

## Parental Stress and Parents' Profiles Among Parents of Children With Learning Disabilities in Abuja, Nigeria

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### Abstract

Parental stress is an emotional challenge that troubles parents of children with learning disabilities in the process of caring for their children. This study examined the difference in parental stress among parents of children with learning disabilities in Abuja, Nigeria according to the parents' profiles. A cross-sectional design was employed to gather the data for this study in the six Area Councils of the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) in Abuja, Nigeria. The study employed a multistage clustered random sampling technique to sample 314 parents of children with learning disabilities who send their children to the Inclusive Basic Primary Schools. Parental stress was measured using the Parental Stress Scale (PSS, Berry and Jones, 1995). The Cronbach's alpha reliability was 0.83. The results showed a significant difference in parental stress according to the parents' age group [ $F(4, 309) = 8.583, p = .000$ ] and the parent's level of income [ $F(4, 309) = 4.339, p = .014$ ]. Thus, to be effective, the formulation of relevant policies, interventions, support programs, and services for the parents of children with learning disabilities should give due consideration to the age and level of income of the parents.

**Keywords:** Parental Stress, Parents' Profile, Children, Learning Disabilities, Inclusive School.

### Introduction

Learning disabilities are the developmental variants with high complexities, resulting from compound disorders and manifesting in discrepancies between potentials and actual achievements (Dhingra, et al., 2010; Nwabueze, 2015). The term includes such conditions as a behavioral deficiency, brain damage, minor brain malfunction, dyscalculia, and developmental aphasia. The National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities (NJCLD, 2021) gave a definition of learning disabilities that appears to be universally accepted as a "generic

term that refers to a heterogeneous group of disorders manifested by significant difficulty in the acquisition and use of listening, speaking, reading, writing, reasoning, or mathematical abilities."

These disorders are intrinsic to the individual and are presumed to be due to central nervous system dysfunction, which may occur across the life span of an individual. Learning disabilities results in a significant difference in the acquisition and use of essential skills such as reading, writing, speech and language, mathematics, behavior, social cognition, and perception. A learning disability may occur along with other disability conditions (e.g., sensory impairment, mental retardation, social and emotional disturbance) or environmental influences (e.g., cultural differences, insufficient/inappropriate instruction, and psychogenic factors), but it is not the direct result of those conditions or influences.

Parents' profile refers to parents' age group, level of family income, and level of education: Age groups of the parents range between less than 30, 31-40 years old, 41-50 years, 51-60 years, above 60 years, while family incomes were categorized as Low Income (0-N35,000), Middle Income (N36,000 - N75,000), and High Income (N76,000 & Above). Parents' level of education refers to the highest level of education attained by the parents, which was categorized into Secondary, Diploma/National Certificate of Education (NCE), Degree/Higher National Diploma (HND), and Postgraduate. No study has shown which category of parents has the highest stress level when it comes to having and parenting children with learning disabilities in Nigeria.

According to Zhang et al (2012), stress is described as feedback from one's failure to cope with changing dictates of the environment, which eventually results in negative consequences like frustration, burnout, dereliction of responsibilities, and so on. Parental stress refers to aversive psychological reactions to the strains and demands of parental roles, which has a direct impact on the mother's emotional well-being, the relationship between parents and children, and the child's emotional and social development (Deater-Deckard, et al., 2006).

Parenting stress is amplified by challenging life situations including poverty, single parenting, and parental separation (Louie et al., 2018). Parental stress in this study refers to the emotional problems and difficulties parents go through while giving care to their children with learning disabilities. These include undue energy dissipation, obnoxious expenditures, worry anxiety, grief, shame and guilt, blame, resentment from neighbours and extended family members, marital discords, and so on (Logsdon, 2018). It is a persistent emotional condition that occurs when the demands of the child-rearing cycle are perceived to be greater than personal and social resources (BeLue, et al., 2015; Deater-Deckard, 2004), which could have many negative consequences for both parents and their children's functioning (Hartley, et al., 2011). The raising of a child with learning disabilities puts enormous stress on the parents (Davis & Carter, 2008; Phelps, et al., 2009). Parents of children without learning disabilities have been identified to experience untoward and increased stress due to extra care required for their children compared to the parents of typically normal developing children. Stress is also attributed to the changing and varying demands they are facing resulting from the specific needs in raising their children with learning disabilities (Isa et al., 2017).

