, and parenting duties, thereby enhancing their mental health and overall well-being.*

Keyword: parental stress, mental health, parenting behaviours and child development.

INTRODUCTION

Parenting seems to play a significant role in shaping a child's emotional, cognitive and social development. However, Parenting in this 21st century appears to be more challenging and demanding, these challenges could be influenced by rapid technological advancement, shifting societal norms, economic pressures and evolving family structures. The parental challenges seem to lead to stress, anxiety and emotional struggles for parents which may impact their mental well-being and reduced their coping capacity". When parental mental health is compromised, the quality of care, emotional responsiveness, and consistency provided to children may also be adversely affected.

Parental stress refers to the psychological strain experienced by individuals in their role or duties as a parents or caregivers. According to Deater-Deckard, (2004) parental stress is a psychological response to the "demands associated with the role of parenting, particularly when these demands exceed a parent's perceived resources or coping capacities. Parental stress encompasses a range of emotional and behavioural responses triggered by challenges such as financial constraints, time pressures, behavioural difficulties in children and lack of social support, Common parental stressors include child problems, financial pressures, lack of social support and conflicting work-family Abidin (1995).

Observation reveals that when parents or caregivers are exposed to multiple stressors, they are more likely to experience emotional exhaustion, anxiety, and depressive symptoms, which can significantly undermine their capacity to respond sensitively, consistently, and effectively to their children's needs. Oladipo & Adeniyi, (2019 ; Adebayo, 2020) stated that parents experiencing high levels of stress often report diminished emotional wellbeing and reduced coping abilities. Research indicates that high level of parental stress are associated with increased irritability, emotional exhaustion, and disengagement from parenting responsibilities (neece,green & baker,2012). These stress-related outcomes can contribute to the adoption of less effective parenting strategies such as inconsistent discipline, lower sensitivity, and reduced warmth which have been shown to adversely affect children behavioural, emotional and academic development (Anthony etal 2005; Deater-Deckard,2005).

Parental stress, which often arises when parenting demands exceed the expected and actual resources available for parents to succeed in the parenting role, negatively affects parent-child relationships". It appears that stress related to time constraints and financial insecurity is common in Ekiti state due to balancing formal employment with informal economic activities. When parental mental health is compromised, parents may become inconsistent in discipline there by affecting the quality of parent-child interactions.

The researchers observed that age, gender and marital status seems to be vital factors that may influence “parental stress experiences and mental health outcomes. Parents age seems to determine the level of stress been experience by parents, first to be parents appears to have little experience on how to go with parenting duties and the financial aspect which might result to stress for them, while the older parents seems to have wealth of experience in handling the parenting duties but the finance instability seems to creates stress for them. In related to this, (Nomaguchi & Brown,2011) asserted that younger parents experience higher level of stress due to limited parenting experience and economic instability, while order parents may face cumulative financial and health-related pressures.

Another factor that seems to influence parental stress is Gender, people have the opinion that all the parenting responsibilities such as taking care of the children, doing the house chores among others seems to be mother’s roles and financial provision goes to the fathers. It appears that when parents experience these it may leads to gendered patterns of stress and psychological stress. In the same vein, (Matud,2004;Adegoke,2014) highlighted that Nigeria society often places primary care giving duties or responsibilities on mothers and economic provision on fathers.

Marital status constitutes a critical socio-demographic determinant of parental stress, influencing parents’ psychological well-being and their capacity to navigate caregiving demands effectively. Cairney e tal.,2003 suggested that married parents may benefit from shared responsibilities and emotional support, whereas single parents often experience role overload, financial constraints, and reduced social support, increasing vulnerability to stress and mental health problem.

Parenting practices serve as a crucial pathway through which parental stress and mental health influence the child cognitive, emotional and behavioural development. Positive parenting practices such as warmth, structure, effective communication and involvement in schoolwork are associated with better academic achievement, motivation and self-regulation and classroom behaviour (darling &Steinberg, 1993; Aremu & Sokan, 2018). Conversely, parent stress and poor mental health increase the likelihood of harsh, authoritarian, or disengaged parenting practices which have been linked to learning difficulties, low academic motivation, attention problem and disruptive behaviour among the children.

Child development encompasses cognitive development, emotional regulation, social competence and academic functioning. Empirical evidence suggests that children exposed to chronic parental stress and poor parental mental health are more likely to experience emotional difficulties, behavioural problems, poor academic performance (Adeyemo, 2019; Olowodunoye & Adeyemo 2020). In addition, research has consistently shown that parents experiencing high levels of stress or poor mental health may struggle to provide the emotional warmth, consistency and responsiveness required for optimal child development. Chronic parental stress can disrupt effective parenting practice, leading to harsh discipline, emotional withdrawal, inconsistent

supervision or reduced involvement in children's academic and social lives. Such parenting behaviours have been linked to emotional insecurity, poor self-regulation, low academic achievement and behavioural problems in children.

