

Parental Stress and Self-Care

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Thesis Title

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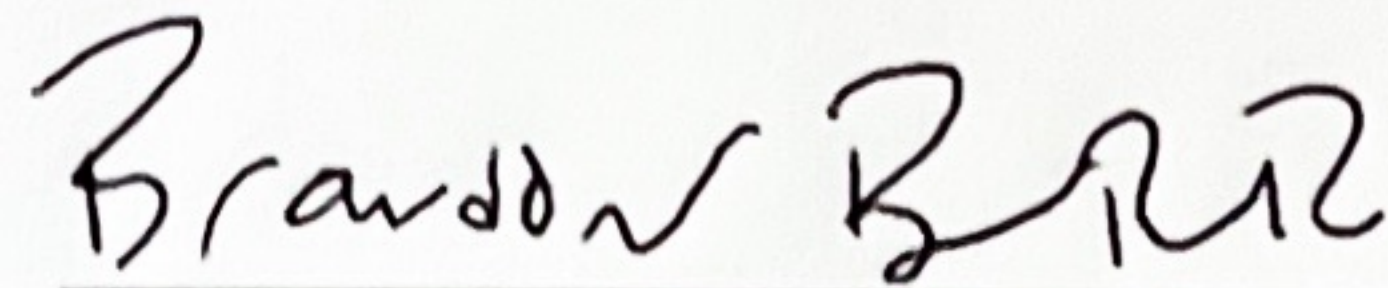
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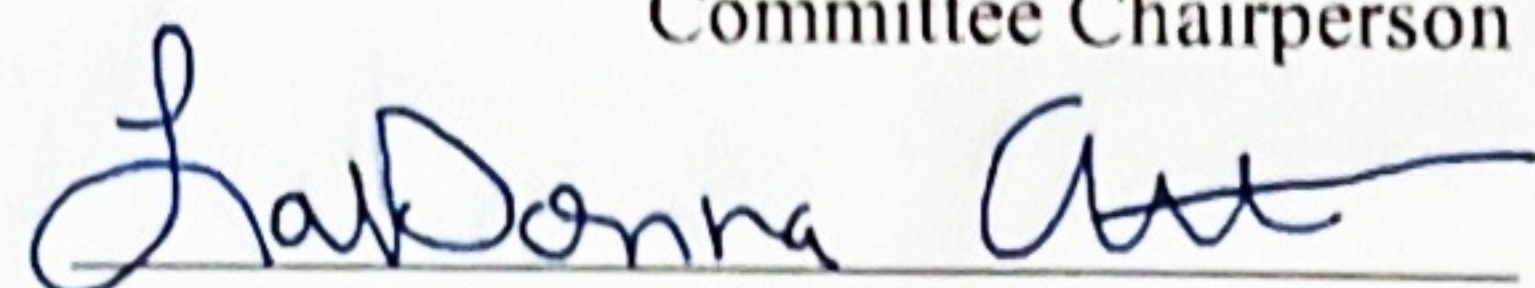
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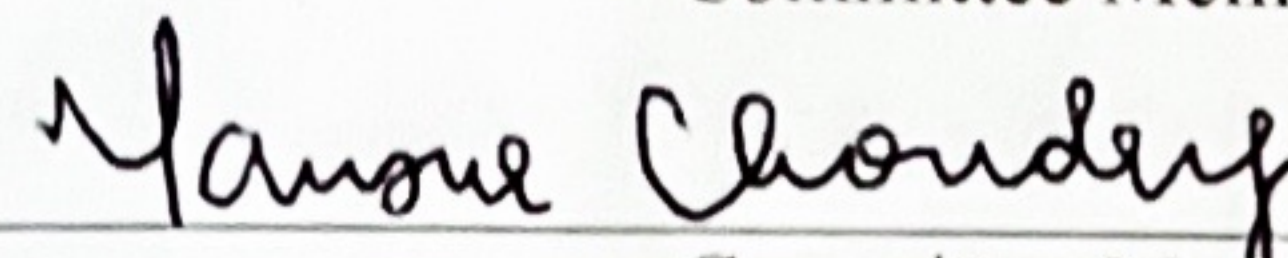
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Parental Stress and Self-Care

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Chapter One: Introduction

Introduction and background of the problem

Stress is a concerning contributor to non-optimal parenting practices. The American Psychological Association (APA) reports 48% of parents have experienced an increased level of stress compared to their stress before the COVID-19 pandemic. Correlating to this trend, a higher percentage (32%) of parents received professional mental health treatment compared to adults without children (12%) (APA, 2021). Likewise, parents were more likely to receive a mental health diagnosis than adults without children. The APA suggests self-care as an avenue to support parents' mental and physical health. The APA recommends parents implement self-care in 15 to 30 minute increments and encourage their children to do the same (APA, 2021).