Dyson (2010) defines parental stress as the unfavourable and overwhelming feedback suffered by the parents from the inability to cope with the special demands for care, leading to negative consequences while raising a child with learning disabilities. The abnormal care demand from a child with learning disabilities generates feelings of guilt in the parents and makes them susceptible to psychological distress and family dysfunction. Family stress is ongoing since learning disabilities is a developmental disorder that attracts special care throughout the family's daily life. Most often, parents are cut in between, saddled with guilt due to their inability to give the required care to other children without disabilities because of the excessive demand for care placed on them by their child with learning disabilities.

The major problem facing parents of children with learning disabilities is parental stress which is an emotional challenge caused by the inability of their children with learning disabilities to learn what other children of their age group could easily learn. This emotional problem affects parents differently based on their age groups, level of education, and level of family income. Secondly, the sources of stress generated from the care for a child with learning disabilities are inclusive of the multiple direct negative impacts from the child. However, worthy of note is the absence of social support from extended family members, friends, and the general society leading to the social isolation of the family; unnecessary close contact with the school with a negative undertone; incompetent assessment and diagnosis; insufficient and unrealistic service provision; attachment of labels for budgetary and service provision, including unrealistic expectations from the parents. In addition, a good work atmosphere and cooperative spirit at work place help to reduce the difficulties faced by these parents (Laili et al., 2021). This study sought to examine the difference in parental stress among parents of children with learning disabilities in Abuja, Nigeria according to the parents' profiles.

### **Research Objective**

The general objective of this study was to examine the difference in parental stress among parents of children with learning disabilities in Abuja, Nigeria according to parents' profiles.

### **Specific Objective**

1. To describe parents' profile (age, family income, level of education) and patterns of parental stress among parents of children with learning disabilities in Abuja, Nigeria.
2. To determine the difference in parental stress among parents of children with learning disabilities in Abuja, Nigeria according to the parent' profile (age, level of education, level of family income).

### **Significance of the Study**

The significance of this study was to fill the literature gap in studies on parents of children with learning disabilities. This increases the body of knowledge on the link between parents' profiles and parental stress. It is very important to address the parents' profile as it relates to parental stress. The findings of this study will hopefully provide insight into the extent to which parents' profile (age group, level of education, and level of family income) relates to parental stress. Results from this study may aid parents of children with learning disabilities and relevant government agencies in reducing parental stress among young and older parents of children with learning disabilities.

### Methodology

The study involved a cross-sectional design and quantitative methodology with a non-experimental comparative design where data was analyzed using an ANOVA analysis. The population of this study comprises 2007 parents of children with learning disabilities in the Inclusive Basic Primary Schools across the entire six Area Councils of Federal Capital Territory (FCT) Abuja, Nigeria (See Table 1).

Table 1

*Population and Sample of Inclusive Schools across Federal Capital Territory (FCT) Abuja*

Localities	No. of Inclusive Schools	The population of Children with Learning Disabilities
Abuja Municipal Area Councils	8	513
Kwali Area Council	3	219
Abaji Area Council	2	195
Gwagwalada Area Council	2	603
Bwari Area Council	2	282
Kuje Area Council	3	195
<b>Total</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>2007</b>

Source: The enrolment statistics were obtained from the Federal Capital Territory Education Secretariat and Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) in the year 2020.

