

## IMPACT OF PARENTS' GENDER ON TYPE & LEVEL OF PERCEIVED PARENTING STRESS DUE TO HAVING MENTALLY CHALLENGED CHILDREN

RASHMI UPRETI<sup>1</sup> & RITU SINGH<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Human Development & Family Studies, G.B.P.U. A. & T., Pantnagar,  
Distt. U.S. Nagar, Uttarakhand, India

<sup>2</sup>Assistant Professor, Department of Human Development & Family Studies, G.B.P.U. A. & T., Pantnagar,  
Distt. U.S. Nagar, Uttarakhand, India

### ABSTRACT

The present study assessed and compared the type and level of perceived stress among the parents of 150 mentally challenged children across their gender. Sample was drawn randomly in equal proportions from three categories of mental challenge viz. mild, moderate and severe from 3 RCI (Rehabilitation Council of India) recognised special schools of Delhi. The level of stress perceived by parents were assessed using Family Interview for Stress and Coping in Mental Retardation (Section-I). Findings of the study revealed that mothers from LIG, irrespective of their child's degree of mental challenge perceived more stress in daily care of the child, marital adjustment, interpersonal relations and social life as compared to fathers. While MIG mothers felt more stress than fathers in giving extra inputs for the care of the child and by the disturbed behavior of the child. The predominant reason for these variations is probably Indian family values wherein mothers are held solely responsible for family nurturing even though this perspective is changing over time with education which is visible among parents of MIG.

**KEYWORDS:** Fathers, Family Stress, Low Income Families, Mental Retardation, Middle Income Families, Mothers

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The child is God's gift to the family. Family is the primary unit responsible for social security of every family member hence birth of mental challenge child affects it most adversely. To a family, every child is special in his or her own way and god has given mental capabilities to each child. However, few children are deprived of these mental capabilities and are mentally challenged. They have special needs that challenge family to find ways to best prepare these children for the future and to handle any problems that may surface. Mental retardation/ mental challenge is defined as sub-average cognitive abilities, which is associated with impairment in adaptive behavioral skills and originated during developmental period. These adaptive behavior skills such as personal and social competence are weaker in the mentally deficient children. Hence, in the families having children with mental disability, the needs and responsibilities of the family has increased manifold and makes them dependent on others throughout their lifespan and always calls for high investment in terms of time, energy and money which thereby leads to more stress among the family members especially parents.

The birth of child is often a joyous time for parents but giving birth to a mentally challenged child, in itself and realising that the child is dependent on others, is an unexpected stressful event which affects them most. Parenting, in itself, is a challenging process, but, parenting mentally retarded children is even more challenging. In the past, MR children were seen less as human and more as a liability to the society. Hence, they were often deprived of the usual parental care and

attention. But nowadays, they are looked up as an asset who demands from the parents' to plan such intensive interventions strategies that turns special need children into contributing members of the society, in their own unique way. Every family wants his or her child to be physically and mentally perfect but some children have a temporary or permanent physical or mental disability which makes whole family stressed. Thus, parenting MR children today has become tremendously more stressful.

Little bit of stress is a normal part of everyday life which effects all the domains of human life. However, having a mentally challenged child in the family acts as chronic distress and makes family face a multitude of challenges. All families experience stress from time to time, but the types of stress and the resources available to cope up with this stress vary among families. According to Holroyd and Lazarus (1982), psychological stress occurs when "environmental and/or internal demands tax or exceed the individual's resources for managing them".

Various investigators described the emotional and social stresses experienced by the parents in the East (Seshadari, 1983) and West (Tunali and Power, 1993). Whereas, it was reported by Koller et al. (1992) and Beresford (1994) that stress is not an inevitable consequence in these parents. However, studies which show the influence of parents' gender on their level of perceived stress are very limited. Therefore, present study has been taken up with the listed objectives:

- To assess and compare the type and level of perceived stress among parents of mentally challenged children across their gender.
- To investigate statistical differences in the type and level of perceived stress among parents of mentally challenged children across their gender.

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

### **2.1 Locale**

The present research study was carried out exclusively in Delhi. Delhi was purposively selected because of its nearness to the researcher and also has an appreciable number of RCI (Rehabilitation Council of India) recognized special schools meant exclusively for MR children. Out of the 9 RCI recognized institutes for MR children in Delhi, 3 institutes namely NIMH (National Institute for Mentally Handicapped), Manovikas and C.B.S Memorial were randomly selected as research base for the present study.

