



International Journal of Psychiatry Research

www.psychiatryjournal.in

Online ISSN: 2664-8970; Print ISSN: 2664-8962

Received Date: 05-05-2019; Accepted Date: 06-06-2019; Published: 13-06-2019

Volume 1; Issue 2; 2019; Page No. 13-17

Behavioral problems of children with intellectual disability and Parents' expressed emotion

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Abstract

Background: The present study was intended to assess the behavioral problems of children with intellectual disability and parents' expressed emotion. The objectives of the study were to assess the behavioral problems of children with intellectual disability, expressed emotion of their parents and to determine the relationship between behavioral problems of children and expressed emotion of parents.

Methodology: Descriptive design was adopted. Sample consisted of 100 parents of children with intellectual disability from a selected school for differently abled Children. The tool used for the study were questionnaire to assess demographic variables of parents and socio-clinical variables of children, Level of Expressed Emotion scale and American Association Mental Retardation Adaptive Behavior Scale. The technique used for data collection was self-report from parents.

Result: There was statistically significant positive correlation between expressed emotion of parents and behavior problems of children ($r=0.219$, $p<0.05$).

Conclusion: The study concluded that higher the expressed emotion in the parents, aggravate the behavior problems in children with intellectual disability.

Keywords: intellectual disability, behavior problems, expressed emotion, intrusiveness, irritability

1. Introduction

Disability is an umbrella term, covering impairment, activity limitation, and participation restriction. An impairment is a problem in body function or structure; an activity limitation is a difficulty encountered by an individual in executing a task or action; while a participation restriction is a problem experienced by an individual in involvement in life situations [1]. The person with disabilities deserves proper care, protection, training, employment and rehabilitation. More than 1 billion people in the world have some form of disability [2].

The Intellectual Disability (ID) is characterized by significant limitations in both intellectual functioning and adaptive behavior, which covers everyday social and practical skills. This disability originates before the age of 18. The worldwide prevalence of intellectual disability is 2.3%. It is more common in low income countries, 16.41 in every 1000 people [3]. As per the National census 2011, there are 1,505,624 people having intellectual disability in which 870,708 constitute males and 634,916 females [4]. Report of Kerala Mental Health Survey shows, about 11.36% of the total population is affected by mental disorders [5]. From Human Development report 2005, 0-1% (18,267-36,535) of all children upto 6 years of age have Intellectual disability in Kerala [6].

1.1 Need and significance of the study

The families of children with intellectual disability (ID) function differently than those with typically developing children. The presence of challenging behaviors in children with ID, gender of the child and perceived burden have a major impact on the lives of their families [7]. But the parents often do not seek help for the behavior problems, perhaps believing that it is due to the child's

disability [8]. Both behavioral and cognitive treatments are generally found to be effective for the challenging behaviors in children with mild intellectual disability [9].

Parents experience physiological stress and disappointment when their child doesn't meet their hopes and expectations. It also affects several aspects of parent's life negatively including poor physical and emotional state. Intellectual disability can impose psychological problems, social issues and life style restrictions that can affect quality of life of parents and family members [10]. The child behavior problems is a stronger contributor to parenting stress than the child's cognitive delay [11]. A positive relationship between mothers and their children with disability are associated with decrease in internalizing and externalizing problems [10].

In a study on 'expressed emotion research in severe mental illness' noted that the symptoms of irritability by the parents are believed to be behavioral precursors of mental illness in later childhood or adulthood [12]. Another study on expressed emotion in families of children and adults with intellectual disabilities, found that there is high EE in some families and the behavioral problems in children with intellectual disabilities are related to high EE in parents [7]. In a study by Linda A and McDonagh found that 62% of children with mental illness came from households of high expressed emotion [13].