The study employed a multistage clustered random sampling technique to sample the respondents. Multistage sampling refers to a sampling procedure where the sampling is carried out in stages with the use of smaller and smaller sampling units at each stage. In multistage sampling, large clusters of the population are divided into smaller clusters into several stages to make primary data collection more manageable (Dudovskiy, 2018). The sampled size was 314 which was calculated using proportionate distribution across the six Area Councils in Abuja

The instrument used in this study was a Parental Stress Scale (PSS) developed by Berry and Jones (1995), which comprises 18 items with a 5-point Likert scale assigned scores: 1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Undecided, 4 = Agree, and 5 = Strongly agree. The criteria used were based on the parent's response stress sum Score of 17-36 rated Low, 37-54 rated moderate and 55-70 rated High. The instrument had a Cronbach's alpha reliability of above (0.83), and test-retest reliability of (0.81) which shows that the instrument is reliable to be used for this study.

## Results

Table 2

*Pattern of Parents of Children with Learning Disabilities (n = 314)*

Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)
<b>Age Groups</b>		
less than 30years	29	9.2
31-40years	100	31.8
41-50years	88	28.0
51-60years	70	22.3
Above 60years	27	8.6
<b>Level of Education</b>		
Secondary	43	13.7
Diploma/NCE	29	9.2
Degree/HND	165	52.6
Postgraduate	77	24.5
<b>Level of Family Income</b>		
Low Income (0-N35,000)	86	27.4
Middle Income (N36,000 - N75,000)	203	64.7
High Income (N76,000 & above)	25	7.9

### Parents' Age Groups

As regards the age of the respondents (see Table 2), 29 respondents (9.2%) aged less than 30 years old, 100 respondents representing 31.8% were between ages 31 to 40 years old, 88 respondents representing 28.0% were between 41 to 50 years old, 70 respondents representing 22.3% were between 51 to 60 years old, and 27 respondents representing 8.6% were 60 years old and above. This implies that most of the respondents were between 31-40 years old, followed by respondents between 41-50 years and respondents between 51-60 years old. This means that the parents were still in their productive and active years and able to take care of their children with learning disabilities.

### Parents' Level of Education

As shown in Table 2, half of the respondents (n=52, 16.6%) were Master's Degree, followed by 151(48.1%) of the respondents with a Bachelor's Degree, 43(13.7%) were secondary school holders, 25(8.0%) of the respondents were Ph.D. holders, 18(5.7%) of the respondents were NCE holders, 14(4.5%) of the respondents were HND holders, and 11(3.5%) of the respondents were Ordinary Diploma holders. This means that most of the parents were well educated and received tertiary education. Out of the total number of the respondent, only 13.7% received secondary education as the highest academic qualification.

### Level of Family Income

Concerning family Income, findings in Table 2 revealed that 86 respondents representing 27.4% were from the low-income group, 203 respondents representing 64.7% were from the middle-income group and 25 respondents representing 7.9% were from the high-income group. This implies that most of the parents were from the middle-income group. The data of the study showed that more than half of the parents were in the middle-income group. Thus,

it is assumed that they could afford to take financial responsibility for their children with learning disabilities.

### Hypotheses Testing

Ho1: There is no significant difference in parental stress among parents of children with learning disabilities according to parents' age.

Ho2: There is no significant difference in parental stress among parents of children with learning disabilities according to the family level of income.

Ho3: There is no significant difference in parental stress among parents of children with learning disabilities according to the parent's level of education.

Table 3

#### *ANOVA Test of Mean Difference in Parental Stress*

Variable	N	Mean	SD	F	P
<b>Age Groups</b>					
less than 30 years	29	45.00	7.19	<b>8.583</b>	<b>.000</b>
31-40 years	100	49.83	4.07		
41-50 years	88	49.64	4.69		
51-60 years	70	48.70	4.23		
Above 60 years	27	46.11	5.56		
<b>Level of Education</b>					
Secondary	43	47.89	5.05	<b>.518</b>	<b>.670</b>
Diploma/NCE	29	48.97	4.58		
Degree/HND	165	48.93	4.56		
Postgraduate	77	48.80	5.97		
<b>Level of Family Income</b>					
Low Income (0-N35,000)	86	48.72	4.93	<b>4.339</b>	<b>.014</b>
Middle Income (N36,000 - N75,000)	203	48.43	4.95		
High Income (N76,000 & above)	25	51.52	4.96		