### **2.2 Sample**

Firstly, the list of mildly, moderately and severely mentally challenged children enrolled in the selected institutes was procured from their Directors. Further, from the list, 50 mentally challenged children and their parents were randomly selected from all three levels of mental challenge viz. mild, moderate and severe mental challenge. Thus, the sample for the present study comprised of 150 mentally challenged children and their families.

### **2.3 Tools**

Self-designed general questionnaire was used to study the socio-demographic and socio-economic characteristics of respondents. Family Interview for Stress and Coping in Mental Retardation (Section-I) developed at NIMHANS was used to assess the type & level of perceived stress in the families of mentally challenged children. The items included in Section-I of the scale helps to assess perceived stress among parents of mentally challenged children.

## 2.4 Procedure and Data Analysis

The Directors of the selected institutions were contacted, to gather all the necessary required details related to the enrolled MR children and their families. The required samples were drawn and then, first common meeting was organized by the researcher with the families of MR children. The purpose of meeting was to explain the purpose of the research study. Afterwards, the parents were contacted for data collection on the place of their choice- institute or their home where they were interviewed and observations made by the researcher. The data collected was classified and tabulated in-line with the objectives to arrive at meaningful and relevant inferences. The collected data was then analyzed using statistical techniques like frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation and t- test.

## 3. RESULTS

Distribution pattern of the parents on perceived level of stress across their gender can be clearly seen from the Table 1(a & b). In case of extra inputs for care, it was noted from low income families that majority of mothers of mildly, moderately and severely challenged children (92.00%, 80.00% and 80.00% respectively) were having moderate level of stress as compare to fathers. While, 56.00%, 60.00% and 60.00% of fathers who had mildly, moderately and severely challenged children were found to perceived low stress. Whereas, from middle income families proportion of mothers with mildly, moderately and severely challenged children were more (80.00%, 84.00% and 84.00%) at moderate level of stress than their counterparts.

Under LIG, in the leisure time and activity subscales more percentage of fathers of mildly challenged children (64.00%) were found to be affected minimally when compared to mothers (44.00%). Leisure time and activity of exactly equal percentage (56.00%) of mothers and fathers of moderately challenged children was identified to be affected somewhat. Likewise, 60.00% of mothers of severely challenged children also reported that their leisure time and activity somewhat affected. In middle income families, it was observed that leisure time and activities of more proportion of mothers who had children with mild, moderate and severe level of mental challenge (72.00%, 72.00% and 60.00%) affected somewhat due to the child's condition. Whereas, 56.00%, 52.00% and 48.00% of fathers having child with mild, moderate and severe level of mental challenge were found with minimally affected leisure time and activity.

Under the subscale neglect of others it was pleasurable to found that majority of fathers as compare to mothers of mildly, moderately and severely challenged children (100.00%, 88.00%, 84.00% respectively) minimally felt that they were not able to give proper time to other family members and neglected them due to paying more attention towards mentally challenged child. Similar trend was also observed in MIG, where again the percentage of fathers of mildly, moderately and severely challenged children were 96.00%, 92.00% and 96.00% respectively.

**Table 1(a): Frequency and Percentage Distribution of LIG Parents of Mentally Challenged Children on the Type & Level of Perceived Stress across Their Gender**

