

A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF MENTAL HEALTH AMONG PARENTS OF CHILDREN WITH HEARING IMPAIRMENT AND AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER IN JAIPUR DISTRICT, RAJASTHAN.

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Abstract

The mental health of parents is a crucial determinant of family well-being and significantly influences the development, education, and rehabilitation of children with disabilities. Parents of children with Hearing Impairment (HI) and Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) often encounter various psychological, social, and economic challenges that may adversely affect their mental health. The present study aimed to compare the mental health of parents of children with Hearing Impairment and Autism Spectrum Disorder in Jaipur district of Rajasthan. A descriptive comparative research design was adopted for the study. The sample comprised 120 parents, including 60 parents of children with Hearing Impairment and 60 parents of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder, selected through purposive sampling from special schools and rehabilitation centres in Jaipur district. Data were collected using the Mental Health Scale developed by Dr. Mubashir Gull and Prof. Akbar Husain (2019). The study examined four dimensions of mental health, namely Dismaying Insufficiency, State of Tribulation, Socio-Emotional Despondency, and Dire Straits. The findings revealed significant differences between the two groups of parents on all dimensions of mental health. "Parents of children with Hearing Impairment demonstrated significantly better mental health than parents of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder." The study emphasizes the need for psychological counselling services, parent support groups, and family-centred intervention programmes to enhance the mental health and well-being of parents of children with disabilities.

Keywords: *Mental Health, Parents, Hearing Impairment, Autism Spectrum Disorder, Comparative Analysis.*

Introduction:

Mental health is an essential component of overall well-being and plays a significant role in an individual's ability to cope with life's challenges and responsibilities. Parents are the primary caregivers of children and their psychological well-being directly influences the development and rehabilitation of their children. Raising a child with a disability often brings emotional, social, and financial challenges that may adversely affect parental mental health. Among various disabilities, Hearing Impairment and Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) require continuous care, specialized interventions, and long-term support from family members. Parents of children with hearing impairment frequently experience stress related to communication barriers, educational concerns, and uncertainty regarding their child's future. Similarly, parents of children with autism often face higher levels of anxiety, depression, caregiving burden, and social isolation due to the complex behavioural and developmental needs of their children. In the Indian context, particularly in Rajasthan, limited access to specialized services, social stigma, and inadequate support systems further increase the psychological burden on parents. Therefore, examining and comparing the mental health status of parents of children with hearing impairment and autism spectrum disorder is essential for understanding their needs and developing appropriate counselling and support programmes.

Autism Spectrum Disorder

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a neurodevelopmental disorder characterized by persistent difficulties in social communication and social interaction, along with restricted and repetitive patterns of behaviour, interests, or activities. The term "spectrum" indicates that autism varies considerably in its severity and presentation from one individual to another. Children with autism may experience challenges in verbal and non-verbal communication, maintaining relationships, understanding social cues, and adapting to changes in routine. Many children with ASD require intensive educational, behavioural, and therapeutic interventions throughout their lives.

The diagnosis of autism often creates significant emotional, psychological, and financial challenges for families. Parents of children with ASD frequently experience high levels of stress, anxiety, depression, and social isolation due to the extensive caregiving responsibilities and uncertainty regarding their child's future. Consequently, the mental health and well-being of parents become an important area of research and intervention.

Hearing Impairment

Hearing impairment refers to a partial or complete loss of hearing that affects an individual's ability to perceive and process auditory information. It ranges from mild hearing loss to profound deafness and may be congenital or acquired. Hearing impairment can significantly influence the development of speech, language, communication skills, academic achievement, and social interactions, especially when it occurs during early childhood.

Children with hearing impairment often require specialized educational services, speech and language therapy, hearing aids, cochlear implants, and communication support systems such as sign language. The diagnosis and management of hearing impairment may place considerable emotional and financial burdens on parents. Many parents experience stress related to communication difficulties, concerns about educational opportunities, and uncertainty about their child's future independence and social integration. Therefore, understanding the experiences and mental health of parents of children with hearing impairment is essential for developing effective support services and family-centred interventions. The findings of such a study can contribute to improving family well-being and enhancing the effectiveness of special education and rehabilitation services in Rajasthan.

Review of Literature

Nahar et al. (2022) investigated the risk and protective factors associated with maternal mental health among mothers of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder. The study found that mothers of children with ASD experienced significantly higher levels of stress, anxiety, and depressive symptoms. Social support and resilience were identified as important protective factors that improved parental mental health.

Ng and Ng (2022) conducted a qualitative study on the experiences of stigma among Chinese parents of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder. The findings revealed that social stigma, feelings of isolation, and inadequate community support negatively affected the psychological well-being of parents, particularly mothers.

