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## A Comparison of Perceived Parenting Stress Levels of Employed, Married Mothers and Employed Married Fathers

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1998

A Comparison of Perceived Parenting Stress Levels  
of Employed, Married Mothers and  
Employed, Married Fathers



Melissa D. Duchatschek, BA

An Abstract Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate  
School of Lindenwood University in Partial  
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the  
Degree of Master of Art  
1998

## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research was to measure the amount and type of parenting stress perceived by employed married mothers and employed married fathers using a self-report psychological instrument designed to identify parent - child systems under stress. The Parenting Stress Index (PSI), was given to twenty-seven (N = 27) married, employed parents of children age twelve and under. Fifteen women and twelve men volunteered to complete the instrument. A t-test was performed and the hypothesis that married, employed mothers would perceive more parenting stress than married, employed fathers was not supported.

A Comparison of Perceived Parenting Stress Levels  
of Employed, Married Mothers and  
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A Culminating Project Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate  
School of Lindenwood University in Partial  
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Degree of Master of Art  
1998

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## Chapter I

### Introduction

If one were to randomly ask parents what parenting stress meant to them, one would find that it means different things to different people. The parent of a child with a physical disability will more than likely view parenting stress as something far different from the parent of a child with Attention Deficit Disorder or a normally developing child. Likewise, the definitions of parenting stress found in the literature are vague enough to apply to the many different reasons for parenting stress. One definition states that parenting stress is the dimensions of a parent's functioning that may compromise his/her ability to parent effectively or may signal dysfunction of the parent-child system (Wyngaarden Krauss, 1993). This definition could apply to virtually any function inherent to the parenting process. As a result, there has been an abundance of research done to try to pinpoint the causes of parenting stress (Dunlop, 1981; Lavee, Sharlin, & Katz, 1996; Rosenfield, 1989; Ross & Mirowsky, 1988).

There is a large body of research which relates to the



parenting stress perceived by mothers and mothers of children with disabilities. However, the amount of research regarding the perceived parenting stress of fathers due to children with or without disabilities is relatively limited. To illustrate, in 1994, Hornby attempted to write a review of the literature regarding the stressful effects of children with disabilities on their fathers. He was able to locate only 22 relevant studies. A similar problem occurred while researching the current study.

Stress in the parenting role has been found to be related to family functioning and parenting behavior (Deater-Deckard & Scarr, 1996). Parents who display lower quality interactions with their child generally report more parenting stress (McKay, Pickens, and Stewart, 1996). It has also been found that parenting stress is significantly associated with a child's insecure attachment to his/her mother and father (Jarvis & Creasey, 1991).

Concepts such as role overload and role strain have been proposed as causes for an employed mothers parenting stress (Rosenfield, 1989; Ross & Mirowsky, 1988). These concepts suggest that a woman will experience significant amounts of

parenting stress as a result of the dual roles of employment and motherhood. Other researchers believe instead that parenting stress is a result of the number of children in the home and the economic situation of the family (Lavee, Sharlin, & Katz, 1996).

Economic distress has been found to increase the perceived parenting stress for fathers (Lavee et. al., 1996). It has also been found that if the wife works, the father's parenting stress increases due to the increase in child care responsibilities placed upon him (Burke & Weir, 1976; Rosenfield, 1989). An additional source of stress for men was their perception of their level of competence as a father (McBride, 1989).

### **Statement of Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to compare the level and type of parenting stress for married, employed mothers and married, employed fathers. Most research to date deals with the parenting stress experienced by married, employed mothers. Thus, it was hypothesized that mothers would experience higher levels of perceived parenting stress than fathers when both were

married and employed outside of the home. An additional purpose of this study was to identify the different causes of parenting stress perceived by employed, married mothers and fathers.

## Chapter II

### Literature Review

In today's society, parenting stress is not uncommon, and has been defined in several different ways. Parenting stress has been defined as the dimensions of a parent's functioning that may compromise one's ability to parent effectively or may signal dysfunction of the parent-child system (Wyngaarden Krauss, 1993). The ecological model describes parenting stress as an outcome of the functioning of the resource variables in various levels of the family ecosystem (Fang, 1992).

In the past, the responsibility for child rearing would lie primarily with the mother, for whom employment outside of the home was relatively unheard of. As society changed, women began to enter the work force and parenting responsibilities increased for fathers. In 1967, a study found that both parents were employed in only 33% of families; by 1991, this number increased to 61% (Jones, 1996).

Most early studies deal with parenting stress experienced by women. There are also an abundance of

studies which deal with parenting stress experienced by the parents of disabled children. Wyngaarden Krauss (1993) found that mothers and fathers of disabled children reported similar levels of parenting stress overall, but their dimensions of stress varied. Mothers reported more stress from the personal consequences of parenting, while fathers reported more stress due to the child's temperament and the relationship they had with the child.

In 1997, Robson conducted a study on the effects of low birthweight babies on parenting stress. She found that the quality of the infant-parent relationship contributed more to parenting stress for fathers than it did for mothers. In a study done by Meadow-Orlans (1995) regarding parenting stress for the parents of deaf or hard of hearing children, it was found that the mothers reported more negative relationships with their spouse and found their child to be distractible. Hadadian (1994) found that there are higher levels of perceived parenting stress in families with disabled children, but that there is no difference in the levels of stress between the mothers and fathers of disabled children.



