

Research Article

# Parental Stress in Managing School-going Children during the COVID-19 Lockdown Period - A Pilot Study

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## I N F O

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## A B S T R A C T

**Introduction:** Parental stress has various reasons like low income, broken family, and lesser family or social support. COVID-19 and the lockdown that has been imposed have created stress among the people. This may be due to increased financial instability within the family, illness or exposure to COVID-19 itself. This study is done to assess the stress on parents in managing their school-going children.

**Aim:** To assess the stress on parents in managing school-going children with their online classes and the factors which are concerning for the parents during the lockdown period.

**Materials and Method:** Parents of children between the age group of 5-12 years were included in the study. These parents' stress level was analysed based on their response to the parental stress scale.

**Results:** The stress level is found to be on the higher side in the case of a single parent working with the mean stress level being 42.6 when compared to both parents working which had a mean stress level of 32.6. Other factors which are found to increase the stress among parents were low socioeconomic status, having children of a younger age group, and parents living in nuclear families.

**Conclusion:** During the COVID-19 lockdown, the mental health of the parents was found to be influenced by various causes. Good family support, better work timing of parents, and a routine help in reducing stress in the family.

**Keywords:** Parental Stress, COVID-19 Lockdown, Managing Children

## Introduction

This COVID-19 pandemic has pushed the whole world to adapt to new habits and trends in order to decrease the risk of exposure to the novel coronavirus.<sup>1</sup> Complete lockdown is one such measure enforced by many countries throughout the world including India. This study has been

conducted to investigate the stress faced by the parents in managing their children of school-going age group during COVID lockdown.

## Aims and Objectives

**Primary Objective:** To assess the stress level in parents

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during COVID-19 lockdown on managing the school-going children with their online classes.

**Secondary Objective:** To explore the various factors which are hindering the parents from being potential and supportive caregivers to their children.

## Materials and Methodology

### Study Characteristics

- **Study Design:** Pilot study
- **Study Population:** Parents of children between 5 and 12 years of age
- **Study Duration:** For a period of 1 month, in October 2020
- **Study Setting:** Chettinad Hospital and Research Institute, Kelambakkam, Chengalpattu
- **Study Tool:** Parental stress scale<sup>2</sup>
- **Sample size:** 60 subjects (according to the central limit theorem)

### Inclusion Criteria

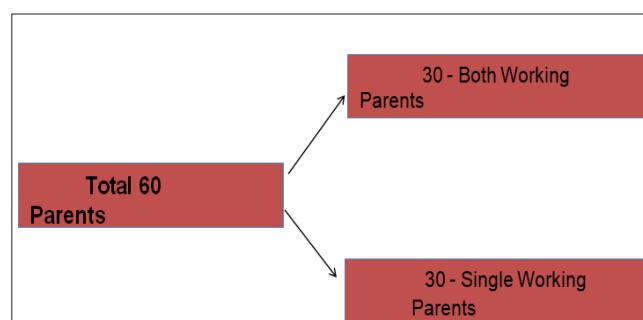
Parents of children between the age group of 5 and 12 years who were attending online classes were included in the study.

### Exclusion Criteria

Parents of children with delayed development or with any chronic illness, and children below 5 years and above 12 years were excluded from the study.

Ethical committee approval was obtained on the 21st of September. Parents of children in the age group of 5 years to 12 years who came to Paediatrics OPD were included in the study after getting informed consent. The parents were asked to fill a questionnaire which consisted of 18 questions including a measure of stress, emotion, and role satisfaction of the parents. Parental stress scale<sup>2</sup> was used to assess the stress level.

A total of 60 parents were included in the study, 30 were single working parents and 30 were both working parents as shown in Figure 1.



**Figure 1. Study Participants**

Table 1 shows the parental stress scale. The scores were awarded as: 1 = Strongly disagree 2 = Disagree 3 = Undecided 4 = Agree 5 = Strongly agree. To compute the parental stress score, items 1, 2, 5, 6, 7, 8, 17, 18 should be reverse scored as 1 = 5, 2 = 4, 3 = 3, 4 = 2, 5 = 1.

**Table 1. Parental Stress Scale<sup>2</sup>**

S. No.	Items	Answers
1.	I am happy in my role as a parent.	
2.	There is little or nothing I wouldn't do for my child(ren) if it was necessary.	
3.	Caring for my child(ren) sometimes takes more time and energy than I have to give.	
4.	I sometimes worry whether I am doing enough for my child(ren).	
5.	I feel close to my child(ren).	
6.	I enjoy spending time with my child(ren).	
7.	My child(ren) is/ are an important source of affection for me.	
8.	Having child(ren) gives me a more certain and optimistic view of the future.	
9.	The major source of stress in my life is my child(ren).	
10.	Having child(ren) leaves little time and flexibility in my life.	
11.	Having child(ren) has been a financial burden.	
12.	It is difficult to balance different responsibilities because of my child(ren).	
13.	The behaviour of my child(ren) is often embarrassing or stressful to me.	
14.	If I had it to do over again, I might decide not to have child(ren).	
15.	I feel overwhelmed by the responsibility of being a parent.	
16.	Having child(ren) has meant having too few choices and too little control over my life.	
17.	I am satisfied as a parent.	
18.	I find my child(ren) enjoyable.	