Parental expressed emotion, specifically criticism/hostility, over involvement, parental distress, and parenting practices, accounted for the variance in child externalizing behaviors such as excessive verbal aggression, physical aggression to people and animals, destruction of property, theft, and deliberate fire setting. So there is great need to assess the level of expressed emotion of parents and children's behavioral problems [14]. Parental

expressed emotion have reliable association with children's behavior problems. But there are very few studies related to express emotion in families of children with intellectual disability [15]. The exact mechanism by which the parent and child characteristics interact to create family environment is unknown. The relationship of behavior of child and level of EE are not clearly mentioned in any studies. There are very few studies done related to this in India and virtually no studies reported from Kerala. Therefore the investigator focused to investigate the two aspects of family environment of intellectually disabled child such as behavior problems of children and expressed emotions of their parents.

2. Materials and methods

The present study aimed at assessing the behavioral problems of children with intellectual disability and parent's expressed emotion. Quantitative research approach was adopted. The research design was descriptive design. The setting of the study was in a special school for differently abled children in Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala. Sampling technique of the study was non-probability purposive sampling. Data collection was started after getting clearance from the institutional ethics committee and permission from Special school for Differently Abled. The study was conducted among 100 parents of children with intellectual disability. The parents were given the questionnaires such as demographic variables of parents, socio-clinical variables of children, Level of expressed emotion scale [16] and Adaptive behaviour scale [17] in their local language. The technique of the data collection was self-report from parents Socio-clinical variables of children with intellectual disability were collected from school records. The data was analyzed by descriptive and inferential statistics. Association of expressed emotion and behavioral problems with demographic variables and socio-clinical variables were computed by ANOVA and t-test. The relationship between expressed emotion and behavior problems were analyzed using Karl Pearson correlation coefficient. The investigator also conducted an awareness class for parents regarding measures to manage behavioral problems among children with intellectual disability and steps to overcome parental stress.

3. Results

3.1. Demographic characteristics of parents of children with Intellectual disability

- 33% of parents were between the age group of 36-40 years and only 4% were more than 50 years of age.
- Among the parents, majority (70%) were mothers and 30% were fathers.
- The type of marriage for 95% of the parents was non-consanguineous and only 5% was consanguineous marriage.
- 81% parents belonged to nuclear family, 15% were from joint family and only 4% from extended family.
- Majority (82%) of the mothers conceived the disabled child

at their 20-30 years of age.

- 96% of parents were not having family history of mental illness and only 4% were having family history of mental illness.

3.2. Socio-clinical characteristics of children with Intellectual disability

- 56% of children were more than 12 years of age and only 2% belonged to the age group of 3 to 5 years.
- Majority (75%) of the children were males and only 25% were females.
- 45% of the children were having intelligence quotient between 55 and 70 and only 15% were having IQ under 30.
- 41% of the children were taking medicine and about 59% were not using any medicine.
- 16% of the children were having physical disability and remaining 84% were not having physical disability.

Table 1: Expressed emotion among parents of children with intellectual disability n =100

Subscales of EE	Maximum score	Mean	Standard deviation (SD)	Mean %
Lack of emotional support	104	48.8	7.3	47
Criticism	24	11.0	3.5	45.8
Intrusiveness	60	35.3	5.9	58.8
Irritability	52	26.8	9.6	51.6
Total	240	121.9	13.0	50.8

Table 1 reveals that the mean score of lack of emotional support was 48.8 ± 7.3 , for criticism the mean score was 11.0 ± 3.5 , mean score for intrusiveness was 35.3 ± 5.9 whereas for irritability the mean score was 26.8 ± 9.6 . Intrusiveness was high when compared with other domains of expressed emotion.

