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# Psychosocial impacts on the parents of mentally challenged children at Mangaluru

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<https://doi.org/10.55889/2582-7979.1271>

## Abstract

**Introduction:** Intellectually disabled children upset the mental, physical, social, and financial outlooks of the family in terms of their rearing and future. The support systems surrounding the parents of mentally retarded children play a vital role in lessening the burden associated with their special child. This study sheds some light on the psychosocial impacts on parents of mentally challenged children who were attending special schools at Mangaluru. **Objective:** The study's main objective was to assess the psychosocial impacts on parents of mentally challenged children. Furthermore, we aimed to find the association between the psychosocial impact on parents of mentally challenged children and selected demographic variables. **Method:** This study used a cross-sectional survey design, and participants were selected by using the purposive sampling technique. The sampling frame consisted of parents of clinically diagnosed mentally disabled children in which 80 parents were selected for this study. A structured psychosocial impact scale was used to collect data, which were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. **Results:** The analysis of the results showed that 59 [73.75%] female respondents had more psychosocial problems than their male counterparts. Forty respondents [50%] had a moderate psychosocial impact, followed by 30 (37.5%) respondents who had a severe psychosocial impact and 10 (12.5%) respondents who had a mild psychosocial impact. The total mean percentage of the psychosocial impacts score was 60.5%, with a mean and standard deviation of 30.25 and 7.87, respectively. **Conclusion:** This study indicates that parents, especially mothers with intellectually disabled children, experience various psychological and social problems. Parent-focused early intervention and counselling services, especially for mothers, should be included in the mental retardation management protocol.

*Key words:* Mentally challenged children, mental retardation, parents, psychosocial impacts

## Introduction

Intellectual disability is a profoundly limiting condition characterized by a significant decline in cognitive function usually occurring in early childhood. Children with this disorder have significant challenges regarding intellectual and adaptive skills compared to their peers (Gohel et al., 2011). These children often have delays in reaching developmental

milestones, struggle academically and have difficulties such as dyslexia (Zwicker et al., 2012). In severe cases, people with profound intellectual disabilities may need constant care and help with daily activities. The impact of intellectual disabilities on families is far-reaching and affects their mental, physical, social, and financial well-being (Gupta and Kaur, 2010).

There are many challenges for parents in rearing children with intellectual disabilities. During this journey, they may experience various tensions that build and dissipate over time. Failure for a child with an intellectual disability can cause significant anxiety because expectations are not met. After receiving a diagnosis of a child's disability, parents exhibit a variety of emotional reactions, including shock, denial, guilt, sadness, grief, rejection, and ultimately acceptance. They struggle with questions such as

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Manuscript received: 04 December 2022

Revision accepted: 05 July 2023

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**How to cite this article:** Rahul, T R, Kookal, S, Jose, J T (2023). Psychosocial impacts on parents of mentally challenged children at Mangaluru. *Manipal Journal of Nursing and Health Sciences*, 9(1), 12-17.

“Why me?” and “How can this happen?” as they try to come to terms with their new reality. Deep shame and deep sadness can be felt, followed by a conscious decision to face the challenges ahead. Undeniably, parenting plays a key role in shaping the growth and development of children (Shabo, 2015).

However, when a child has an intellectual disability, parents face additional physical responsibilities that can burden them and other family members. Tasks such as positioning, toileting, bathing, feeding and dressing can create additional challenges that further affect their overall well-being. Inadequate knowledge about intellectual disabilities can exacerbate these difficulties and affect how both families and society view people with cognitive disabilities (Baker et al., 2003). Factors include the nature of the child’s disability, the relationship between intellectual disability and developmental disabilities, the age at which the disability was diagnosed, the child’s participation in special education, the duration of schooling, family size, family structure, socioeconomic status, and socioeconomic status. -Economic status, educational background of parents and professional status may have a profound effect on parents’ psychosocial outcomes. (Trute et al., 2007). Understanding these factors is critical to understanding the level of parental involvement and effectively managing their expectations.

**Objectives**

The objectives of the study were

1. To assess the psychosocial impacts on the parents of mentally challenged children using a psychosocial impact assessment scale in selected special schools.
2. To find the association between psychosocial impacts on the parents of mentally retarded children and selected demographic variables.

**Materials and methods**

This study aimed to examine the psychosocial impacts on parents of mentally challenged children studying at special schools. A cross-sectional survey was undertaken among 80 parents of clinically diagnosed mentally challenged children by using a structured psychosocial impacts assessment scale.

The investigator adopted a convenience sampling technique to select the school and a purposive sampling technique to select the respondents after obtaining the required permissions. The study included all the parents of clinically diagnosed mentally challenged children who were willing and available at the time of study and excluded parents who had already received any kind of training regarding the care of mentally retarded children.

*Description of the tool*

The tool consisted of two sections, namely, sections A and B.