Baker (1994) studied parenting stress and ADHD and found that fathers and mothers experienced similar levels of parenting stress with these children. In addition, a group of researchers compared the parenting stress levels of parents of children with autism, Downs Syndrome, Behavior Disorders and normal development, and found that the parents who experienced the most parenting stress were the parents of the children with autism and behavior disorders (Dumas, Wolf, Fisman, & Culligan, 1991).

On a more positive note, it has also been found that mothers who have resolved their child's diagnosis report lower levels of parenting stress and higher levels of marital satisfaction (Sheeran, Marvin, & Pianta, 1997). Fathers who involve themselves in the treatment of their child's disability also report less parenting stress (Darke & Goldberg, 1994).

More recently, however, researchers have begun to study the parenting stress experienced by fathers of normally developing children and how it compares in type and amount to that experienced by women (Burke & Weir, 1976; McBride, 1989; Kessler, Price, & Wortman, 1985; Rosenfield, 1989).

These studies may have not been deemed necessary until larger numbers of females entered the work force, requiring men to take on additional child rearing responsibilities.

In a study based on attachment theory, Abbott (1990) found that there are two main dimensions which predict parenting stress. The first is interpersonal distress, and the second is the negotiation of the division of responsibility for household tasks. The employment of both parents plays a key role in the studies which have been done on parenting stress.

### **Mothers and Parenting Stress**

In a 1976 study, Burke and Weir found that employed women were physically and emotionally healthier and held more positive attitudes toward their marriages than housewives (Booth, 1977). Ritchie (1982) found that working mothers were less anxious about child rearing and had higher self-esteem. It has also been suggested that a woman's mental health is better if their employment status is congruent with their interest in work (Hock & Demeis, 1990; Pistrang, 1984).

Dunlop (1981) studied the stress employed mothers experience when placing their children in day care in order to go to work. She found that women who were comfortable with their choice of day care provider were better able to cope with the responsibilities placed on them by employment and the home. Ross and Mirowsky (1988) found that the least stressful parenting situation for mothers is employment combined with good child care. Husband's participation in arranging child care also lessens parenting stress for mothers.

Another study found that a woman's employment status prior to becoming a mother contributed to parenting stress. It was shown that women who were highly involved with their work prior to having a child had a more stressful motherhood experience if they gave up their work to stay home with their child. DeMeis, McBride, and Hock (1986) also found that women who preferred to be employed experienced less parenting stress if they went back to work, while mothers who preferred to stay at home experienced less stress if they stayed at home. Freitas Vando (1981) found that women with higher socioeconomic status and/or high career



commitment had less stress due to parenting.

Forgays & Forgays (1993) compared the parenting stress of employed mothers and non-employed mothers and discovered a trend for non-employed mothers to rate themselves as more stressed. However, they did not attribute this higher level of stress to employment status alone. Had they done so, they would have had to contend with the numerous studies which have been done suggesting that women experience significant amounts of parenting stress as a result of the dual roles of employment and motherhood.

Gove and Geerken (1977) found that children increased the demands on women, decreased their privacy, and isolated them from other adults. All of these things contribute to parenting stress. Rosenfield (1989) discussed the role overload perspective. This perspective argues that women who combine children with employment suffer from more demands than men. This is thought to be because women retain the primary responsibility for housework and children even when they are employed. Gutek, Nakamura, and Nieva (1981) found that women experience more

role overload and role conflict because their work and family roles are simultaneous. By this, they mean they overlap in terms of time and extend over a larger portion of the day.

Using the Parenting Stress Index, Lawrence (1983) found a significant inverse relationship between a husband's support and his wife's level of parenting stress. Lewis and Cooper (1987) agreed that women are overburdened by the responsibilities of employment and parenting. They discussed the 1983 findings of Brief, Rude, and Rabinowitz which suggested that the dual responsibilities have a greater effect on Type A individuals who tend to work long hours and have little time to deal with parenting responsibilities. Other researchers have also examined mothers with Type A personalities. Repetti & Wood (1997) found that job stressors have a strong impact on the parenting behavior of Type A mothers. These mothers tend to become more withdrawn from their children on the days they experience more stress at work. Rosenfield (1989) mentioned the 1986 findings of Thoits, which reported that women have higher levels of stress than men when both are married, employed, and have children in the home. Role

strain, overload from the amount of effort required to perform in both arenas, is most likely for mothers if the wife plays two roles (employee and mother), and if the two roles are not integrated (Ross & Mirowsky, 1988).

Baruch, Biener, and Barnett (1987) also discussed role conflict and role overload issues and hypothesized that stress experienced by mothers is due to employment demands in the home as well as outside. They state that a major component of the roles of wife, mother, and homemaker is to see to it that another person is well and happy. In reality, one has little control over the welfare and happiness of another person, and trying to control this only causes stress. It has been shown that maternal perceptions of daily hassles were predictive of the mother's perceived parenting stress and satisfaction with the parenting role (Crnic & Greenberg, 1990). These researchers also found that spousal support and support from friends protected mothers from the stress of parenting hassles.