An analysis of One-Way ANOVA was performed to compare the difference between age groups and parental stress. The ANOVA result in Table 3 showed that there was a statistically significant mean score difference between parental stress among parents of children with learning disabilities according to the parents' age  $F(4, 309) = 8.583, p = .000$ . The mean score for parents of children with learning disabilities between the age group of 31-40 years and 41-50 years old was slightly higher than the age of 51-60 years old, the age above 60 years old, and the age of fewer than 30 years old. This indicated that parents in the age between 31-40 years old experience more parental stress compared to other age groups. Thus, Ho1 was not supported. The mean plot is illustrated in Figure 1.

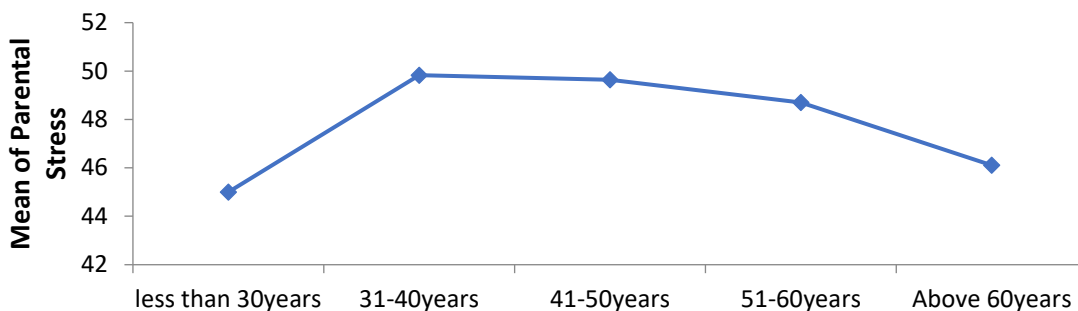


Figure 1: Mean Plot of Parental Stress across Age Groups

This study found out that parental stress was significantly higher for parents in the 31-40 age group and gradually drops as the parents increase in age. This aligns with Oyarzun-Farias, et al. (2021), who found that younger parents showed more parental stress when giving care to children with learning disabilities compared to older parents.

As regards the level of education, data in Table 3 showed that there was no significant difference in parental stress according to the level of education of parents of children with learning disabilities, [ $F(4, 309) = 0.518, p = .670$ ]. However, the mean score for Diploma/NCE holders was slightly higher than Secondary, Degree/HND, and Postgraduate holders in the current study. This indicated that parents who were Diploma/NCE and Degree/HND holders had slightly more parental stress compared to Secondary and Postgraduate holders. Thus, Ho2 is supported. The mean plot is illustrated in Figure 2.

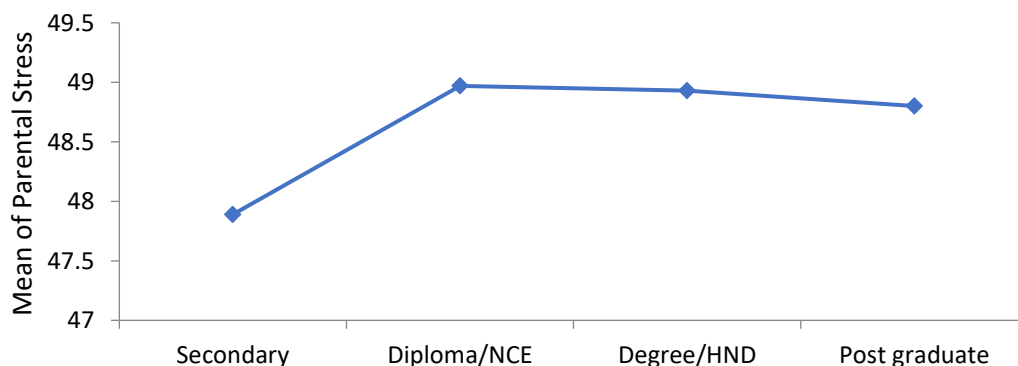


Figure 2: Mean Plot of Parental Stress across Parents' Level of Education

This is in tandem with Parkes, et al (2015), who observed that parental stress was prevalent among mothers regardless of either high or low educational status. Other investigations (Cheng et al., 2008; Chen et al., 2005) reported findings that were similar to this present study. In conclusion, regardless of their level of education, parents of children with learning disabilities experience parental stress.