Areas of Perceived Stress	Subscales	Levels of Stress	Score range	LIG (n=75)											
				Mildly Challenged Children (n <sub>1</sub> =25)				Moderately Challenged Children (n <sub>2</sub> =25)				Severely Challenged Children (n <sub>3</sub> =25)			
				Mothers		Fathers		Mothers		Fathers		Mothers		Fathers	
				n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Daily Care	Extra inputs for care	Nil	0-3	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
		Low	4-7	1	4.00	14	56.00	3	12.00	15	60.00	3	12.00	15	60.00
		Moderate	7-11	23	92.00	10	40.00	20	80.00	10	40.00	20	80.00	6	24.00
		High	12-15	1	4.00	1	4.00	2	8.00	0	0.00	2	8.00	4	16.00
		Very high	16+	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
	Decreased leisure time and activity	Nil	0-2	3	12.00	2	8.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	1	4.00
		Minimal	3-5	11	44.00	16	64.00	8	32.00	11	44.00	10	40.00	13	52.00
		Somewhat	6-8	11	44.00	7	28.00	14	56.00	14	56.00	15	60.00	11	44.00
		Definitely	9-11	0	0.00	0	0.00	3	12.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
	Totally	12+	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	
	Neglect of others	Nil	0-2	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
		Minimal	3-5	16	64.00	25	100.0	15	60.00	22	88.00	13	52.00	21	84.00
		Somewhat	6-8	9	36.00	0	0.00	7	28.00	1	4.00	12	48.00	4	16.00
		Definitely	9-11	0	0.00	0	0.00	3	12.00	2	8.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
	Totally	12+	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	
	Disturbed behaviour	Nil	0-1	8	32.00	16	64.00	3	12.00	8	32.00	3	12.00	9	36.00
Mild		2-3	14	56.0	8	32.00	16	64.00	13	52.00	14	56.00	12	48.00	
Moderate		4-5	2	8.00	1	4.00	3	12.00	2	8.00	5	20.00	1	4.00	
Severe		6-7	1	4.00	0	0.00	1	4.00	2	8.00	3	12.00	3	12.00	
Very high		8+	0	0.00	0	0.00	2	8.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	
Family Emotional Stress	Personal distress	Nil	0-8	10	40.00	15	60.00	7	28.00	10	40.00	9	36.00	10	40.00
		Mild	9-17	15	60.00	10	40.00	15	60.00	12	48.00	11	44.00	13	52.00
		Moderate	18-26	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	3	12.00	2	8.00
		Severe	27-35	0	0.00	0	0.00	1	4.00	1	4.00	2	8.00	0	0.00
		Very severe	36+	0	0.00	0	0.00	2	8.00	2	8.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
	Marital problems	Nil	0-6	0	0.00	1	4.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	1	4.00
		Mild	7-13	24	96.00	24	96.00	25	100.0	25	100.0	24	96.00	24	96.00
		Moderate	14-20	1	4.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	1	4.00	0	0.00
		Severe	21-27	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
		Very high	28+	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
	Other interpersonal problems	Nil	0-2	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
		Mild	3-5	2	8.00	5	20.00	1	4.00	3	12.00	0	0.00	5	20.00
		Moderate	6-8	23	92.00	20	80.00	24	96.0	22	88.00	25	100.0	20	80.00
		Severe	9-11	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
		Very severe	12+	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
	Effect on siblings and other family worries	Nil	0-4	24	96.00	25	100.0	18	72.00	18	72.00	22	88.00	20	80.00
Mild		5-9	1	4.00	0	0.00	7	28.00	7	28.00	3	12.00	5	20.00	
Moderate		10-14	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	
Severe		15-19	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	
Very high		20+	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	
Social Stress	Altered social life	Nil	0-8	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	2	8.00	0	0.00
		Mild	9-17	13	52.00	0	0.00	3	12.00	3	12.00	7	28.00	5	20.00
		Moderate	18-26	12	48.00	25	100.0	19	76.00	22	88.00	16	64.00	18	72.00
		Severe	27-35	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	2	8.00
		Very severe	36+	0	0.00	0	0.00	3	12.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
	Social embarrassment	Nil	0-6	25	100.0	25	100.0	20	80.0	20	80.00	25	100.0	21	84.00
Mild	7-13	0	0.00	0	0.00	2	8.00	2	8.00	0	0.00	4	16.00		

		Moderate	14-20	0	0.00	0	0.00	1	4.00	1	4.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
		Severe	21-27	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	2	8.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
		Very high	28+	0	0.00	0	0.00	2	8.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
Financial Implications		Nil	0- 2	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
		Mild	3-5	8	32.00	7	28.00	4	16.00	7	28.00	9	36.00	8	32.00
		Moderate	6-8	0	0.00	0	0.00	2	8.00	1	4.00	0	0.00	2	8.00
		Severe	9-11	17	68.00	18	72.00	19	76.00	17	68.00	16	64.00	15	60.00
		Very severe	12+	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00

Table 1(b): Frequency and Percentage Distribution of MIG Parents of Mentally Challenged Children on the Type & Level of Perceived Stress across Their Gender