Some researchers disagree with the role overload theory and believe that parenting stress is affected by the number of

children and economic distress, rather than dual roles (Lavee, Sharlin, and Katz, 1996). They believe that dual roles have a greater impact on marital satisfaction than they do on parenting stress. Kandel, Davies, and Raveis (1985) believe that employment may increase vulnerability to the effects of parental stress. Other parenting stress issues experienced by mothers have been studied. Leonard (1993) found that returning to work prior to four months postpartum was universally stressful for mothers. It has also been found that women who delay parenting experience more parenting stress than young mothers (Marchant, 1991).

### **Fathers and Parenting Stress**

There are not as many studies which deal exclusively with the parenting stress experienced by fathers. Pleck (1985) believes that this may be because men experience fewer demands than women within their family roles. Kessler, Price, and Wortman (1985) stated that women tend to protect men from family related stress. Baruch et al. (1987) found that workplace stressors are



more strongly related to psychological distress than family role stressors for men. However, it is now becoming more acceptable for men to acknowledge stress associated with family roles.

Issues that contribute to parenting stress for fathers are not as varied as those of mothers. It has been found that the number of children living at home increases the parenting stress of fathers despite the ages of the children (Lavee, Sharlin, & Katz, 1996). They also found that economic distress increases fathers' parenting stress. Fathers' parenting stress has been found to increase when their wives are employed. Most of this stress is due to increased child care responsibilities (Burke & Weir, 1976; Rosenfield, 1989). Booth disputed the findings of Burke and Weir in a 1977 study. He did not find a significant relationship between the employment of women and increased parenting stress for fathers. Instead, he found that the wife's employment has beneficial effects on the husband. Lavee et. al. also found that the parenting stress of fathers was not exacerbated by their wives' employment (1996).

Two other factors which contribute to fathers' parenting

stress are how demanding they perceive their children to be, and how competent they believe they are as parents (McBride, 1989). In contrast to older mothers, younger fathers have been found to perceive more parenting stress than older fathers (Sweetman, 1995). The research of Crnic and Booth (1991) found that for fathers, parenting hassles led to the greatest amount of parenting stress when the children were infants. They hypothesized that this may be because fathers have a harder time transitioning to parenthood. In their opinion, parenting stress for fathers may be lessened through the support of friends. Paternal parenting stress may also be alleviated through participation in intervention programs (McBride, 1991; McBride & McBride, 1990). Maternal social support strongly affects paternal parenting stress levels as well (Fang, 1992). Frank, Olmstead, Wagner, and Laub (1991) attempted to find out if a good parenting alliance would compensate for the amount of parenting stress felt as a result of a child's minor illnesses. They found that for fathers, the type of parenting alliance was more positively related to parenting stress than it was for mothers. Fathers with a poor parenting alliance

reported more parenting stress.

### **Summary**

It appears that there are multiple contributors to the stress men and women perceive from the parenting experience. It also appears that men and women have differing opinions on what aspects of parenting are most stressful. In general, however, it seems that women find issues related to the parenting role to be most stressful, while men contribute most of their stress to issues related to the child.

### **Chapter III**

#### **Methodology**

##### **Subjects**

The subjects were married, employed mothers and fathers of children twelve and under. Two married couples participated. The remainder of the subjects were married, but either the researcher did not have access to their spouse to administer the instrument or the spouse preferred not to complete the instrument. All of the subjects were volunteers, and were selected by the researcher because it was known that they were married, employed and had at least one child in the home under the age of twelve years. All volunteers, after being asked by the researcher and having had the purpose of the research explained to them, agreed to complete the test instrument. Subjects were drawn from the researchers place of employment (a social service agency in St. Louis, MO) and acquaintances. Thus, this was a sample of convenience. There were twenty-seven (N = 27) subjects; fifteen women and twelve men. The male subjects ranged in age from twenty-five years, eleven months to thirty-eight years, eleven



months ( $m = 32$  years, 3 months). The female subjects ranged in age from twenty-six years, one month to forty years, seven months ( $m = 30$  years, 4 months). The children of the male subjects ranged in age from eight months to twelve years, two months ( $m = 5$  years); while the children of the female subjects ranged in age from eight months to eleven years, seven months ( $m = 6$  years, 7 months). All subjects were Caucasian, and from a middle to upper middle-class background.

### **Procedures**

Subjects were approached by the researcher and were asked to participate in a study which was being done to compare the levels of parenting stress perceived by married, employed mothers and married, employed fathers. They were told that all they would need to do would be to spend about twenty minutes completing a questionnaire called the Parenting Stress Index. After the individual agreed to participate, they were supplied with a copy of the Parenting Stress Index (PSI), and an answer sheet developed by Richard Abidin (1995). Subjects were then given

instructions on how to complete the questionnaire. If the subject had more than one child, the researcher instructed the subject to choose one child less than twelve years old on whom to base their responses. The subjects were also informed that their name and their child's name were optional. No time limit was given. Most of the questionnaires were done at the researchers place of employment. Other questionnaires were completed at the home of the researcher or the subject and returned upon completion.