## Interpretation of the Scale

- Scores range from 18 to 90
- Higher the score, higher is the level of parenting stress, and lower the score, lower is the level of parenting stress

## Proforma of the Participant

It included the following information:

- Father's age:
- Mother's age:
- Are both parents working?:
- Father's occupation:
- Mother's occupation:
- Number of children:
- Type of family: joint/ nuclear
- Age of child/ children:
- Are they attending online classes during the lockdown?:
- Socioeconomic status:
- (modified Kuppaswamy classification):
- Marital status:
- Any chronic illness/ developmental delay in child/ children?:
- Other difficulties faced by the parents during online classes:

## Statistical Analysis

Descriptive analysis was done using mean and standard deviation for quantitative variables and frequency and proportion for categorical variables.

Paired t sample test was used for statistical significance. P value < 0.05 was considered statistically significant.

## Results

### Mean Age of the Child

The minimum age of children in both groups was 5 years and the maximum was 12 years (Table 2).

### Child's Age and Mean Stress Score

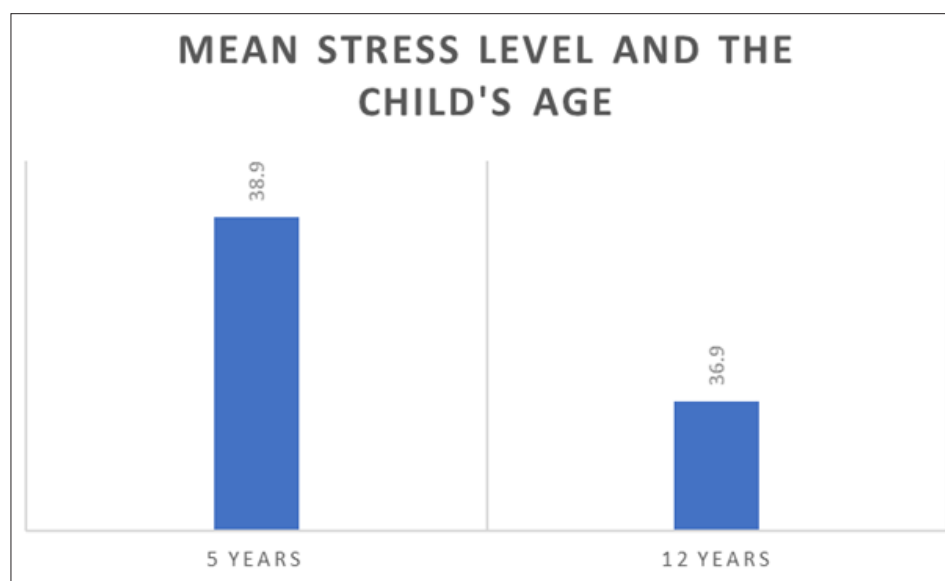
The mean stress score of parents with 5 years old children was found to be 38.9 and that of parents with 12 years old children was found to be 36.9 (Figure 2). Hence it was found that the stress score was high in parents with children of a younger age group.

### Type of Family and Mean Stress Score

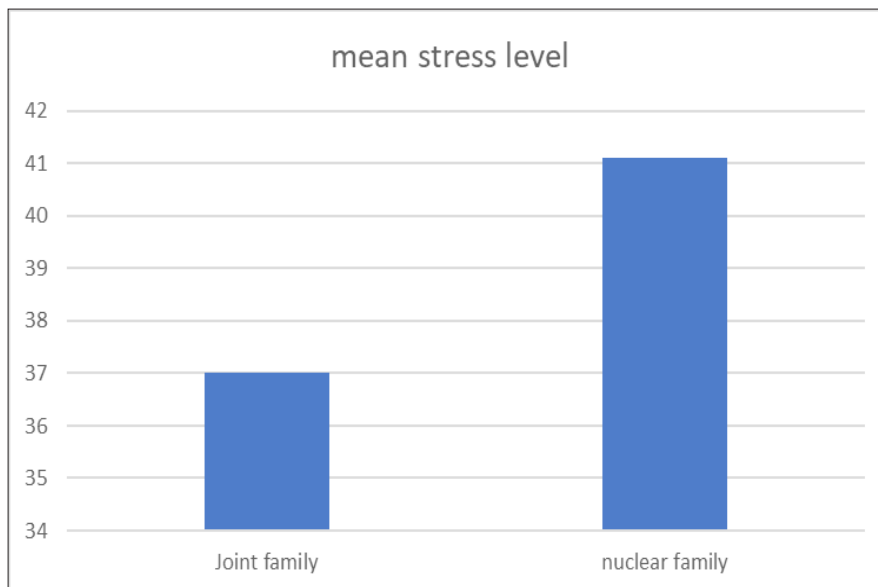
The mean stress value was found to be high (41.1) in nuclear families and low (37) in joint families (Figure 3). The reason for a lower mean stress value in joint families is that they have good family support.