Areas of Perceived Stress	Subscales	Levels of Stress	Score range	MIG (n=75)													
				Mildly Challenged Children (n <sub>1</sub> =25)				Moderately Challenged Children (n <sub>2</sub> =25)				Severely Challenged Children (n <sub>3</sub> =25)					
				Mothers		Fathers		Mothers		Fathers		Mothers		Fathers			
				n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%		
Daily Care	Extra inputs for care	Nil	0-3	0	0.00	1	4.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
		Low	4-7	3	12.00	15	60.00	2	8.00	14	56.00	3	12.00	13	52.00		
		Moderate	7-11	2	8.00	7	28.00	21	84.00	10	40.00	21	84.00	12	48.00		
		High	12-15	2	8.00	2	8.00	2	8.00	1	4.00	1	4.00	0	0.00		
		Very high	16 +	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00		
	Decreased leisure time and activity	Nil	0-2	2	8.00	4	16.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	1	4.00		
		Minimal	3-5	5	20.00	14	56.00	7	28.00	13	52.00	10	40.00	12	48.00		
		Somewhat	6-8	1	4.00	7	28.00	18	72.00	12	48.00	15	60.00	12	48.00		
		Definitely	9-11	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00		
		Totally	12+	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00		
	Neglect of others	Nil	0- 2	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00		
		Minimal	3-5	1	4.00	24	96.00	12	48.00	23	92.00	16	64.00	24	96.00		
		Somewhat	6- 8	1	4.00	1	4.00	13	52.00	2	8.00	9	36.00	1	4.00		
		Definitely	9- 11	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00		
		Totally	12+	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00		
	Disturbed behavior	Nil	0-1	3	12.00	8	32.00	0	0.00	6	24.00	2	8.00	9	36.00		
		Mild	2-3	1	4.00	11	44.00	19	76.00	13	52.00	8	32.00	8	32.00		
		Moderate	4-5	3	12.00	5	20.00	5	20.00	5	20.00	13	52.00	6	24.00		
		Severe	6-7	3	12.00	1	4.00	1	4.00	1	4.00	2	8.00	2	8.00		
		Very high	8+	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00		
Family Emotional Stress	Personal distress	Nil	0- 8	10	40.00	9	36.00	5	20.00	7	28.00	5	20.00	8	32.00		
		Mild	9-17	14	56.00	16	64.00	20	80.00	18	72.00	19	76.00	17	68.00		
		Moderate	18 -26	1	4.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00		
		Severe	27 -35	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	1	4.00	0	0.00		
		Very severe	36 +	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00		
	Marital problems	Nil	0-6	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00		
		Mild	7-13	24	96.00	24	96.00	25	100.00	25	100.00	24	96.00	24	96.00		
		Moderate	14-20	0	0.00	1	4.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	1	4.00	1	4.00		
		Severe	21-27	1	4.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00		
		Very high	28+	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00		
	Other interpersonal problems	Nil	0-2	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00		
		Mild	3-5	23	92.00	24	96.00	23	92.00	24	96.00	23	92.00	19	76.00		
		Moderate	6-8	2	8.00	1	4.00	2	8.00	1	4.00	2	8.00	6	24.00		
		Severe	9-11	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00		
		Very severe	12+	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00		
Effect on	Nil	0-4	21	84.00	23	92.00	24	96.00	22	88.00	23	92.00	24	96.00			

	siblings and other family worries	Mild	5-9	4	16.00	2	8.00	1	4.00	3	12.00	2	8.00	1	4.00
		Moderate	10-14	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
		Severe	15-19	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
		Very high	20+	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
Social Stress	Altered social Life	Nil	0- 8	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
		Mild	9-17	14	56.00	24	96.00	16	64.00	23	92.00	15	60.00	24	96.00
		Moderate	18 -26	11	44.00	1	4.00	7	28.00	2	8.00	9	36.00	1	4.00
		Severe	27 -35	0	0.00	0	0.00	2	8.00	0	0.00	1	4.00	0	0.00
		Very severe	36 +	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
	Social embarrassmen t	Nil	0-6	22	88.00	25	100.00	23	92.00	24	96.00	24	96.00	24	96.00
		Mild	7-13	3	12.00	0	0.00	2	8.00	1	4.00	1	4.00	1	4.00
		Moderate	14-20	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
		Severe	21-27	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
		Very high	28+	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
	Financial implications	Nil	0- 2	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
		Mild	3-5	9	36.00	12	48.00	17	68.00	17	68.00	18	72.00	18	72.00
Moderate		6-8	16	64.00	13	52.00	8	32.00	8	32.00	7	28.00	7	28.00	
Severe		9-11	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	
Very severe		12+	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	