### Instrumentation

#### **Parenting Stress Index (PSI).**

The PSI (Abidin, 1995) is a self-report instrument designed to identify parent and child systems which are under stress. The PSI contains 101 questions. Subjects may also complete an optional life stress scale at the discretion of the researcher. The PSI provides a total stress score, three domain scores (child, parent, and life) and 13 subscale scores. The total stress score is the sum of the scores on the child domain scale and the parent domain scale. The child domain score and the parent domain

score are the sum of six and seven subcale scores, respectively. When answering the questions, parents rate their response primarily on a five point Likert scale, with a range of “strongly agree,” “agree,” “not sure,” “disagree,” and “strongly disagree.” In addition, twelve multiple choice items were included among the 101 mandatory questions.

The Life Stress scale is in a “yes” or “no” format and contains 18 questions. It is designed to provide some index of the amount of stress the parent is experiencing outside of the parent-child relationship.

The PSI includes a built-in Defensive Responding Scale on which a score of 24 or below is considered significant. Fifteen questions make up this scale. If the parents score is significant on this scale, the rest of the PSI should be scored with caution because it is possible that the subject is answering the questions in a defensive; rather than honest, manner

Once completed, the total stress score is computed by adding the scores from the child domain scale and the parent domain scale. A score above 260 is considered significant enough

to refer the individual for professional consultation.

Raw scores are converted to percentile scores which are used to interpret the respondents performance on the PSI. The percentile scores provide information on that respondents' score relative to the other scores from the sample. High scores are those at or above the 85th percentile; low scores are those at or below the 15th percentile (Abidin, 1995).

The PSI was standardized for use with parents of children one month to twelve years old. To determine the reliability of the index, coefficient alpha reliability coefficients were calculated. Based on the normative sample, the coefficients ranged from .70 to .83 for the subscales of the Child Domain and from .70 to .84 for the subscales of the Parent Domain. The reliability coefficients for both domains and the Total Stress scale were .90 or greater. The author states that these coefficients indicate a high degree of internal consistency (Abidin, 1995). The PSI has also been found to have test-retest reliability. The PSI was administered to a sample of 30 mothers 1 to 3 months after the initial administration. Correlation coefficients between the first and second set of scores

were .63 for the Child Domain, .91 for the Parent Domain, and .96 for the Total Stress score. Other studies have yielded similar results, all indicating the stability of scores over an interval of time (Abidin, 1995).

The index has been validated on at least six cultures and has effectively survived translation. Abidin(1995) provided numerous abstracts from studies which provide evidence for the construct and predictive validity of the PSI. He states that the validity of any measure must be established for particular purposes and populations, and that users of the PSI must determine from the research if the PSI will be useful for the population they are working with.

### **Child Domain Scale**

The child domain scale is made up of six subscales and is a reflection of the total stress caused by children (Abidin, 1995). The six subscales are as follows.

Distractibility/Hyperactivity (DI): High scores on this subscale are associated with children who display



characteristics of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder.

Adaptability (AD): High scores are a reflection of the child's inability to adjust to changes in his or her physical or social environment.

Reinforces Parent (RI): High scores on this subscale may indicate that the parent does not experience his/her child as a source of positive reinforcement.

Demandingness (DE): High scores are a sign that the parent feels the child places many demands upon them.

Mood (MO): High scores may be indicative of a child whose affective functioning shows evidence of dysfunction.

Acceptability (AC): High scores may suggest that the child's physical, intellectual, and emotional characteristics do not match the parent's expectations.

### **Parent Domain Scale**

The parent domain scale is designed to pinpoint the sources of stress and dysfunction that may be related to dimensions of the parent's functioning (Abidin, 1995). The seven subscales are as

follows:

Competence (CO): Parents who lack practical child development knowledge and have a limited range of skills usually score higher on this subscale.

Isolation (IS): Higher scores are obtained by parents who feel socially isolated from support systems.

Attachment (AT): High scores are common when the parent does not feel emotionally close to the child or has a real or perceived inability to observe and understand the child's feelings.

Health (HE): High scores are obtained by parents whose health has deteriorated due to parenting stress.

Role Restriction (RO): High scores are obtained by parents who believe that their child restricts their freedom and frustrates their attempts to maintain their own identity.

Depression (DE): Parents who are experiencing significant depression score higher on this subscale.

Spouse (SP): High scores are obtained by people who are lacking emotional and active support of the other parent in the area of child rearing.

**Life Stress Scale**

The life stress scale is an optional part of the PSI. For this study, volunteers answered the questions on the scale. The life stress scale provides an index of the amount of stress outside the parent-child relationship that the parent is currently experiencing. If an individual has a total stress score of 250 or more combined with a life stress score of 17 or higher, that individual should be referred for professional assistance.

**Data Analysis**

For this study, raw scores were manually calculated for each subject, and means and standard deviations were calculated for each category. After testing for heterogeneity and pooling the variances, T-tests were performed to determine if there were any significant differences in the levels of perceived parenting stress for the mothers and fathers in this sample.



