Chapter #19

PARENTING STRESS AND ITS INFLUENCING FACTORS AMONG KOSOVAR MOTHERS

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ABSTRACT
Parenting behaviors are considered to be influenced by certain stressors, deriving from situational, contextual, or parental or child domains. The main goal of this study was to examine the interplay of children's age, number of children and gender with parenting stress level among Kosovar mothers. The Parenting Stress Scale (PSS; Berry & Jones, 1995) was used to assess parenting-related stress among Kosovar mothers. The measuring instrument consisted of an online survey distributed to a sample of (N=226) Kosovar mothers. Evaluation of the individual predictors indicated that number of children, child age, and child gender were all significantly associated with high levels of parenting stress, all having *p*s < .05. Parents of more than one child were over 8 times more likely to have high levels of parent stress (*OR* = 8.120). Conversely, parents of children younger than school age had decreased odds of high parenting stress (*OR* = .083). Similarly, those who had only female children were less likely to experience high parenting stress (*OR* = .346) compared to those with children of mixed genders. The Kosovar mothers' parenting stress indicators are in line with the existing parenting stress triggers found within other population groups, since number of children, child age, and child gender were all significantly associated with high levels of parenting stress.

Keywords: parenting stress, mothers, children's age, number of children, child gender.

1. INTRODUCTION

The term 'stress' has gained increasing popularity in the behavioral and health sciences over the past five decades (Krohne, 2002). The point in the life cycle in which people tend to experience increased levels of stress is considered to be when they become parents; a time also deemed most demanding in terms of adult life responsibilities. While becoming a parent is recognized as one of the most powerful human experiences, as it is often accompanied by celebratory and relieved emotions, occasionally it is also a time of anxiety and stress (Lawoko & Soares, 2002, as cited in, Sumpter, 2009).

Certain stressors, deriving from parental or child situational or contextual domains influence parenting stress, which also encompasses difficulties in adjusting to the parenting role (Garbarski, 2014). Parenting stress is also defined as a cognitive and emotional reaction to childrearing demands, which are experiences that can be taxing or overwhelming to a parent's resources (Lazarus & Folkman 1984; as cited in Krohne, 2002).

According to research findings, a significant level of parenting stress has been found in both mothers and fathers (Lavee, Sharlin & Katz, 1996). However, in the overwhelming majority of instances, women are considered the primary caregivers (Sheppard, 2003), and thus, frequent research studies have focused on identifying the effects and factors related to parenting stress among mothers specifically.

Though some stress is considered a normal and inevitable part of the parenting process, high parenting stress can affect both the mother and the child (Deater-Deckard & Scarr, 1996). Parents who experience parenting stress are more likely to practice poor parenting behavior such as using harsh discipline methods (Sturge-Apple, Sour & Skiho, 2014), being less involved with their children and having a negative view of their role as a parent, thereby influencing the child's development (Abidin Jenkins & McGaughey, 1992). The presence of children in a family is found to also affect or lower marital happiness, increase conflict between husbands and wives (Carlson 2007), add to the psychological distress of the parents (Wolf, Noh, Fisman & Speechley, 1989) and lower their life satisfaction (Milgram & Atzil, 1988).

Most current research findings pertaining to the interplay of the influence of child characteristics on parenting stress are related to child developmental disabilities or child behaviors and the availability of social support of social support for parents (Baker, 1994; Dumas, Wolf, Fisman, & Culligan, 1991; Kobe & Hammer, 1994; Krauss, 1993; as cited in Lavee, Sharlin & Katz, 1996). However, though parenting stress has been found to be higher in delayed condition families (Baker, Blacher, Crnic & Edelbrock 2002), there is also evidence that the level of parenting stress among parents of children with disabilities and non-disabilities does not differ (Baker, et al., 2003).

Few research studies conducted to date associate the impact of child characteristics, age, gender, and the number of children to the mother's parenting stress. Nevertheless, according to the existing research in the field, mothers of sons reported more stress than did mothers of daughters (Scher & Sharabany, 2005). Furthermore, other study findings also indicate that a higher number of children has a direct impact on the level of parenting stress and the parental role (Lavee, Sharlin & Katz 1996).

Child growth and development is considered to be an indicator of parenting stress as well. At early ages, parental behaviors, stress and depression have been found to be associated with the health and well-being of their children (England, Sim & NRC, 2009). According to other research findings, for mothers of children under the age of eight, parental stress is believed to be linked to problems related to functioning in essential and routine roles, failing to help the child achieve self-regulation, anger and irritability, enmeshing dependency or both, less consistency in mother-child relationships over time and escalating negative qualities of interaction over time (Radke-Yarrow & Brown, 1993).