The model of self-care was proposed by Dorothea Orem. She geared the model toward nursing. As proposed in 1985, Orem defined self-care as “the practice of activities that individuals initiate and perform on their own behalf in maintaining life, health, and well-being” (Orem, 1985, p. 33). Self-care deficits may lead to clinical problems. Orem suggests that nurses who can recognize self-care deficits in patients can encourage practices that enable patients to live a healthier life mentally and physically (Orem, 1985).

Today, the concept of self-care is applied to the general population, regardless of mental or physical health diagnoses. Active Minds is a nonprofit organization that advocates for the mental health education and awareness of young adults. The advocacy group proposes that self-care is the way individuals maintain their relationships with themselves. Some self-care practices Active Minds provides as an example include meditation, reading, exercising, or cleaning (Active Minds, 2022).

Active Minds also suggests that self-care is a way to reduce stress. With the stress levels of parents on the rise, it is important to acknowledge the potential effects stress can have on parents and children. Neece et al. (2012) suggests that child development can be applied to a transactional model between the individual child and their environment as proposed by Belsky. This model has been used mainly to understand the interaction between parents and their children (Neece et al., 2012). These interactions have been acknowledged as a potential factor that influences the temperament of a child, internalizing and externalizing behavioral problems, emotional adjustment, substance use, and regulation (Neece et al., 2012). The investigative study by Neece et al. (2012) sought to investigate the transactional model further by looking at the correlation between parenting stress and child behavioral problems in longitudinal data. Their results suggest behavioral problems of children could be either a variable that increases parental stress or result from increased parental stress (Neece et al., 2012).

Statement of the problem

Literature surrounding parental stress raises a huge question. Why are professionals not educating parents on self-care? If self-care is a truly effective avenue to reduce stress, the education of self-care should be investigated as a potential evidence-based practice. The current study will explore the relationship between parental stress levels and self-care practices. By examining the responses of parents, it will provide for data that is useful and direct to the interfamilial environment in relation to self-care. With self-care being an under-researched topic, this study will provide a better understanding of the potential benefits self-care could have regarding parents and children. If this study provides evidence of an inverse relationship between stress and self-care, further research could examine the relationships between parent education on self-care and reduced stress.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Parents and caregivers are the most influential relationships in children's lives. Good parents promote healthy development while bad parents can hinder development detrimentally. Stress is a well-researched risk factor associated with maladaptive parenting. By reviewing this research as well as research on self-care, we are better able to understand the potential impact parental stress can have on the family structure and how self-care can counteract it. Resulting from the review, we will be able to draw conclusions about a potential prevention or intervention techniques to combat parental stress and promote parenting styles and practices that promote healthy development.

Parenting

The Cambridge Dictionary (2022) defines parenting as “the raising of children and all the responsibilities and activities that are involved in it” (dictionary.cambridge.org). However, this definition is extremely vague. Currently, parenting is defined more by the patterns of behavior parents demonstrate. These patterns of behavior have been divided into four styles of parenting: authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, and uninvolved.

Parenting Styles

The four parenting styles are based upon two factors: demandingness and support/responsiveness. Demandingness refers to the “degree a parent controls a child's behavior,” and support refers to “the amount of affection, acceptance, and warmth a parent provides” (Lang., 2022, p. 103). Research on parenting styles stems from the work of clinical psychologist, Diana Baumrind (1966). To better understand parents and their patterns, we will provide a brief summary of the four parenting styles.

Permissive Parents

Baumrind (1966) describes permissive parents in behaviors and attitudes that are “nonpunitive, acceptant, and affirmative” when responding to children’s behaviors (p. 889). Permissive style parenting is also sometimes referred to as uninvolved or neglectful parenting. Additionally, these parents make very few, if any, demands for their children in terms of responsibility or expectations in general (Baumrind). In terms of the two variables, these parents exhibit low demandingness but high support.

Authoritarian Parents

Authoritarian parents are extremely demanding and controlling. It is common for them to “shape, control, and evaluate the behavior and attitudes of the child in accordance with a set standard of conduct” (Baumrind, 1966, p. 890). The standards these parents implement are extremely rigid and absolute (Baumrind). Historically, this style of parenting was used to guide the child to embody religious values (Baumrind). However, in more recent years, authoritarian parents use these tactics either due to a psychological need for control or with the belief that their children will be an efficient and successful member of society resulting from the guidance of the parent.