Table 2: Behavioral problems among children with intellectual disability n =100

Domains of Adaptive Behavior Scale (ABS)	Maximum Score	Mean	Standard deviation (SD)	Mean %
Threatens or does physical violence	24	3.4	3.0	14.3
Has violent temper or temper tantrum	10	2.2	1.7	22.4
Teases or gossips about others	12	1.1	1.7	9.1
Bosses and manipulates others	12	1.8	1.9	14.6
Uses angry language	12	1.1	1.5	10.5
Reacts poorly to frustration	8	2.3	1.6	22.7
Disrupts others activities	10	1.2	1.6	11.8
Total	88	13.1	8.5	14.9

Table 2 shows that the mean score of domain 'reacts poorly to frustration' was 2.3 ± 1.6 , 'has violent temper or temper tantrum' was 2.2 ± 1.7 . The children reacts poorly to frustration was having high mean percentage score followed by violent temper tantrums when compared to other domains of behavioral problems.

Table 3: Association between expressed emotion of parents and mother's age at the time of conception n =100

Demographic Variables		Mean	SD	N	t	p
Mother's age at the time of conception	≤ 30 years of age	123.0	13.2	88	2.27*	0.03
	>30 years of age	114.1	7.7	12		

*Significant at 0.05 level

Table 3 depicts that there was statistically significant association ($p<0.05$) between expressed emotion and mother's age at the time of conception. The mothers conceived below 30 years of age were having high expressed emotion.

Table 4: Association between behavioral problems of children and type of family n=100

Type of family	Mean	SD	N	t	p
Nuclear	12.1	8.6	81	2.19*	0.031
Joint/Extended	16.8	7.1	19		

*Significant at 0.05 level

As shown in table 4 that there was statistically significant association ($p<0.05$) between behavioral problems of children

and type of family. Children from Joint/extended family exhibited more behavioral problem compared to nuclear family.

Table 5: Association between behavioral problems of children and gender of children n=100

Gender	Mean	SD	N	t	p
Male	14.3	8.8	75	2.78**	0.006
Female	9.0	6.3	25		

**significant at 0.01 level

It is clear from the table 5 that there was significant statistical association between behavioral problems and gender of the child ($p<0.01$). Males had more behavioral problems compared to females.

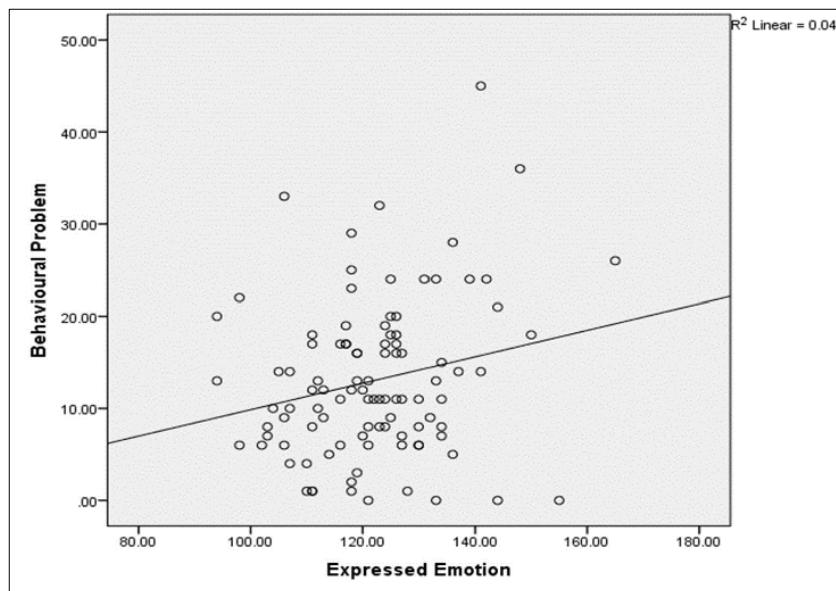


Fig 1

Correlation between behavioral problems of children with intellectual disability and parents' expressed emotion

Figure 1 highlights the correlation between expressed emotion and behavior problems. The calculated 'r' value for expressed emotion of parents and behavior problems among children with intellectual disability showed a statistically significant positive correlation ($r=0.219$, $p<0.05$).