Xu et al. (2024) studied the relationship between perceived social support and rumination among parents of children with autism. The study concluded that higher levels of social support significantly reduced psychological distress and improved parental mental well-being.

A 2025 study on parents of children with ASD reported a high prevalence of depression, anxiety, and stress among caregivers. The researchers concluded that parental mental health problems negatively affect caregiving capacity and family functioning and highlighted the importance of early psychological support services. A systematic review of qualitative studies on parents of children with ASD found that lack of emotional support, social exclusion, financial burden, and inadequate policies contributed significantly to parental stress and social isolation. The review recommended strengthening family support services and community awareness programmes.

Need and Significance of the Study

The birth and upbringing of a child with a disability bring numerous challenges that can significantly affect the psychological well-being of parents. Parents of children with Hearing Impairment and Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) often encounter emotional stress, financial burdens, social stigma, and increased caregiving responsibilities. While both disabilities require long-term support and specialized interventions, the nature and intensity of parental challenges may differ according to the child's condition.

Poor parental mental health can adversely affect family relationships, parenting practices, and the educational and developmental outcomes of children with disabilities. In the context of Rajasthan, limited access to specialized services, inadequate awareness, and insufficient counselling and support systems may further increase the psychological burden on parents. Although several studies have examined parental stress and mental health in different disability groups, comparative research focusing on parents of children with hearing impairment and autism in Rajasthan is scarce. Therefore, the present study is needed to assess and compare the mental health status of these parents and to identify their specific psychological needs. The findings of the study will provide valuable insights for special educators, psychologists, counsellors, rehabilitation professionals, and policymakers in developing effective parent-support programmes, counselling services, and family-centred interventions aimed at improving the well-being of both parents and their children.

Statement of the Problem:

A Comparative Analysis of Mental Health Among Parents of Children with Hearing Impairment and Autism Spectrum Disorder in Rajasthan

Objectives of the Study

- To assess the mental health of parents of children with Hearing Impairment and Autism Spectrum Disorder.
- To compare the mental health of parents of children with Hearing Impairment and Autism Spectrum Disorder on the dimensions of mental health.

Hypotheses

H₀₁: There is no significant difference in mental health between parents of hearing impaired and autistic children.

Research design:

The present study employed a descriptive comparative research design to examine and compare the mental health of parents of children with Hearing Impairment and Autism Spectrum Disorder in Rajasthan. The study aimed to assess the existing mental health status of the two groups of parents without manipulating any variables. Data were collected using standardized mental health measures and relevant demographic information.

Variables

Independent Variable

1. Type of Disability
 - Hearing Impairment
 - Autism Spectrum Disorder

Dependent Variable

1. Mental Health factors
 - Dismaying Insufficiency
 - State of Tribulation
 - Socio-Emotional Despondency
 - Dire Straits

Population of the Study

The population of the present study comprised all parents of children with Hearing Impairment and Autism Spectrum Disorder enrolled in special schools, inclusive schools, and rehabilitation centres in Rajasthan State. These parents constituted the target population for investigating the mental health status of caregivers of children with disabilities.

Sample of the Study

For the present study, a total sample of 120 parents was selected from the Jaipur district of Rajasthan. The sample consisted of 60 parents of children with Hearing Impairment and 60 parents of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder. The participants were selected from special schools and rehabilitation centres in Jaipur district using an appropriate sampling technique, such as purposive sampling. The selected sample was considered adequate for comparing the mental health status of the two groups of parents.

Tool:

Mental Health Scale developed by Dr. Mubashir Gull and Prof. Akbar Husain (2019) to assess the mental health status of parents of children with Hearing Impairment and Autism Spectrum Disorder. The scale is a standardized psychological instrument designed to measure the overall mental health and well-being of individuals. It consists of a series of statements related to different aspects of mental health, and respondents are required to indicate their responses according to the prescribed instructions. The scale has been standardized on the Indian population and possesses satisfactory psychometric properties, making it suitable for research purposes. The scores obtained from the scale were used to compare the mental health levels of the two groups of parents.

Results & Discussion:

Table-1

Indicating mean, SD and t-values between parents of hearing impairment and autism spectrum disorder for mental health factors.

Mental health factors	Types of parents	N	Mean	SD	't'	Sig. Level
Dismaying Insufficiency	Children with HI	60	27	4.99	14.27	$p < .01$
	Children with ASD	60	15	4.19		
State of Tribulation	Children with HI	60	17	5.11	11.21	$p < .01$
	Children with ASD	60	8	3.55		

Socio-Emotional Despondency	Children with HI	60	9	3.23	3.94	$p < .01$
	Children with ASD	60	7	2.24		
Dire Straits	Children with HI	60	10	3.66	7.04	$p < .01$
	Children with ASD	60	6	2.44		

Critical value of t at 0.01 level of significance ($df = 118$) = 2.62.