**Table 2. Descriptive Analysis of Age Group of Children among Single Working Parents and Both Working Parents**

Working Status of Parents	Minimum Age of Children (Years)	Maximum Age of Children (Years)	n	Mean Age (Years)
Both parents	5.00	12.00	30	8.2000
Single parents	5.00	12.00	30	7.6667



**Figure 2. Child's Age and Mean Stress Score of Parents**



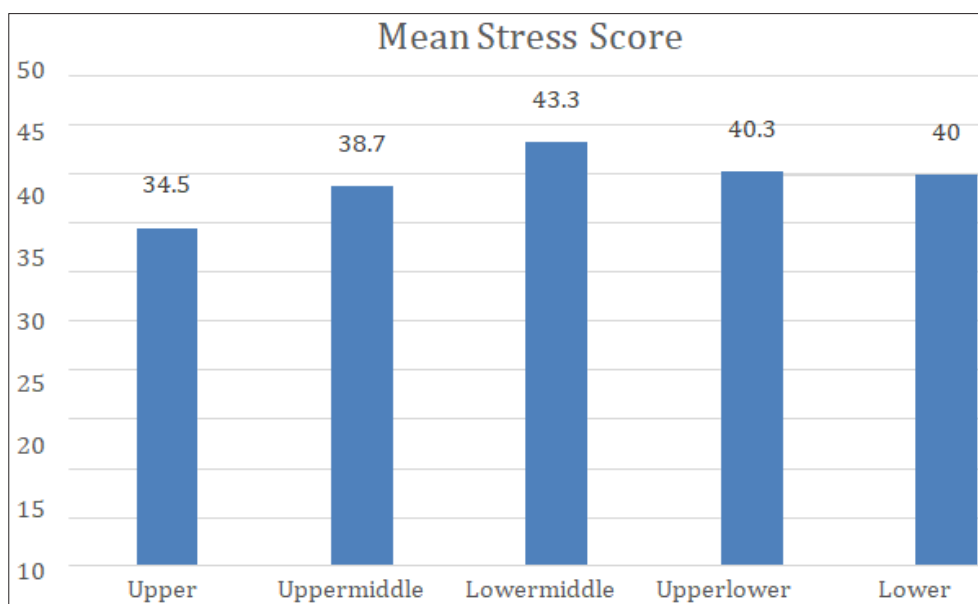
**Figure 3. Comparison between Mean Stress Value and Type of Family**

**Socioeconomic Status**

The mean stress score was highest in the lower middle class (43.3) and lowest in the upper class (34.5) (Figure 4).

Table 3 shows the mean  $\pm$  SD values of stress among the participants.

The other factors which are concerning for the parents are less time to handle their household chores,<sup>3</sup> worries about the child’s health problems like vision problems and stress in children, lesser parent-child bonding and financial burden on the family<sup>4</sup>.



**Figure 4. Socioeconomic Status and Mean Parental Stress Score**

**Table 3. Descriptive Analysis of Stress among Single Working Parents and Both Working Parents**

Working Status of Parents	Level of Stress (Mean $\pm$ SD)	n	Minimum Stress	Maximum Stress	P Value
Both parents	32.60 $\pm$ 6.5	30	20	47	0.00
Single parents	42.66 $\pm$ 7.6	30	29	65	0.00

## Discussion

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused a lot of havoc all across the world.<sup>1</sup> It has led to the adoption of newer methods of living by the general population and one of these changes has been the introduction of online classes among school-going children.<sup>4</sup> Introduction of these online classes has led to increased stress among the majority of parents due to the inability to cope with this change.<sup>5</sup>

In the present study, it was found that the level of stress is significantly higher in families of single working parents than in those with both working parents. It was observed that higher levels of stress were more common among families with lower middle socioeconomic status. It was also observed that stress levels were higher among parents of 5 years old children than 12 years old children.<sup>6</sup> The overall results conclude that the stress level is significantly more in the single parent working group as compared to both parents-working group. We attribute this difference in stress levels to possible better socioeconomic status among families in which both parents were working. They were able to hire a helper to take care of their children.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, only a single working parent was not able to cope with the extra burden of managing the children with their online classes, thereby leading to increased stress. The stress level was more in nuclear families as there was less family support and it was more time consuming for the parents to handle their children.<sup>6</sup> Other causes of increased stress levels in parents were improper time management, child's health issues, and financial burdens. The participants of the group with both parents working were able to cope with the stress as most of them had good family support,<sup>5</sup> whereas, on the other hand, participants of the single parent working group had an extra burden on them as they had to handle both the household works and their children.

## Conclusion

This study assessed the mental health status of parents and explored other factors influencing their stress. Stress in parents can negatively impact the development of children, especially in the younger age group. It shows that there should be good family support and better working hours for parents which would help them to spend more time with their family.<sup>3</sup> Maintaining a routine with children and encouraging them to take short breaks during online classes can help reduce the stress in children. All these measures increase the child-parent bonding and harmony in the family.

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**Conflict of Interest:** None

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