Table 1(a & b) depicts that under LIG more fathers (64.00%) as compare to mothers (32.00%) were not at all affected by the mild disturbed behaviour of children. However, more proportion of mothers of moderately and severely challenged children (64.00% and 54%) were found to be mildly affected by the disturbed behaviour of the child. Quite different picture were observed in MIG, where more percentage of mothers who had mildly and moderately challenged children (64.00% and 76.00% respectively) were found to be mildly affected by the disturbed behaviour of the mentally challenged children. Moreover, more than half of the mothers (52.00%) and only 24.00% of fathers of severely challenged children were identified to be moderately affected due to the disturbed behaviour of their children.

In LIG under the personal distress component more percentage of mothers of mildly and moderately challenged children (60.00%) were found to be mildly distressed but in case of severely challenged children, surprisingly more fathers (52.00%) were recognized to be mildly distressed when compared to mothers (44.00%). Whereas, from middle income families, a completely different picture was drawn, majority of mothers of moderately and severely challenged children (80.00%, 76.00% respectively) as compare to fathers (72.00% and 68.00%) were found mildly distressed while 64.00% of fathers and 56.00% of mothers of mildly challenged children were also found to be mildly distressed.

On marital problems subscale it was very pleasant to note that among LIG and MIG almost all the mothers (96.00%, 100.00% and 96.00%) and fathers (96.00%, 100.00% and 96.00%) of mildly, moderately and severely challenged children reported mild marital problems attributable to child's condition.

Under the component other interpersonal problems, from LIG it was revealed that majority of mothers as compare to fathers who had children with mild, moderate and severe level of mental challenged (92.00%, 96.00% and 100.00% respectively) had moderate interpersonal problems. However, in MIG exactly equal percentage of fathers of mildly and moderately challenged children (96.00%) reported mild interpersonal problems but in case of severely challenged children, majority of mothers (92.00%) had mild interpersonal problems as compared to fathers (76.00%).

The picture under the dimension, effect on siblings and other family worries from the Table 1(a & b) reveals that majority of parents had no effect on siblings and other family worries due to the child's condition. Among them exactly equal percentage of mothers and fathers (72%.00) having moderately challenged children also showed no effect on siblings and other family worries. Moreover, it was appreciable to noticed that 88.00% and 80.00% of mothers and fathers who had

severely challenged children were also found to have no effect on siblings and other family worries due to the child's condition. In MIG also, majority of parents had no effect on siblings and family worries. Where proportion of fathers with mildly and severely challenged children were found more (92.00% and 96.00% respectively). Contradictory to it, the proportion of mothers of moderately challenged children were more (96.00%) as compare to fathers.

In the subscale altered social life, it has been seen that social life of most of the parents was moderately altered. Among LIG, surprisingly, social life of fathers of mildly, moderately and severely challenged children were found to be altered more (100.00%, 88.00% and 72.00% respectively). Among middle income families social life of majority of fathers whose children were mildly, moderately and severely challenged (96.00%, 92.00% and 96.00% respectively) altered mildly.

In case of social embarrassment, it was appreciable to observe all the parents reported no social embarrassment. Among them majority of mothers from LIG with mildly, moderately and severely challenged children (100.00%, 80.00% and 100.00%) felt no social embarrassment. In MIG all the mothers of mildly challenged children had no social embarrassment, exactly equal percentage of mothers and fathers with severely challenged children (96.00%) also showed no social embarrassment. While, 96.00% and 100.00% of fathers of moderately and mildly challenged children reported no social embarrassment.

On the financial stress, it was quite disappointing to note that in LIG the number of fathers of mildly challenged children who experienced severe level of financial stress were more (72.00%) than mothers' (68.00%). More number of mothers of moderately and severely challenged children (76.00% and 64.00%) also reported severe financial stress. But among MIG, more mothers (64.00%) reported moderate level of financial stress. Here, at mild level of financial stress mothers and fathers of moderately challenged children shared equal proportion (68.00%). Similarly, 72.00% of mothers and fathers of severely challenged children also reported mild level of financial stress.