Table 1 presents the mean scores, standard deviations, and t -values of parents of children with Hearing Impairment (HI) and Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) on the four factors of mental health.

In the factor Dismaying Insufficiency, parents of children with Hearing Impairment obtained a mean score of 27.00 with an SD of 4.99, whereas parents of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder obtained a mean score of 15.00 with an SD of 4.19. The calculated t -value of 14.27 is greater than the table value of 2.62 at the 0.01 level of significance. Hence, a significant difference exists between the two groups of parents on this factor. The higher mean score of "Parents of children with Hearing Impairment demonstrated better mental health and lower levels of feelings of inadequacy and psychological distress than parents of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder."

For the factor State of Tribulation, parents of children with Hearing Impairment obtained a mean score of 17.00 and an SD of 5.11, while parents of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder obtained a mean score of 8.00 and an SD of 3.55. The calculated t -value of 11.21, which is greater than the critical value of 2.62, indicates a significant difference between the two groups. The findings suggest that Parents of children with Hearing Impairment exhibit better emotional adjustment and fewer emotional difficulties than parents of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

Regarding Socio-Emotional Despondency, parents of children with Hearing Impairment obtained a mean score of 9.00 with an SD of 3.23, whereas parents of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder obtained a mean score of 7.00 with an SD of 2.24. The obtained t -value of 3.94 is significant at the 0.01 level because it exceeds the table value of 2.62. Therefore, a significant difference exists between the two groups in socio-emotional well-being. The higher mean score of the Hearing Impairment group indicates lower feelings of loneliness, emotional instability, and social dissatisfaction.

In the factor Dire Straits, parents of children with Hearing Impairment obtained a mean score of 10.00 and an SD of 3.66, while parents of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder obtained a mean score of 6.00 and an SD of 2.44. The calculated t -value of 7.04 is greater than the critical value of 2.62, indicating a significant difference between the two groups. This finding suggests that parents of children with Hearing Impairment experience less severe life difficulties and psychological suffering than parents of children with ASD.

Thus, for all four factors of mental health, the calculated t-values are significant at the 0.01 level of significance. Therefore, the null hypothesis stating that there is no significant difference between parents of children with Hearing Impairment and Autism Spectrum Disorder on the dimensions of mental health is rejected. Thus, since higher scores on the Mental Health Scale indicate better mental health, parents of children with Hearing Impairment demonstrated significantly better mental health than parents of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder on all four dimensions..

Conclusion

The present study concludes that there are significant differences in the mental health of parents of children with Hearing Impairment and Autism Spectrum Disorder in Jaipur district of Rajasthan. The findings revealed that parents of children with Hearing Impairment obtained higher mean scores on all four dimensions of mental health—Dismaying Insufficiency, State of Tribulation, Socio-Emotional Despondency, and Dire Straits—indicating better mental health compared to parents of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder. The comparatively lower mental health of parents of children with ASD may be attributed to the greater caregiving demands, behavioural challenges, social stigma, and long-term uncertainty associated with autism. These findings are consistent with previous studies, which reported that parents of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder experience higher levels of stress, anxiety, and psychological distress than parents of children with other disabilities (Hayes & Watson, 2013; Dabrowska & Pisula, 2010). Similarly, studies have shown that adequate support services and early intervention contribute positively to the psychological well-being of parents of children with Hearing Impairment (Quittner et al., 2010; Pipp-Siegel et al., 2002). Therefore, there is an urgent need to provide psychological counselling, parent training programmes, social support networks, and family-centred interventions, particularly for parents of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder, to enhance their mental health and overall family well-being.

Educational Implications:

1. **Development of Parent Counselling and Support Programmes:** The findings of the study highlight the need for regular psychological counselling, stress management programmes, and parent support groups, particularly for parents of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder. Educational institutions and rehabilitation centres should provide counselling services to enhance parental mental health and coping abilities.
2. **Strengthening Family-Centred Educational Interventions:** Special schools and inclusive educational settings should adopt family-centred approaches by actively involving parents in educational planning and intervention programmes. Providing parent training, awareness programmes, and guidance on disability management can improve parental well-being and contribute to better educational and developmental outcomes for children with disabilities. Strengthening parent support groups and community-based rehabilitation programmes.

3. Limitations of the Study

- The study was confined to Jaipur district only.
- The sample size was limited to 120 parents.
- The study relied on self-reported responses.

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