Statement of the problem

In this 21st century, it appears that increasing socio economic pressures, marital challenges, family and work imbalance and rising parental responsibilities seem to be overwhelming which have significantly heightened levels of stress among parents. These stressors often undermine parent's mental health, leading to psychological condition such as anxiety, depression, emotional instability and chronic fatigue thereby shaping the quality of parenting practices and home learning environments available to children. While parents play a central role in shaping children cognitive, emotional, social and behavioural development growing evidence suggests that many parents lack adequate psychological support to effectively manage stress and maintain positive mental well-being.

The presence of persistent stress and poor mental health poses serious risks to child development. Parents experiencing psychological distress seem to exhibit reduced emotional responsiveness, inconsistent discipline and limited involvement in their children's leaning and socialization process. Consequently children raised in such environments may experience behavioural insecurity, poor academic performance, behavioural problems and difficulties in social adjustment". These development challenges seem to extend into adolescence and adulthood negatively affecting educational attainment and overall well-being.

Despite the recognized importance of parental well-being limited empirical attention has been given to the combined influence of "parental stress, mental health and parenting practices on parental stress. The problem this study seeks to address is the insufficient understand of how parental stress and mental health interact to influence child development.

Purpose of the Study

The general objective of this study is to examine the interplay of parental stress and mental health and its implication for parenting practices and child development. Specifically to:

1. determine the relationship between parental stress and parental mental health;
2. examine the influence of parental stress on parenting practices
3. assess the influence of parental mental health on parenting practices
4. investigate the influence of parenting practices on child development

Research question

To further guide the study three research questions were raised;

1. What is the relationship between parental stress and mental health among parents?
2. How does parental stress influencing parenting practices

3. What is the relationship between parental mental health and parenting practices
- 4 Will parenting practices predict child development

Research hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated;

1. There is no significant relationship between parental stress and parental mental health
2. Parental stress has no significant relationship on parenting practices
3. Parental mental health has no significant relationship on parenting practices
4. Parenting practices will not significantly predict child development.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted descriptive design of research type. The population for the study comprised all parents within age 18 to 40 years in Ekiti State. There are 16 Local Government Areas and three senatorial districts in Ekiti State”. From each of the senatorial districts, one Local Government Areas was selected for the study using simple random technique by balloting. Thus, 100 parents were randomly selected from each of the Local Governments to make a total of 300 parents that participated in the study.

The instrument used for the study was a self developed questionnaire The “interplay of parental Stress and Mental Health in Shaping Parenting Behaviours and Child Development in Ekiti State, Nigeria (IPSMHSPBCD) which is designed to be filled by the parents. IPSMHSPBCD will comprise of two sections A and B. Section A will be designed to elicit respondent information such as the age, gender, marital status. Section B contains 20 items which seeks for information on the interplay of parental stress and mental health in shaping parenting behaviours and child development in Ekiti State, Nigeria. Likert-type 4 point rating scale was used as follows: Strongly Agree (SA) 4 points, Agree (A) 3 points, Disagree (D) 2 points and Strongly Disagree (SD) 1.

To ensure validity, the questionnaire was reviewed by three experts from counselling, early childhood education and educational measurement. Their suggestions were incorporated into the final draft. A pilot study was conducted with 20 parents outside the scope of the study the reliability of the instrument was tested using Cronbach’s Alpha”, yielding a coefficient of 0.81, which indicated high internal consistency.

The researchers have personal contact with the select parents in each local government selected areas. The respondents were given adequate time to read the items before responding to the items. The copies of the questionnaire were collected back immediately after completion but the researchers were unable to retrieved 6 back.

The data collected were analyzed using inferential statistics. The hypotheses 1-3 were tested using “Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) and hypothesis 4 was tested using multiple regression. All the hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research Hypothesis 1: There is no significant relationship between parental stress and parental mental health.

In testing this hypothesis, responses to items on parental stress and parental mental health were collated and subjected to Pearson Product Moment Correlation. The result is presented in Table 1

Table 4: PPMC showing relationship between parental stress and parental mental health

Variables	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	r_{cal}	p-value
Parental stress	294	14.02	3.304	0.511	0.000
Parental mental Health	294	13.27	3.492		

P < 0.05 (Significant Result)

The information contained in Table 1 shows that $r_{cal} = 0.511$; $p = 0.000 < 0.05$. Since the p value is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected. This implies that there is significant relationship between parental stress and parental mental health.

Research Hypothesis 2: Parental stress has no significant relationship with parenting practices

In testing this hypothesis, responses to items on parental stress and parental practices were collated and subjected to Pearson Product Moment Correlation. The result is presented in Table 2

Table 2: PPMC showing relationship between parental stress and parental practices

Variables	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	r_{cal}	p-value
Parental stress	294	14.02	3.304	-0.366	0.000
Parental practices	294	16.71	4.503		

P > 0.05 (Significant Result)

Table 2 implies that $r_{cal} = -0.366$; $P = 0.000 < 0.05$. Since the p value is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected. This implies that there is significant relationship between parental stress and parenting practices.