#### 4. DISCUSSIONS

Becoming the parent of a child who has a disability is a time of great stress and change (Thompson, 2000). Present study revealed that both mothers and fathers of mentally challenged children faced problems and perceived considerable stress as their whole life style get affected. A close perusal of Table 2(a) clearly shows that significant differences exists in most of the dimensions of stress among parents of mentally challenged children from low income families i.e. in daily care of the child, marital adjustment, other interpersonal problems and in alteration of social life. However, in few dimensions there is no significant difference i.e. personal distress, effect on siblings and other family worries, social embarrassment and financial implications. Whereas, Table 2(b) shows that middle income families are significantly different across gender only in dimensions of extra inputs for care and disturbed behaviour.

**Table 2(a): Mean Differences in the Stress Perceived by the LIG Parents of Mentally Challenged Children across their Gender**

Areas of Perceived Stress	Subscales	LIG (n= 150)								
		Mothers of Mildly Challenged Children n <sub>1a</sub> =25	Fathers of Mildly Challenged Children n <sub>1b</sub> =25	t	Mothers of Moderately Challenged Children n <sub>2a</sub> =25	Fathers of Moderately Challenged Children n <sub>2b</sub> =25	t	Mothers of Severely Challenged Children n <sub>3a</sub> =25	Fathers of Severely Challenged Children n <sub>3b</sub> =25	t
		Mean (S.D)	Mean (S.D)		Mean (S.D)	Mean (S.D)		Mean (S.D)	Mean (S.D)	
Daily Care Stress	Extra inputs for care	9.04 (1.02)	6.40 (2.14)	5.93*	10.80 (1.5)	7.23 (1.3)	7.53*	12.2 (2.27)	7.89 (3.14)	9.16*
	Decreased leisure time and activity	6.50 (1.94)	5.20 (2.04)	4.53*	8.12 (1.92)	6.04 (2.3)	4.85*	9.65 (3.03)	7.01 (1.5)	6.39*
	Neglect of others	5.34 (2.69)	4.2 (1.87)	2.34*	6.60 (0.91)	4.68 (1.73)	3.79*	8.17 (2.58)	5.50 (3.97)	6.58*
	Disturbed behaviour	3.43 (1.85)	1.89 (1.45)	3.15*	4.68 (2.36)	2.5 (1.76)	5.47*	6.84 (0.99)	3.22 (2.08)	6.75*
Family Emotional Stress	Personal distress	8.97 (3.13)	8.56 (4.05)	0.46	10.80 (9.57)	10.50 (9.44)	0.48	12.96 (7.87)	12.34 (5.38)	0.76
	Marital problems	2.90 (3.38)	1.88 (1.62)	2.89*	5.16 (1.77)	4.18 (2.69)	4.12*	7.23 (8.30)	5.67 (7.95)	5.78*
	Other interpersonal problems	3.21 (1.41)	1.88 (1.83)	3.02*	4.65 (2.97)	3.55 (3.15)	3.27*	6.23 (2.98)	4.78 (2.99)	5.38*
	Effect on siblings and other family worries	3.56 (0.92)	2.96 (1.1)	1.02	5.13 (2.54)	4.64 (2.9)	1.95	7.2 (1.55)	6.56 (3.50)	1.86
Social Stress	Altered social Life	7.56 (3.1)	5.86 (2.12)	4.93*	8.96 (8.04)	6.74 (6.57)	3.04*	10.12 (7.12)	7.44 (6.29)	7.69*
	Social embarrassment	1.09 (1.35)	0.76 (0.97)	1.08	2.10 (4.55)	1.83 (4.28)	1.19	3.67 (1.75)	3.2 (0.65)	1.43
Financial Stress	Financial implications	6.97 (2.88)	6.76 (2.7)	0.27	8.43 (2.86)	8.1 (3.33)	0.15	9.53 (3.73)	9.32 (4.07)	0.17

**Note:** 1. \* Stands for significant at 0.05 level  
 2. Higher the score, higher the level of stress

**Table 2(b): Mean Differences in the Stress Perceived by the MIG Parents of Mentally Challenged Children across Their Gender**