## Chapter IV

### Results

Once the tests were returned to the researcher, raw scores were manually calculated for each subject. Subjects received one overall total stress score, which was arrived at by summing the total scores on the child domain scale and the parent domain scale. The subjects received additional scores on the life stress scale and the defensive responding scale. After computing the raw scores, the scores were plotted on the PSI scoring graph. The design of this graph allows for the conversion of raw scores to percentile scores. The percentile scores are then used to interpret a subjects performance on the PSI. They provide information about the subjects score relative to the scores of the other subjects in the sample. The normal range for percentile scores is between the 15th and 80th percentiles. Scores higher than the 85th percentile are considered significant (Abidin, 1995).

#### **Results for Male Subjects**

Child Domain Scale: The score on the child domain scale

was arrived at by summing the six subscale scores ( See Table 1). For the male subjects the mean child domain score was 110.167, SD = 21.406. Scores ranged from 75 to 158 (R = 83). Scores on the Distractibility/Hyperactivity subscale ranged from 20 - 32 (R = 12), with a mean score of 27.25, SD = 6.06. Scores on the Adaptability subscale ranged from 19 - 41 (R = 22), with a mean score of 28, SD = 5.67. Scores on the Reinforces Parent subscale ranged from 7 - 17, ( R = 10), with a mean score of 9.92, SD = 2.691. Demandingness scores ranged from 10 - 30 (R = 20), with an average score of 20.33, SD = 5.467. Mood scores ranged from 7 - 17 (R = 10), with a mean score of 11.25, SD = 2.832. Acceptability scores ranged from 8 - 24 (R = 16), with an average score of 13.417, SD = 4.071.

The highest average subscale score was in the area of Adaptability for the male subjects, while the lowest subscale score was in the area of Reinforces Parent. Once plotted on the PSI scoring graph, Adaptability also received the highest percentile score (80%), and Reinforces Parent received the lowest percentile score (64%). This means that for the men in this sample, the

highest percentae of perceived parenting stress comes from the adaptability of the child, while the lowest amount comes from the child being a source of positive reinforcement.

TABLE 1

Mean scores, Standard Deviation scores, and Percentile scores for fathers on the Child Domain Scale of the PSI

SCALE	m	SD	%
Adaptability (AD)	28	5.67	80
Acceptability (AC)	13.417	4.071	65
Demandingness (DE)	20.33	5.467	70
Mood (MO)	11.25	2.832	75
Distractibility (DI)	27.25	6.06	75
Reinforces Parent (RI)	9.92	2.691	64
CHILD DOMAIN	110.167	21.406	74

Parent Domain Scale: The score on the Parent Domain scale was arrived at by summing the seven subscale scores (See Table 2). For the male participants, the mean total parent domain score was 119.83. The scores ranged from 68 - 154 ( $R = 86$ ),  $SD = 34.302$ . The subscale receiving the highest score on this scale was Competence ( $m = 27.417$ ), while the subscale receiving the lowest score on this scale was Health ( $m = 12.33$ ). The average score on the Competence subscale was 27.417,  $R = 22$ ,  $SD = 5.992$ . The mean score on the Isolation subscale was 12.75,  $R = 11$ ,  $SD = 2.68$ . The average score on the Attachment subscale was 14.5,  $R = 12$ ,  $SD = 3.708$ . The average score on the Health subscale was 12.33,  $R = 12$ ,  $SD = 3.064$ . On the Role Restriction scale, the mean score was 17.5,  $R = 14$ ,  $SD = 4.233$ . The mean score on the Depression scale was 18.33,  $R = 16$ ,  $SD = 4.871$ . On the Spouse subscale, the mean score was 17,  $R = 13$ ,  $SD = 4.041$ . After plotting the Parent Domain raw scores on the PSI scoring graph, it was found that for the men in this sample, Attachment contributes the largest percentage of parenting stress, while Depression accounts for the lowest percentage of parenting stress.

TABLE 2

Mean scores, Standard Deviation scores, and Percentile scores for fathers on the Parent Domain scale of the PSI

SCALE	m	SD	%
Depression (DE)	18.33	4.871	37
Attachment (AT)	14.5	3.871	77
Role Restriction (RO)	17.5	4.233	43
Competence (CO)	24.417	5.992	40
Isolation (IS)	12.75	2.68	56
Spouse Support (SP)	17	4.041	55
Health (HE)	12.33	3.064	65
PARENT DOMAIN	119.83	34.302	47

Total Stress: The average total stress score was 230.333 for married, employed fathers. Scores ranged from 147 - 312, with a SD equal to 41.264. The author of the test suggests that



subjects receiving a total stress score of 260 or above be referred for professional counseling. Only one of the twelve male subjects received a total stress score in excess of this guideline.

Defensive Responding: For the most part, defensive responding scores remained above the recommended 24 points. This means that the subjects responded honestly to the questions on the PSI. Two of the twelve men scored less than 24 points, with scores of 21 and 14. Their scores on the remainder of the PSI should be looked at cautiously, as these participants may have been attempting to make themselves look good to the researcher.