Authoritative Parents

Baumrind (1966) suggests that “the authoritative parent attempts to direct the child’s activities in a rational, issue-oriented manner.” (p. 891). These parents provide reason for their instructions and actions as well as allow their children to have autonomy in what they do (Baumrind). Parenting in this manner can be characterized by being affirming of children, setting appropriate limitations and expectations for children, and capitalizing on children’s potential through using “reason, power, and shaping by regime and reinforcement to achieve objectives”

(Baumrind, p. 891). In terms of demandingness and responsiveness, authoritative parents exhibit high levels of both.

Uninvolved Parents

Uninvolved parenting is self-explanatory. The definition of uninvolved according to the Merriam-Webster dictionary is “not connected or concerned with someone or something, especially on an emotional level.” Parent of this type display low levels of both demandingness and responsiveness. They are under-involved and do not adequately provide children with the structure and nurturing they need.

Demographic Trends of Parenting

Chan and Koo (2011) did a multivariate analysis looking to identify trends in family structures between parents and adolescents. The researchers found that the authoritative parenting style was displayed most often in families with two parents, parents with tertiary education, and higher socioeconomic status (Chan & Koo). Authoritarian parenting was found most often in single-parent families where the parent was self-employed, parents who had completed secondary education, and fell in the working class (Chan & Koo). Lastly, the researchers found that permissive parenting typically took place in single-parent families and blended families, households with parents with low education, and households with low socioeconomic status (Chan & Koo). Arian et al. (2019) also found that parents with low socioeconomic status do not experience the “advantages of high income and education” that assist in addressing problem behaviors in children. Parents living with less economic resources lack in material resources as well as less parenting knowledge due to their lack of education.

Parenting Theories

Miguel et al. (2013) did a study aimed to test theoretical models examining relationships between parents' social representations of the development of intelligence and the style and values parents possess. The results of this study indicated that parents' style of parenting is influenced by their desired values and social representations of how intelligence is developed (Miguel et al.). Essentially, parents could be more rigid and harsh with their children due to their belief they are doing what is best for their child. Parents desire to create environments, both social and physical, that will most encourage their child's development of desired intelligence as well as promote the acceptance of desired values. This concept could be supported by the life history theory.

Belsky et al. (2012) suggests life history theory postulates that natural selection has shaped humans to "make trade-offs that prioritize resource expenditures, so that greater investment in one domain occurs at the expense of investment in other domains" (p. 663). It is helpful to conceptualize this idea in terms of a 24-hour day. There is only so much time in a day. If parents are experiencing stress, the stressor requires more time, and, because of the special investment in this domain, the time dedicated to parenting and connecting with their child does not receive the time and attention required to maintain a positive relationship and healthy parenting practices that promote healthy development. Aside from philosophical theories behind parenting, variables within one's life are well-researched to explain parenting styles and behavior.

Parenting Stress

Abidin 1992 discussed determinants of parenting behavior. He lists child and parent characteristics, work environment, lack of parenting competence and life events as relevant

stressors for parents as a whole (Abidin). Conversely, he lists coping skills, parenting competence, material resources, and positive relationships with fellow parents as protective factors for parents (Abidin). Current research patterns indicate that these stressors and protective factors still reign true for parents.

Parental Burnout

Parental burnout should also be considered when investigating parental stress. Burnout can be “characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and a decrease in self-fulfillment” that people experience due to long-term exposure to environments that are “emotionally exhausting” (Abramson, 2021, para. 4). Parental burnout comes in three stages: overwhelming exhaustion, distancing, and loss of fulfillment (Abramson). Parents experiencing burnout notice the exhaustion and, as a preservation measure, distance themselves from their children attempting to preserve the energy they have available (Abramson). After these two stages, parents’ loss of fulfillment manifests in attitudes of being intolerant of being a parent in general (Abramson). Abramson also reports that parents experiencing burnout experience similar feelings of people who experience occupational burnout. However, unlike in the workplace, parents cannot escape their roles. Additionally, Abramson reports that even if a parent is opposed to certain parenting practices like yelling or spanking, burnout can lead them to do those exact things.

Stressors

It is impossible to list every potential stressor a parent may experience. However, it is helpful in providing three categories of stressors to understand the broad environment that can present challenges when it comes to parenting. Normative stressors include those of typical everyday life (Hardman, 2022). An example of a normative stressor may be a family transition

considered common for families like having a child. Nonnormative stressors are those that are sudden, unexpected, and dramatic (Hardman). An example of a nonnormative stressor may be an unexpected death of a parent. Stressors such as these are very likely to alter the family in drastic ways, both positively and negatively. Lastly, chronic stressors include circumstances that happen over a long period of time (Hardman). An example of a chronic stressor may be the failure of a family business that was once successful.