In regards to child development and age, research studies from the field also indicate that the parenting stress among parents tends to either remain relatively constant (Lenderger & Golbach, 2002; Ostberg, Hagekull, & Hagelin, 2007, as cited in Goldberg & Garcia, 2015), or decline in early childhood ages (Chang & Fine, 2007; Williford, Calkins, & Keane, 2007, as cited in Goldberg & Garcia, 2015). Other studies document the same stability as well. Their findings indicate that the daily hassles of parenting and major life stress are relatively stable across the preschool period (Crnic Gaze & Hoffman, 2005). However, according to these findings, the effect of stress on parenting has been found to be subject to social support. Mothers with high social support were found to be more positive, and the social support was found to moderate the effect on stress and parental behaviors (Crnic & Booth, 1991). The support from family members, fathers and grandmothers specifically, has also been found to be associated with lower stress among mothers (Burchinal, Follmer & Bryant, 1996).

Though there exists plenty of evidence worldwide documenting that parenting stress is linked to numerous stressors, there is not yet any evidence that these factors interact with the parenting stress among Kosovar mothers. Therefore, the main goal of this study was to examine the interplay of children's age, number of children and gender with the parenting stress level among the Kosovar population.

Even though there is a lack of previously conducted studies within the field of parenting stress among the Kosovo population, there is evidence that the long-lasting postwar effects within the families of the current children in Kosovo, which have resulted in higher rates of the postwar prevalence of mental disorders, are still present among the Kosovar population as well (Priebe et al., 2010). Moreover, taking into consideration that the level of parenting stress differs within different contexts and that geographical location, socio-economic status, race, and ethnicity can and do impact the level of stress and threaten the physical and mental health of parents (Beeber, et al., 2014; Epel & Lithgow, 2014; Berger & Guidroz, 2009, as cited in Cronin, Becher, Schmiesing, Maher &Dibb, 2015), a relevant study analyzing the interplay between the age, gender and number of children should be carried out in another context, such as in Kosovo.

Lastly, previous studies worldwide have documented that women are often the main caretaker responsible for the children, and this is true in the Kosovar society as well. However, with the lack of social support services, which is influenced by numerous cultural and contextual factors, the majority of mothers, even still, are prone to domestic violence, neglect in the private sphere and are considered "morally" correct only if they adhere to their reproductive roles (Qosaj-Mustafa, 2011).

2. METHOD

2.1. Participants/sample

A summary of the sample descriptive statistics are outlined in Table 1. A total of (N=226) Kosovar mothers participated in this study. Participants ranged in age from 20 to 54 years old, with an average of 30.58 years (*SD* = 4.48). Further descriptive are shown.

Table 1.
Summary of Demographics.

	n	%
Gender (Children)		
Girl(s)	79	35.0
Boy(s)	90	39.8
Boys and Girls	57	25.2
Child Age		
Infant	49	21.7
Toddler	73	32.3
Preschooler	9	4.0
School Age	15	6.6
Adolescents	1	0.4
Mixed Ages	79	35.0
Age		
Mean		30.58
Standard Deviation		4.48
Min		20
Max		54
Number of Children		
Mean		1.49
Standard Deviation		.68
Min		1
Max		5

2.2. Procedure

Participants in the current study were recruited from a series of parenting groups for Kosovar mothers. Prior to completing the survey, potential participants were informed of the purpose of the study, the time demands, and potential risks and benefits. They were further informed that their responses would remain confidential and that their participation may be revoked at any time. The time required to complete the survey was approximately 15-20 minutes.

The Parenting Stress Scale (PSS; Berry & Jones, 1995) was used to assess parenting-related stress among Kosovar mothers. The PSS is an 18-item self-report scale that assesses both positive and negative themes of parenthood. Positive themes include emotional benefits and personal development, while negative themes include demands on resources and restrictions. Items are presented on a 5-point scale ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree. Lower scores indicate lower levels of stress, whereas higher scores are indicative of higher stress. For the present study, the scale was forward translated to Albanian, from the original English version (Berry & Jones, 1995). The internal consistency of the scale in the current sample was acceptable ($\alpha = .811$).