Life Stress Scale: For this study, volunteers also completed the optional life stress scale. Scores on this scale ranged from 0 - 25, with a mean score of 8.333,  $SD = 7.792$ . If the respondents score on the Total Stress scale is 250 or above and their score on the Life Stress scale is 17 or above, they may need professional assistance. Only one of the male subjects fell into this category.

### **Results for Female Subjects**

Child Domain Scale: The average total child domain score

for the female respondents was 104.47. Their scores in this category ranged from 79 - 143 ( $R = 64$ ),  $SD = 17.723$  (See Table 3).. The subcategory on which the female subjects scored the highest was Adaptability, with a mean score of 26.267, a range of 20 - 41 ( $R = 21$ ) and  $SD = 5.859$ . The subcategory receiving the lowest overall score was Reinforces Parent, with a mean score of 10, a range of 7 - 13 ( $R = 6$ ) and  $SD = 1.673$ . However, the category receiving the highest percentile score was mood (84%), while the category receiving the lowest percentile score was Distractibility (45%).

On the Distractibility/ Hyperactivity scale, the mean score was 23.467,  $R = 22$ ,  $SD = 6.866$ . The mean score on the Demandingness scale was 20.07, scores ranged from 14 - 27 ( $R = 13$ ) and  $SD = 3.615$ . The scores ranged from 6 - 24 ( $R = 18$ ) on the Mood scale, with a mean of 11.93, and  $SD = 4.155$ . The mean score on the Acceptability scale was 12.73, scores ranged from 7 - 18 ( $R = 11$ ), and the  $SD = 2.816$ .

TABLE 3

Mean scores, Standard Deviation scores, and Percentile scores for mothers on the Child Domain scale of the PSI

SCALE	m	SD	%
Adaptability (AD)	26.267	5.859	65
Acceptability (AC)	12.73	2.816	56
Demandingness (DE)	20.07	3.615	69
Mood (MO)	11.93	4.155	84
Distractibility (DI)	23.467	6.866	45
Reinforces Parent (RI)	10	1.673	65
CHILD DOMAIN	104.47	17.723	63

Parent Domain Scale: On the parent domain scale, females scored an average score of 120.6 overall, SD = 16.887, and total scores ranging from 92 -131 (R = 39) (See Table 4). The subcategory receiving the highest overall score from the mothers



was Competence with an average score of 28.53. Scores in this subcategory ranged from 21 -39 (R = 18), SD = 4.145. The category receiving the lowest overall scores from the mothers was Health with an average score of 11.47. Scores ranged from 6 - 18 (R =12), SD = 2.553. The two categories receiving the highest percentile score were Health and Role Restriction (55%), and Depression contributed the least to parenting stress (46%). The scores on the subscale Isolation ranged from 7 - 22 (R = 15), with a mean score of 12.4, SD = 3.738. The scores on the Attachment subscale ranged from 7 -19 (R = 12), with an average score of 11.93, SD = 3.316. On the Role Restriction scale, the scores ranged from 13 - 25 (R = 12), with an average score of 19.07, SD = 3.586. Scores on the Depression subscale ranged from 14 -33 (R = 19), with a mean score of 19.6, SD = 4.937. Scores on the Spouse subscale ranged from 7 - 25 (R = 18), with an average score of 16.93, SD = 5.335.

TABLE 4

Mean scores, Standard Deviation scores, and Percentile scores for mothers on the Parent Domain scale of the PSI

SCALE	m	SD	%
Depression (DE)	19.6	4.937	46
Attachment (AT)	11.93	3.316	48
Role Restriction (RO)	19.07	3.586	55
Competence (CO)	28.53	4.145	50
Isolation (IS)	12.4	3.738	54
Spouse Support (SP)	16.93	5.335	54
Health (HE)	11.47	2.553	55
PARENT DOMAIN	120.60	16.887	48

Total Stress: For the married, employed mothers, the average total stress score was 225.07, SD = 30.621. Scores on this scale ranged from 178 - 298 (R = 120). Two of the

respondents scored above the recommended 260 points, with scores of 270 and 298, respectively.

Defensive Responding: The average defensive responding score for the females was 34, SD = 7.174. Scores ranged from 23 - 52 points, with only one respondent scoring below the recommended 24 points. This means that for the most part, the mothers in this study responded to the PSI honestly, and did not try to make themselves look good by answering defensively.

Life Stress: The average life stress score for the female subjects was 6.4, SD = 8.762. Scores ranged from 0 -24 points. Two of the respondents scored above 250 on the Total Stress scale and above 17 on the Life Stress scale. The author of the text suggests professional counseling for individuals with scores in these areas.

### **Comparison of Means**

On the average, the male subjects were 21 months older than the female subjects, while the children of the female subjects were eighteen months older than the children of the male subjects

On the child domain scale, both fathers and mothers received the highest raw scores on the Adaptability subscale (28 and 26.267, respectively). Fathers and mothers also received the lowest raw scores on the subscale Reinforces Parent (9.92 and 10, respectively). Overall higher raw scores in the category were received by fathers (110.167 pts. vs. 104.47 pts.). Once raw scores were converted to percentile scores, the men scored higher than the women as well (74% vs. 63%). This means that the men in this sample report that they perceive more stress from the areas measured on the child domain scale than the female subjects.