Section A consisted of 8 items seeking information about demographic variables such as age, gender, type of family, religion, monthly income, educational qualification, occupation and source of previous information. Section B consisted of a structured psychosocial impact assessment scale regarding the psychological and social problems of parents of mentally challenged children. The assessment scale consists of 25 items: 9 items regarding the psychological aspects and 16 items regarding the social aspects of problems. The respondents were instructed to select the options, and each option was scored as shown in Table 1.

Table 1  
Scoring of Statements on a Scale of Never, Sometimes, and Always

NEVER	0
SOMETIMES	1
ALWAYS	2

The negative statement received the maximum score when respondents selected ALWAYS, and the positive statement received the lowest score if respondents selected NEVER; the total score was 50. The tool was prepared in English and later translated into Kannada.

The psychosocial impacts of parents have been arbitrarily divided into three categories based on the scores on the assessment scale. Severe psychosocial impact: 34-50, moderate psychosocial impact: 17-33, and mild psychosocial impact: 0-16. Seven experts from the fields of psychiatry, clinical psychology, psychiatric nursing and psychiatric social work scrutinized the

content validity of the structured psychosocial impact assessment scale. As per their suggestions, necessary modifications were incorporated into the scale, and the content validity index of the scale (CVI-S) was 0.91. The reliability of the tool was found to be 0.82 by using the Cronbach's alpha.

*Data Collection Process*

Formal written permission was obtained from the selected special schools before the data collection. The investigator self-introduced the subjects, and the purpose of the study was explained. Later, informed consent was obtained from the participants before inclusion in the study. The data were collected on 15 July 2017, which involved filling out the questionnaire, and the information thus obtained was kept confidential.

**Results**

**Table 1:** Frequency and percentage distribution of demographic variables

N=80		
Demographic variables	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
<u>Age of the parent</u>		
20-30 years	47	58.75%
31-40 years	5	6.25%
41-50 years	28	35%
> 50 years above	0	0%
<u>Gender</u>		
Male	21	26.25%
Female	59	73.75%
<u>Religion</u>		
Christian	28	35%
Muslim	44	55%
Hindu	08	10%
Any other	0	0
<u>Type of family</u>		
Nuclear	35	43.75%
Joint	38	47.50%

Demographic variables	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
<u>Extended</u>		
07		8.75%
<u>Monthly income (in INR)</u>		
< 5,000	27	33.75%
5,000-10,000	43	53.75%
10,001-15,000	07	8.75%
> 15,000	03	3.75%
<u>Educational status</u>		
Primary education	26	32.5%
Secondary education	39	48.75%
Higher secondary education	05	6.25%
Graduate level and above	10	12.5%
<u>Occupation</u>		
Government employee	09	11.25%
Private Employee	40	50%
Self-Employee	20	25%
Unemployed	11	13.75%
<u>Previous source of information</u>		
Mass media	5	6.25%
Health program	40	50%
School health program	10	12.5%
No information	25	31.25%

Most of the parents were in the age group of 20-30 years [58.75%], followed by age brackets 41-50 years [35%] and 31-40 years [6.25%], respectively. More than half of the parents were Muslims [55%] followed by Christians [35%] and Hindus [10%]. There were 47.5% joint family parents and 43.5% nuclear family parents. The 70 respondents [53.75%] had a monthly income of up to 10,000 INR. Among the respondents, 40 [50%] were private employees, 20 [25%] were self-employed, 11 [13.75%] were unemployed, and 9 respondents [11.25%] were government employees. Respondents received information regarding mental retardation from health programs [50%], school health programs

[10%], and mass media [6.25%], while others had no information from any sources [Table 1].

*Assessment of the level of psychosocial impacts on parents*

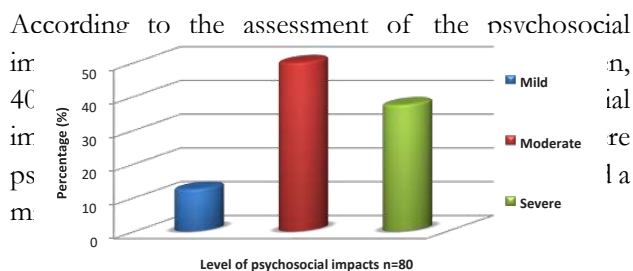


Figure 1 Level of psychosocial impacts on parents

Table 2: Mean, mean percentage, and standard deviation of psychosocial impacts on parents of mentally challenged children

N=80

Group	Mean	Mean Percentage	Standard deviation
Parents of mentally retarded Children	30.25	60.5	7.87

Table 2 depicts that the total mean percentage of the psychosocial impacts of parents of mentally retarded children was 60.5%, with a mean and standard deviation of 30.25 and 7.87, respectively.