4. Discussion

The major findings of present study are discussed in relation to similar studies conducted by other researchers. The present study aimed to assess the behavioral problems of children with intellectual disability and parents' expressed emotion in a selected school in Thiruvananthapuram district. Majority (58.8%) of the parents were having intrusiveness followed by irritability (51.6%) and lack of emotional support (47%). In a similar study conducted by Richard Hastings on expressed emotion in families of children with intellectual disabilities revealed that 30-60% of parents of children with intellectual disability had coded as high expressed emotion. 20-40% for high criticism and 10-60% for high emotional over involvement. High expressed emotion was mainly a result of high levels of emotional overinvolvement [7]. The present study depicted that high scores were for the domains

such as 'reacts poorly to frustration', 'has violent temper or temper tantrum', 'bosses and manipulates others' followed by 'threatens or does physical violence'. Several studies support the findings of present study that aggression and temper tantrums were the significant problems among the children with intellectual disability. Other behavior problems included in the studies were self-injurious behavior, hyperactivity, stereotyped behaviors, impulse or acts without thinking, sudden changes in mood or feelings, gets hurt a lot, accident prone and bites fingernails [8, 18, 19, 20].

In the present study a significant association was observed between expressed emotion and mother's age at the time of conception ($p = 0.025$). But there is no supportive study which reported the same result.

Considering the behavior problems of children, significant association was found between behavior problems with gender of the child and type of family. In the present study, children from joint/extended nuclear families were having more behavioral problems compared to nuclear family and male children had higher behavioral problems compared to female children. In tune with this finding a study on behavioral problems in children with intellectual disability showed that there was significant association found between behavior problems and gender of

child, study revealed that boys manifested more behavior problems than girls [20].

There is a correlation between behavior problems and expressed emotion, it was found that statistically significant positive correlation was observed between behavior problems and expressed emotion ($r=0.219$, $p<0.05$). The present study findings are consistent with the result of a study on maternal expressed emotion and relations with behavior problems of children with intellectual disabilities showing a positive correlation between expressed emotion and behavior problems [15]. High levels of expressed emotion would have a detrimental effects on the behavior of the children with intellectual disability. High levels of expressed emotion in mothers of adolescents with autism was related to increasing severity and intensity of externalizing, internalizing and social maladaptive behaviors [21].

5. Limitations

- Study was conducted in a single school which limits the generalizability of the study.
- The assessment of expressed emotion and behavior problems were assessed by self-report by parents, so there may be chance of personal bias.

6. Conclusion

The present study was intended to assess the relationship between the behavioral problems of children with intellectual disability and parent's expressed emotion in a selected special school in Thiruvananthapuram district. The study proved that there is a positive correlation between expressed emotion among the parents and behavior problems of children with intellectual disability. Male child had more behavior problem than female child. Reacting poorly to frustration and temper tantrums were the most common behavioral problems of children with intellectual disability. And parents of children with intellectual disability were having higher scores in 'intrusiveness' followed by irritability when compared to other subscales of expressed emotion such as lack of emotional support and criticism. There is a need to explore interventions that may help to remediate high expressed emotion within parents, as the data suggested that there are significant detrimental effects of high expressed emotion in the behaviors of children with intellectual disability. There is a high need to uplift parents' social and psychological wellbeing which will in turn help the parents to deal effectively with the children having behavioral problems.

7. Recommendations

- Similar study can be conducted by probability sampling method with larger sample.
- A similar study can be carried out with different methods and tools.
- Expressed emotion among parents can be managed routinely with simple, safe and cost effective method like psycho education.
- A study on the effectiveness or a planned intervention on expressed emotion of parents can be undertaken.
- Authorities of the school should take initiative in conducting meetings of the parents and educate the interventions for reducing the high expressed emotion.
- A follow up study can be done after giving the interventions

for reducing the expressed emotion among parents.

- The effectiveness of behavioral interventions for children with intellectual disability can be done.

8. Acknowledgment

Study participants

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