On the Parent Domain scale, both fathers and mothers received the highest raw scores on the Competence subscale (27.417 and 28.53, respectively). Both fathers and mothers received the lowest raw scores on the Health subscale (12.33 and 11.47, respectively). Higher total Parent Domain raw scores were received by the women (120.6 pts. vs. 119.83 pts.), and when these raw scores were converted to percentile scores, women scored higher than the men (48% vs. 47%) as well. Although the difference is minimal, it appears that women may perceive certain

aspects of parenting to be more stressful than men do. In this sample, the women perceived a higher percentage of stress than the men on the subscales Depression, Competence, and Role Restriction. According to the developer of the test, this means that the women may feel they lack knowledge of child development and that their child restricts their freedom to do the things they wish to do (Abidin, 1995).

Men scored higher on the total stress scale ( $m = 230.333$ , 63%), than did women ( $m = 225.07$ , 57%). Men also scored higher on the life stress scale ( $m = 8.333$ , 64%). Men received lower defensive responding scores on average ( $m = 31.33$ ) which suggests that females were likely to answer more honestly.

A comparison of the age of each male subject to their total stress score ( see Table 5) found no significant relationship between the age of the father and their total stress score ( $-.01$ ). The same was found when comparing the age of each female subject to their total stress score. Again, there appears to be no significant relationship between the age of the mother and their stress level ( $.01$ ).



TABLE 5

Parents age and Total Parenting Stress score

Subject #	Male	Total Stress	Female	Total Stress
1	25 y, 11 m	255	35 y	260
2	27 y, 8 m	180	28 y, 2 m	213
3	33 y, 2 m	246	26 y, 1 m	228
4	36 y, 3 m	213	38 y, 7 m	239
5	38 y, 11 m	210	32 y, 10 m	178
6	33 y	249	38 y, 6 m	270
7	30 y	312	33 y, 9 m	189
8	38 y, 7 m	239	28 y, 10 m	227
9	27 y, 9 m	200	37 y, 10 m	220
10	32 y, 7 m	147	-----	209
11	31 y, 5 m	258	40 y, 7 m	225
12	31 y, 1 m	255	27 y, 10 m	220
13			32 y, 4 m	206
14			26 y, 7 m	194
15			28 y, 6 m	298

Note. Dashes indicate data not reported.

A t-test was performed to compare the total parenting stress scores of employed, married mothers with the scores of employed,

married fathers. Prior to conducting the T-test, a Levine's test was done to test for heterogeneity of variance between the two groups in the sample. Variances were pooled as the sample sizes were unequal. It was found that the t-test was not significant ( $t(25) = .3805, p < .05$ ). The results showed no significant difference between mothers and fathers.

T-tests were then performed to see if there was a significant difference between mothers and fathers on the parent domain scale and the child domain scale. Neither t-test was significant. On the parent domain scale  $t(25) = -.0764, p < .05$ , while on the child domain scale  $t(25) = .8013, p < .05$ . In addition, t-tests were performed on each subscale of the parent domain scale and the child domain scale to determine if any of the scales yielded significantly different results. None of the following results were significant with  $p < .05$ : Adaptability  $t(25) = .7746$ , Distractibility  $t(25) = 1.497$ , Reinforces Parent  $t(25) = -.0947$ , Demandingness  $t(25) = .150$ , Mood  $t(25) = -.484$ , Acceptability  $t(25) = .518$ , Competence  $t(25) = -.5698$ , Isolation  $t(25) = .1439$ , Attachment  $t(25) = 1.899$ , Health  $t(25) = .796$ , Role Restriction  $t(25) = -1.044$ ,

Depression  $t(25) = -.668$ , and Spouse Support  $t(25) = .037$  (see Table 6). Based on these results, there appears to be no significant difference in the levels of perceived parenting stress of married, employed mothers and fathers. Therefore, in this case, the null hypothesis that mothers would perceive more stress should be rejected.

TABLE 6

T-test Results

Parent Domain	t	Child Domain	t
<b>Total</b>	-.0764	<b>Total</b>	.8013
Competence	-.5698	Distractibility	1.497
Isolation	.1439	Adaptability	.7746
Attachment	1.899	Reinforces Parent	-.0947
Health	.796	Demandingness	.150
Role Restriction	-1.044	Mood	-.484
Depression	-.668	Acceptability	.518
Spouse	.037		

$p < .05$ ,  $df = 25$

## **Chapter V**

### **Discussion**

Based on the abundance of research that has been done on the parenting stress perceived by mothers, it was hypothesized that married, employed mothers would perceive more parenting stress than married, employed fathers. This hypothesis was not supported by the data. T-tests found no significant difference in the levels of parenting stress perceived by married, employed mothers and fathers.

This result was not totally surprising. Abbott (1990) also found only average levels of parenting stress when studying 100 first-time parents. In her study, men and women reported both positive and negative aspects to parenting and it did not appear that multiple roles were related to increased parenting stress. Instead, it appeared that different aspects of the parenting experience were stressful for men and women. Based on the literature, it was expected that mothers would perceive more parenting stress due to variables such as role restriction and isolation (Rosenfield, 1989; Gove & Geerken, 1977; Ross &

Mirowsky, 1988). This was expected because it would make sense that the parent who assumes responsibility not only for a job outside of the home, but also for taking care of the home and children, would be the one who would have less time for herself and any outside interests. Therefore, she should be prone to higher levels of parenting stress.