2.3. Data analysis

Prior to conducting primary analyses, preliminary and exploratory analyses were conducted to assess the quality of the obtained data. In particular, missing data were evaluated along with the assumptions of statistical testing. To predict the levels of parenting stress, total parenting stress scores were collapsed into High and Low groups based on the central value (mean and median = ~ 63). A central tendency-based classification was used to account for the significant skewness in the data. Using this classification, binary logistic regressions were used to predict the likelihood of having high levels of parenting stress. All analyses were conducted in SPSS v. 24. Significance was determined at the .05 level. The measure of effect size used for the omnibus regression model was Nagelgerke *R2*, with higher numbers indicating a greater amount of the variance explained by the model overall. Odds ratios were utilized for measuring the effect size for each individual predictor. Odds ratios greater than 1 can be interpreted as the amount of times that the positive outcome is more likely to occur, and odds ratios less than 1 can be interpreted as a lower likelihood of the positive outcome occurring.

3. RESULTS

Prior to conducting the primary regression analyses, preliminary analyses were conducted to assess the bivariate, or simple, relationships between all variables obtained and the parenting stress scores. The relationships between categorical variables were assessed using cross tabulations with chi square tests, and continuous variables were assessed by the levels of parenting stress: using tests of difference (i.e., *t*-tests, analysis of variance [ANOVA]). The predictors used in the final regression were based on the significant findings of the preliminary analyses, as well as those that were theoretically hypothesized to be related to high levels of parenting stress.

A summary of the primary analyses is shown in Table 2. As indicated, the overall model predicting high levels of parenting stress was significant, χ^2 (5) = 16.21, p = .006; Nagelkerke R^2 = .092. The evaluation of the individual predictors indicated that number of children, child age, and child gender were all significantly associated with high levels of parenting stress, all having ps < .05. Parents of more than one child were over 8 times more likely to have high levels of parenting stress (OR = 8.120). Conversely, parents

of children younger than school age, had decreased odds of high parenting stress (*OR* = .083). Similarly, those who had only female children were less likely to experience high parenting stress (*OR* = .346) compared to those with children of mixed genders.

Table 2.
Binary Logistic Regression Predicting High Levels of Parenting Stress.

	β	*SE*	Wald	*OR*	
Parent Age	.05	.04	1.83	1.049	
Multiple Children	2.09	1.09	3.66	8.120	*
Child Age (Compared to School Age or Higher)	-2.48	1.10	5.06	.083	*
Gender			6.83		
Girls (Compared to Mixed Gender)	-1.06	.48	4.96	.346	*
Boys (Compared to Mixed Gender)	-.36	.45	.63	.699	

Note. Model summary: χ^2 (5) = 16.21, p = .006; Nagelkerke R^2 = .092; *OR* = *Odds Ratio*; * p < .05

4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The Kosovar mothers' parenting stress indicators are in line with the existing parenting stress triggers found within other population groups, since number of children, child age, and child gender were all significantly associated with high levels of parenting stress. According to the research results, parents of more than one child were 8 times more likely to have higher levels of parenting stress, which was also found in a study conducted by Lavee, Sharlin & Katz (1996), which revealed that higher numbers of children have a direct impact on the level of parenting stress and on their parental role. The current study results show a correlation with the existing literature from which it is known that mothers of sons reported more stress than did mothers of daughters (Scher & Sharabany, 2005). Additionally, the current finding, which shows that parents of children younger than school age had decreased odds of high parenting stress, is in line with other research findings as well; these indicate that the parenting stress among parents tends to remain relatively constant (Lenderger & Golbach, 2002; Ostberg, Hagekull, & Hagelin, 2007, as cited in Goldberg & Garcia, 2015), or decline for early childhood ages (Chang & Fine, 2007; Williford, Calkins, & Keane, 2007, as cited in Goldberg & Garcia, 2015).

5. FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Building upon the current research, future research may be needed to better understand the outcomes of parenting stress on both child and parental functioning outcomes, such as mental health and behavioral functioning. Furthermore, additional research may be needed to further assess potential buffers (i.e., moderators) that may negate some of the risk factors already identified in this study. Such protective factors may include geographical location, socio-economic status, ethnicity (Beeber, et al., 2014; Epel & Lithgow, 2014; Berger & Guidroz, 2009, as cited in Cronin, Becher, Schmiesing, Maher & Dibb, 2015), and other family and contextual factors, such as family dynamics, spouse/partner support, level of education, employment, child development, and social support from others, which has also been found to be associated with lower stress levels among mothers (Burchinal, Follmer & Bryant, 1996). Accordingly, once buffers and protective factors have been identified, it may be helpful to design and test interventions to examine the efficacy of improving areas in which change is possible.

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