Research Hypothesis 3: Parental mental health has no significant relationship on parenting practices

In testing this hypothesis, responses to items on parental mental health and parental practices were collated and subjected to Pearson Product Moment Correlation”. The result is presented in Table 3

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Table 3: PPMC showing relationship between parental mental health and parental practices

Variables	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	r _{cal.}	p-value
Parental mental health	294	13.27	3.492	0.448	0.000
Parenting practices	294	16.71	4.503		

P < 0.05 (Significant Result)

The information contained in Table 3 shows that $r_{cal} = 0.448$; $P = 0.000 < 0.05$. Since the p value is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected. This implies that “there is significant relationship between parental mental health and parental practices.

Research Question 4: Parenting practices will not significantly predict child development. In testing this hypothesis, responses to items on parenting practice and child development were collated and analysed with Multiple Regression Analysis. The result is presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Regression Analysis on predictive effect of Parenting practices on child development
R = 0.692 R² = 0.478 Adjusted R² = 0.476 F = 267.633

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	4.564	0.714	—	6.396	0.000
	Parenting practices	0.674	0.041	0.692	16.359	0.000**

Dependent Variable: Parenting Practices

Table 4 shows that parenting practices significantly predict child development. The result ($B = 0.674$, $\beta = 0.692$, $p = 0.000$) indicates that as parenting practices improves, child development also increases. The model explains 47.8% of the variance ($R^2 = 0.468$), and the F-value (267.633, $p < 0.05$) confirms the model’s significance. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected, confirming that parenting practices significantly predict child development.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Finding revealed that there was significant positive relationship between parental stress and parental mental health. This implies that the extent to which parent feel overwhelmed by responsibilities, financial difficulties, feels exhausted by the demand of caring for children, social expectations and balancing of work with responsibilities could be associated with the mental parent’s mental condition. This finding corroborated the submission of Oladipo and Adeniyi (2019) that when parents or caregivers are exposed to multiple stressors, they undergo emotional

exhaustion, anxiety, and depressive symptoms, which can significantly undermine their capacity to respond sensitively, consistently, and effectively to their children's needs.

Finding equally indicated a statistically significant negative association between parental stress and parenting practices. This indicated that the extent to which teacher is stressed could be related to parenting practices such as showing affection and warmth, praising children when they behave well, discipline children consistently, and providing emotional support for my children. The negative correlation implies that indicated that the higher the stress level of a parent, the weaker the parenting practice. This finding agreed with Adebayo, (2020) stated that parents experiencing high levels of stress often report diminished emotional wellbeing and reduced coping abilities. Discoveries from other enquiries implied that increased level of parental stress is associated with increased irritability, emotional exhaustion, and disengagement from parenting responsibilities (Neece, Green & Baker,2012).

Finding showed a statistically significant correlation between parental mental health and parental practices. This is an indication that mental status of parents influences parenting practice such as showing affection and warmth, praising children when they behave well, discipline children consistently, and providing emotional support for my children. This confirmed the position of Aremu and Sokan (2018) that poor mental health increases the likelihood of harsh, authoritarian, or disengaged parenting practices which have been linked to learning difficulties, low academic motivation, attention problem and disruptive behaviour among the children.

The study indicated that parenting practices significantly predict child development. This implies that when a child receives affection and warmth, praise children when they behave well, is disciplined consistently, and provided with emotional supports, the child will follow rules at home and school, complete tasks effectively, displays aggressive behaviour minimally, get along with other children and shows confidence in social institutions. This corroborates the report of Darling and Steinberg (1993) and Aremu and Sokan (2018) that positive parenting practices such as warmth, structure, effective communication and involvement in schoolwork are associated with better academic achievement, motivation and self-regulation and classroom behaviour.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that parental stress, parental mental health, and parenting practices are closely interconnected and collectively influence child development. The findings revealed that increased parental stress is associated with poorer mental health among parents and negatively affects the quality of parenting practices, thereby reducing parents' ability to provide adequate emotional support, warmth, and consistent discipline to their children. Furthermore, the study established that parental mental health significantly influences parenting practices, suggesting that parents with better psychological well-being are more likely to adopt positive and supportive parenting

behaviours. Ultimately, effective parenting practices were found to significantly predict positive child development outcomes, indicating that children who receive affection, consistent discipline, and emotional support are more likely to exhibit positive behaviour, social competence, and better adjustment both at home and in school.

Recommendations

- Parents should be provided with stress management and counselling support. This will help them cope effectively with financial pressures, work demands, and parenting responsibilities, thereby improving their mental health and overall well-being.
- Government and relevant social agencies should establish accessible family support and mental health services for parents. Such services can help identify early signs of psychological distress and provide timely interventions that will promote healthier parenting practices.
- Parenting education programmes should be organized regularly by schools and community organizations. These programmes will equip parents with effective strategies for showing affection, providing consistent discipline, and offering emotional support to their children.
- Parents should be encouraged to adopt positive and supportive parenting practices in the home environment. Demonstrating warmth, praise, and consistent guidance will enhance children's social behaviour, emotional stability, and overall development.

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