Areas of Perceived Stress	Subscales	MIG (n= 150)								
		Mothers of Mildly Challenge d Children n <sub>1a</sub> =25	Fathers of Mildly Challenge d Children n <sub>1b</sub> =25	t	Mothers of Moderatel y Challenge d Children n <sub>2a</sub> =25	Fathers of Moderatel y Challenge d Children n <sub>2b</sub> =25	t	Mothers of severely Challenge d Children n <sub>3a</sub> =25	Fathers of severely Challenge d Children n <sub>3b</sub> =25	t
		Mean (S.D)	Mean (S.D)		Mean (S.D)	Mean (S.D)		Mean (S.D)	Mean (S.D)	
Daily Care Stress	Extra inputs for care	9.01 (1.89)	5.86 (2.97)	5.32 *	10.76 (2.15)	6.80 (1.89)	7.37 *	11.98 (1.88)	7.89 (2.22)	7.79 *
	Decreased leisure time and activity	6.32 (2.21)	5.85 (2.76)	1.70	7.65 (2.14)	6.95 (2.75)	1.49	8.75 (0.99)	7.98 (1.23)	1.33
	Neglect of others	5.20 (2.53)	4.35 (2.87)	1.60	6.3 (2.34)	5.53 (2.24)	1.86	7.33 (3.2)	6.47 (2.78)	1.47
	Disturbed behaviour	2.85 (1.62)	0.92 (1.00)	3.47 *	4.05 (1.24)	2.00 (2.01)	3.78 *	6.17 (3.02)	3.02 (1.78)	4.53 *
Family Emotional Stress	Personal distress	8.34 (2.9)	8.20 (2.29)	0.45	10.44 (2.38)	10.16 (2.78)	0.56	12.63 (1.38)	12.17 (1.08)	0.89
	Marital problems	1.70 (3.70)	0.85 (1.89)	1.69	2.35 (2.87)	1.59 (2.98)	1.08	3.03 (1.67)	2.27 (1.21)	1.33
	Other interpersonal problems	1.50 (0.92)	0.67 (0.85)	1.43	1.89 (1.45)	1.44 (1.89)	1.47	2.76 (1.23)	2.32 (1.16)	0.87
	Effect on	3.18	2.48	1.25	5.03	4.37	1.28	6.98	6.34	0.97



	siblings and other family worries	(2)	(1.87)		(2.47)	(2)		(1.37)	(0.93)	
Social Stress	Altered social Life	7.12 (3.02)	6.20 (2.61)	1.12	8.19 (2.88)	7.29 (1.78)	1.68	9.22 (3.48)	8.32 (2.98)	1.07
	Social embarrassment	0.98 (1.49)	0.65 (1.11)	0.34	1.95 (1.1)	1.43 (1.23)	0.87	2.78 (1.32)	2.32 (1.32)	0.77
Financial Stress	Financial implications	5.73 (2.72)	5.56 (1.83)	0.42	7.32 (2.11)	6.84 (1.89)	1.03	8.39 (2.4)	8.16 (2.56)	0.23

**Note:** 1. \* stands for significant at 0.05 level

2. Higher the score, higher the level of stress

Having a child with a disability was associated with elevated scores for both mothers and fathers. In this context Dyson (1997), compared 30 mother-father pairs with a child who had a disability with 32 pairs who did not have a child with a disability. Both mothers and fathers of children with disabilities reported significantly more parental stress than mothers and fathers of children without disabilities.

From the study it was revealed that parents of both the gender irrespective of their income class showed significant difference in the component extra input for care and disturbed behaviour. Mothers irrespective of their income class stayed at home and spent a lot of time in caring for their mentally challenged children. Therefore, were more burdened with stress as compare to fathers. Sethi et al. (2007) supported this finding by revealing that amongst the parents mother perceived more stress and burden in caring their disabled children than fathers. Since mothers were found to be with child most of the time so, were also able to provide more vigilance or attention on the disturbed behaviour of the child as compare to fathers.

Among families with low income, leisure time and activities of mothers affected more as compared to fathers, fathers being in occupation were remain outside their home in their work place so had no leisure time. As explained earlier mothers being at home always remain in boundation and spent maximum time in taking care of her child, therefore sometimes they felt that they would not be able to give proper time to other family members and their social life altered too. Heiman (2002) found that the transition in a family with a special-needs child brought about significant changes in that family's social life. Many parents had to make changes in their social life of frustration and dissatisfaction. In the present study it was found that mother's social life altered more as compared to fathers. This finding is in accordance with the finding of Peshwaria et al. (1995) who found that mothers get more affected in terms of social restriction, also parents reported to undergo severe emotional turmoil.