Table 3: Assessment of significant association between psychosocial impacts on parents of mentally retarded children and selected demographic variables

N=80

Sl. No.	Demographic variables	Psychosocial Impacts Scores		df	Chi-square value	p-value
		≤ median	> median			
1.	Age					
	Up to 30 years or more	20	55	1	1.7	0.19
2.	Gender					
	Male	11	10		11.38*	0.001
	Female	9	50	1		

Sl. No.	Demographic variables	Psychosocial Impacts Scores		df	Chi-square value	p-value
		≤ median	> median			
3.	Religion					
	Christian and Muslim	20	52	1	2.96	0.09
4.	Type of family					
	Nuclear and Joint	20	53	1	2.55	0.11
5.	Monthly income					
	Up to 10,000 INR	17	53	1	0.152	0.70
6.	Educational status					
	Primary and Secondary	15	50	1	0.69	0.41
7.	Occupation					
	Government and private	10	40	1	1.77	0.18
8.	Previous source of information					
	Mass media and Health program	10	35	1	0.04	0.84
	School health program and No information	10	25			

Table value of  $\chi^2 = 3.84, p < 0.05$

NS=Not significant, S=Significant

Table 3 shows, that age did not have a significant association with psychosocial impacts ( $p = 0.19$ ). Whether individuals were up to 30 years old or more, there seemed to be no substantial difference in their psychosocial well-being.

On the other hand, gender emerged as a significant factor influencing psychosocial impacts ( $p < 0.001$ ). This finding suggests that there are notable differences in psychosocial well-being between males and females. Further exploration is required to understand the underlying reasons for this disparity.

Religion, type of family, monthly income, educational status, occupation, and previous source of information did not exhibit significant associations with psychosocial impacts. These variables, including religious affiliation (Christian, Muslim, Hindu, or others), family structure (nuclear, joint, or extended), income level (up to 10,000 INR or more than 10,001 INR), educational attainment (primary and secondary or higher secondary and above), occupation (government and private, self-employed and unemployed), and previous source of information (mass media and health programs, school health programs, or no information), did not seem to have a substantial impact on psychosocial well-being.

In summary, while gender demonstrated a significant association with psychosocial impacts, the remaining demographic variables did not show significant relationships. These findings provide insights into the complex interplay between demographic factors and psychosocial well-being, highlighting the need for further research and investigation in this area. [Table 2].

## Discussion

This study elucidates the psychosocial impacts on parents of mentally challenged children studying in specialized schools at Mangalore, Karnataka State, India. The results suggest that parents, especially mothers, experience various psychological and social problems. Another study compared the psychosocial impact on parents of children with intellectual disabilities with parents of typically developing children and showed that parents of mentally challenged children experienced more stress, anxiety and depression than parents of the comparison group (Gohel et al., 2011). This finding supports the notion that parents of children with intellectual disabilities face unique psychosocial challenges.

According to a previous study, poorer well-being and greater anxiety are more prevalent in parents of children with intellectual disabilities than in parents of

normal children. (Masulani et al., 2018). In contrast to the findings of the present study, another study found that there are no significant differences in psychosocial effects between fathers and mothers of intellectually disabled children; there are no significant differences in psychosocial effects between mothers and fathers; rather, psychosocial impacts can vary depending on individual factors such as personal factors, coping strategies and social support, not just gender (Azar & Badri., 2020). The results of this study are consistent with the majority of previous studies that show that parents of children with developmental disabilities face significant psychosocial challenges. Mothers' greater psychosocial problems may be due to their primary role in child care and emotional support. However, the father and other family members' psychosocial problems should not be neglected, as they also play a key role in the well-being of the family.

Although the sample size of the study was relatively small and participants were from a specific area, the study results provide vulnerable insights. In addition, the study focused on parents attending special schools, which may not fully reflect the experiences of all parents of children with intellectual disabilities. Additional research is needed to determine the psychosocial effects on parents of children with intellectual disabilities in different settings and populations. Longitudinal studies can provide better insights into how these effects develop over time and the effectiveness of interventions and support systems to address parents' psychosocial needs. It is important to adopt a holistic approach that considers the unique experiences, strengths and challenges of parents and families to provide comprehensive support and improve their overall well-being.

## Conclusion

This study sheds light on the psychosocial impacts experienced by parents of mentally challenged children attending special schools at Mangaluru. The results highlight that parents of mentally challenged children, especially mothers, are facing significant psychological and social problems in bringing up their mentally challenged children that significantly disrupt their well-being and overall quality of life. Thus, this study also highlights the urgent need for early care and counselling services for such parents that focus

primarily on supporting mothers who have a significant burden of caring for intellectually challenged children. As per the study results, a significant number of parents experience moderate to severe psychosocial effects on their children with developmental disabilities, which can have a profound impact on their mental, physical, social and financial lives. It is very important to identify the challenges these parents face and provide them with appropriate support systems to lighten the burden and improve coping mechanisms. Initiatives such as counselling services for parents can provide the necessary knowledge, skills and emotional support to meet the challenges of effectively parenting children with developmental disabilities.

In summary, it can be stated that addressing the psychosocial effects on parents of children with intellectual disabilities is necessary to promote the well-being of both parents and children. By providing comprehensive support systems and targeted interventions, we can help parents effectively address the challenges they face and create a more inclusive and supportive environment for children with developmental disabilities and their families.

Source of support: None

Conflict of interest: None declared

Source of support in the form of grants: None.

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