Results of this study found that on the parent domain scale, mothers attributed the highest percentage of parenting stress to the variables of Role Restriction and Health (55%). This finding is congruent with the findings of Rosenfield (1989), Lewis and Cooper (1987), Brief et al.(1983), and Ross & Mirowski (1988). These studies have shown that mothers who isolate themselves from social support networks or who feel confined by their roles as wife and mother are more likely to experience higher levels of parenting stress. Wyngaarden-Krauss (1993) also found that women report a greater percentage of stress related to health and role restriction.

Other researchers have found results to the contrary. Helson, Elliot, and Leigh (1990) found that it was not the number of



roles women held that caused stress in the parenting role. Instead, they found that the quality of the roles they played was associated with effective functioning. Raup and Myers (1989) found that women who work during child rearing are less stressed when the children leave home.

For men, the highest raw scores on the parent domain scale were received on the subscales of Competence and Depression. Kanefield (1983) found that men who undertake more home responsibilities when their wives work have higher levels of depression than men who do not. McBride (1991) also found that a significant source of parenting stress for fathers is how competent they believe they are as parents. However, the men in this study obtained the highest percentage score (77%) on the Attachment subscale. This result is consistent with the findings of Wyngaarden-Krauss (1993) which show that for fathers, levels of parenting stress increase when associated with feelings of attachment.

The men and women who participated in this study indicated different primary sources of stress related to the child domain

scale. The women who participated in this study perceived that the highest percentage of their parenting stress stemmed from the mood of their child. They perceived the lowest percentage of parenting stress from how easily distracted and hyperactive their child was.

For the men in this study, the highest percentage of stress was perceived to be a result of how easily the child could adapt to different situations. Men may perceive their child's ability or inability to adapt to situations as a source of stress because men have been found to have a harder time than women transitioning to parenthood (Crnic & Booth, 1991). Fathers perceived the least amount of stress on the subscale Reinforces Parent, which indicates that the fathers in this sample perceive their children to be a source of positive reinforcement.

Although it does not appear that married, employed mothers perceive more parenting stress than married, employed fathers, it does seem as if different aspects of parenting cause stress for men and women. Women appear to be more stressed by the responsibilities of work and home, while men seem to perceive

more stress from the relationship they have with the child and how they interact with each other.

### **Limitations and Recommendations**

There may be several reasons why the results of this study were not significant. First, the sample size was small. This was due in part to the limited number of people whom the researcher knew who were both married and employed outside of the home. A larger sample size may have possibly made a difference in the results. The second limitation to the study was that the sample was not by definition random. Subjects were limited to the researcher's acquaintances which did not span a wide range of races, socioeconomic class, etc. Perhaps using a more random sampling of married, employed mothers and fathers would have made a difference in the results of the study.

Overall, the current research limited the study of parenting stress to those mothers and fathers who were both married and employed outside of the home. To truly get an accurate understanding of the differences in perceived parenting stress

levels of men and women, studies should be done which include single parents, divorced parents, step-parents, different socioeconomic classes, different races, parents of special-needs children, etc. These studies could then be compared to see which groups experience more parenting stress and which variables tend to cause the stress.

Were this study to be replicated, several recommendations would need to be made to improve the methodology. First and foremost, a larger, more random sample should be used. This sample should include different races and classes, and preferably include equal numbers of men and women.

The second recommendation would be to test only couples. This would allow the researcher to determine which parent-child systems were under the most stress within the sample. It would also allow the researcher to pinpoint the aspects of the parent-child or marital relationship that contribute the most stress to the family. This information could be valuable to future treatment plans, should the couple be referred for professional counseling.

A final suggestion would be to interview the subjects prior to

having them take the PSI. The interview would consist of general questions such as how long they have been married, how many children they have, how the household responsibilities are divided, the education level of each parent, etc. The goal of the interview process would be to help the researchers get a better feel for the background of the subjects.

### **Implications**

If this study were to be replicated, it would be important for counselors for several reasons. Most of the literature to date focuses on the parenting stress perceived by mothers and leads one to believe that mothers have more stress due to the responsibilities of parenting than fathers do. Were the results of this study accurate, this assumption would be incorrect.

Counselors should focus their treatment plans on helping each parent learn to deal more effectively with the aspects of parenting that cause them stress. Parent support groups or parent training groups might be important resources. In addition, counselors may want to consider teaching the parents how to help



each other. For example, if the mother sees that her spouse is becoming stressed as a result of not knowing how to competently care for the child, she could spend some time with him teach him different ways to tend to the child's needs. The father could do the same for the mother by taking on more of the household responsibilities or choosing a day each week for her to have to herself.

In summary, no significant difference was found in the levels of perceived parenting stress of married, employed mothers and fathers. Areas that were perceived as stressful were different for mothers and fathers; however this difference was not statistically significant.



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