However, it was seen that mothers from low income families had more interpersonal problems and marital problems. Mothers were found to have more interpersonal problems, might be because of misunderstandings and disagreements in the family with regard to the child's care and blame for the child's condition. More marital problems were reported by mothers, it was probably due to the lack of support from husband in looking after the child, blame of husband to wife for the child's condition, dominating nature of husband in taking decisions regarding the child's welfare and in other family matters. Although middle income families were also stressed but due to better understanding, proper communication and support of husbands to their wives in decisions regarding the welfare of their child and equal sharing of responsibilities among them, made no significant difference in perceiving stress across parents' gender in the components leisure time and activity, neglect of others, in family emotional stress, social stress respectively.

Disability of child demands more money for extra care, for medication and for training of the child so, it was noted that whether the parents were from LIG and MIG, they perceived financial stress, no significant difference across gender was observed in both income groups. Effect on siblings and other family worries were also showed no significant difference across gender in both LIG and MIG, because of equal love and future concern of parents towards the siblings of children with special needs.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

From the present study, it can be concluded that gender of parents had an impact on the level of perceived stress. Among LIG, mothers irrespective of their child's degree of mental challenge were found to be significantly more stressed in daily care of the child, faced marital problems, other interpersonal problems and their social life altered more as compare to their counterparts. While among MIG, gender differences irrespective of child's degree of mental challenge were noticed while giving extra inputs for the care of the child and in perceiving stress due to the disturbed behavior of the child. In these components, mothers were found to be significantly more stressed when compared to fathers. Interestingly, the predominant reason for significant differences in perceived stress among parents of MR children was observed to be parents' average education level. The perceived stress was significantly high among LIG parents who were less educated than MIG parents.

Gender of parent plays a significant role in perceiving the stress that occurs due to the child's condition. Father is considered to be bread weaning member of family and plays secondary role, while mother plays primary role in the rearing of child. But, it doesn't mean that whole responsibility of bringing up of child should be of mother. Fathers especially from LIG should cooperate with their wives in every decision related to their child so that their relationship can be improved. Husbands should take out some time from their daily schedule so that they can spent some time with their children and mothers can get some leisure time in which they can also engaged in some societal activities.

It is proved scientifically that the nature and nurture plays an important role in the development of the child and no one can change the nature, so, one should put efforts to create a healthy and positive environment at home and can also work on those identified determinants that have impact on the stress, so as to reduce the stress.

## 6. RECOMMENDATIONS

- Emphasis should be given to strengthen the bond between spouses so that both participate equally in the upbringing of the child, thereby leads to equal distribution of responsibilities of the child.
- Efforts to be made by parents to increase their education level which make them more aware regarding the child's situation, and thereby develop no misunderstanding among husband and wife.

## 7. REFERENCES

1. Beresford, B. A. (1994). Resources and strategies: How parents cope with the care of a disabled child. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 35, 171–209.
2. Dyson, L. (1997). Father and mother of school-age children with developmental disabilities: parental stress and family functioning and social support. *American Journal on Mental Retardation*, 102 (3), 267-279.
3. Girimaji, S. (1999). Manual of family assessment schedule. Bangalore: NIMHANS.

4. Holroyd, K. A., & Lazarus, R. S. (1982). Stress, coping, and somatic adaptation. In Goldberger, L. & Breznitz, S. (Eds.), *Handbook of stress: Theoretical and clinical aspects*. New York: Free Press.
5. Heiman, T. (2002). Parents of children with disabilities: Resilience, coping, and future expectations. *Journal of Developmental and Physical Disabilities*, 14(2), 37-58.
6. 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*, 97, 315–332.
7. Peshawaria, R., Menon, D. K., Roy, G., & Pillay, R. P. R. S., Gupta, A. (1995). *Understanding Indian families, having persons with mental retardation: Impact on parents*. Secunderabad: National Institute for the Mentally Handicapped.
8. Seshadari, M. (1983). Impact of the mentally handicapped child on the family. *Indian Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 10, 473–478.
9. Sethi, S., Bhargava, S. C., & Dhiman, V. (2007). Study of level of stress and burden in the caregivers of children with mental retardation. *Eastern Journal of Medicine*, 12, 21-24.
10. Tunali, B., & Power, T. G. (1993). Creating satisfaction: A psychological perspective on stress and coping in families of handicapped children. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 34, 945–957.
11. Thompson, C. E. (2000). *Raising a Handicapped Child*. New York: Oxford University Press.