There was a significant difference in parental stress according to the parents of children with learning disabilities' level of income [ $F(4, 309) = 4.339, p = .014$ ]. Thus, Ho3 is not supported. The result in Table 3 revealed that the mean for high income (N76,000 & above) was slightly higher than low income (0-N35,000), and middle income (N36,000 - N75,000) of parents of children with learning disabilities in the current study. This indicated that parents of children

with learning disabilities who were from high-income levels (N76,000 & above) had slightly more parental stress compared to parents with low-income levels (0-N35,000), and middle-income levels (N36,000 - N75,000). The finding was in line with studies conducted by (Chang et. al., 2008; Chen et al., 2005). In conclusion, different levels of family income resulted in different levels of stress among parents of children with learning disabilities. The mean plot is illustrated in Figure 3.

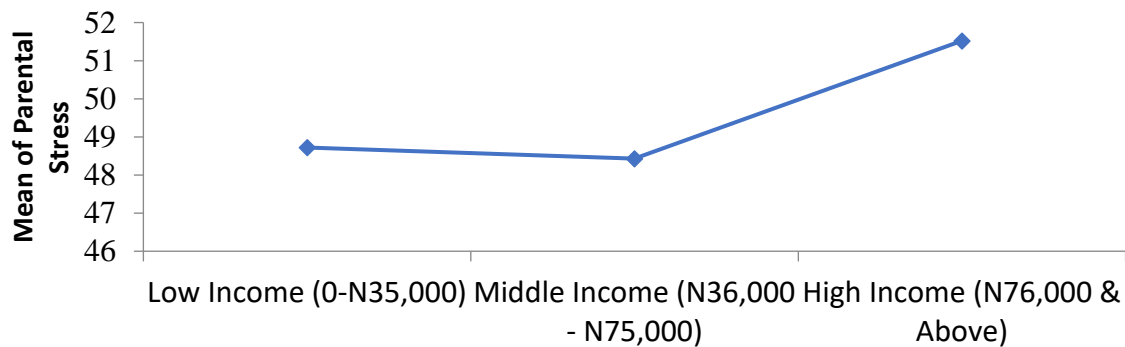


Figure 3: Mean Plot of Parental Stress across Levels of Family Income

### Conclusion

Studies have proven that parents of children with learning and mental disabilities experience a higher level of stress when compared to parents of typically developing children. This is because having a child with disabilities involves more effort and engagement from parents such as long-term commitment to rehabilitation and medical treatments which will continue until the child reached adolescence and adulthood. The stress experienced by parents will also differ according to the phase in the life of the children and could create difficulty in the family interaction as a whole.

This study examined the difference in parental stress according to the parents' age groups, level of education, and level of family income among parents of children with learning disabilities in inclusive schools in Abuja, Nigeria. Research of this kind is very scarce in Nigeria, thus findings from this research may significantly add to the body of knowledge about parental stress among parents of children with learning disabilities in Nigeria. Based on the findings, it is clear that parental stress differs significantly according to parents' age groups, and level of family income, but it does not differ significantly based on parents' level of education.

Child development depends on cultural and individual factors, and a culturally sensitive understanding of child behaviors can result in more effective intervention programs, particularly for children with a learning disability (Cen and Aytac, 2016). To enhance the positive mental well-being of the parents of children with learning disabilities, it is suggested that the authorities in Nigeria should formulate relevant policies, support programs, and services that focus on the parents' age and family income level. This will lessen the burdens parents go through and provide a level playing ground for a better and more accommodating environment for the optimum care and development of the children with learning disabilities.



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