Effects of Stress on Parenting

Stressors impact both the parent as an individual and their family functioning and relationships. Parents who experience lower levels of stress exhibit more authoritative parenting behaviors (Hardman, 2022). These parents are more responsive and warm to their children as well as display more moderate levels of control in their child-rearing (Hardman). In contrast, parents experiencing stress may display disruptive or aggressive behaviors, social withdrawal, feelings of rejection, or low self-esteem (Hardman).

Parental stress has also been associated with the increased use of harsh parenting practices (Chung et al., 2020). Harsh parenting includes practices such as corporal punishment, use of harsh words, and shouting. Chung et al. investigated the correlation of harsh parenting and the COVID-19 global pandemic. Researchers found that, due to parents assuming more roles for their children (i.e. teacher) led to a higher incidence of using harsh parenting practices (Chung et al.). In more general terms, Chung et al. found that higher parental stress was associated with higher rates of maladaptive parenting behavior.

Parental Stress Spillover

Parental stress spillover happens when an event or situation outside of the parenting realm negatively affects a parent's behavior or attitude toward their child (Hosokawa & Katsura

2021). Stress manifests often through symptoms similar to anxiety and depression (Hosokawa & Katsura). Research displays correlations between parental stress and “poor parental mental health, marital conflict, and poor parental physical health” (Hosokawa & Katsura, p. 9). The manifestation of stress symptoms in parents are more likely to cause them to have negative parenting practices and be less attuned to their children.

Effects of Parental Stress on Children

As established through research, stressed parents make for bad parenting. Having a parent that is stressed can affect all domains of development for a child. All people cope with stress in a different manner, and, therefore, implement maladaptive parenting practice as a result.

Sometimes, the coping strategies parents use can be considered an adverse childhood experience (ACE). ACEs are categorized as “potentially traumatic events that occur in childhood” (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2019). Parents’ coping strategies during stressful seasons in their lives tend to be harmful to children and have the potential to be traumatic. A few examples of ACEs include using harsh words, manipulation, hitting, and ignoring. Throughout this section, we will outline the physical, cognitive, and social emotional implications of parental stress on child development.

Physical Development

As discussed previously, when some parents are under stress, they may exhibit aggressive behavior. Using physical punishment or physically lashing out at children can potentially injure them in such a way that causes them to have a prolonged or life-long disability. In infancy, the most common form of physical abuse that can have drastic effects is shaken baby syndrome. Healthcare professionals use this term to describe an acute brain injury that results from an adult or someone else shaking an infant or toddler to where enough brain cells are injured that they

cannot get enough oxygen (Mayo Clinic, 2022). Similarly, Denholm et al. (2013) found that children who were neglected measured smaller in physical growth as opposed to their peers who were not neglected. As children get older, there is more risk for injuries such as broken bones or bodily injuries similar that require medical attention. ACEs can also lead to physical illnesses in adulthood. The CDC (Centers for Diseases Control and Prevention, 2019) reports that preventing ACEs can help lower the risk for children to develop long-term illnesses such as cancer, diabetes, and heart disease.

Cognitive Development

Enlow et al. (2012) investigated whether exposure to interpersonal trauma with a primary caregiver could potentially impact child cognitive development. Resulting from their study, they found that children exposed to interpersonal trauma in childhood had lower cognitive score compared to those who were not. Children exposed to maladaptive parenting practices have the potential to hinder their development of higher cognitive processes due to the over-activation of the body's stress response.

A stress response is characterized by the activation of the amygdala. The amygdala interprets a stimulus deciphering if it is dangerous or not (Harvard Health, 2020). If the amygdala sends a distress signal to the hypothalamus, the body's sympathetic nervous system is activated and triggers a release of the adrenaline hormone (Harvard Health). If the body continues to interpret the environment as threatening, this process continues and the body stays in survival mode. Due to the survival areas of the brain being activated, other parts of the brain like the prefrontal cortex lack in connection and development. These areas of the brain are responsible for cognitive functions such as decision making, learning, and memory. An over-reactive stress response can lead to cognitive deficits resulting from this.

Social Emotional Development

The effect of maladaptive parenting on social emotional development is the most researched domain in relation to negative development outcomes among children. The reciprocal interactions between parents and their children account for the development of internalizing and externalizing problems, emotional adjustment, temperament, self-regulation, and substance use (Neece et al., 2016). Social and emotional skills children may display deficits in resulting from bad parenting may include wanting attention or being clingy, disregarding consequences or perceptions about their actions, developing risky behavior like stealing or running away, regulating emotions, self-esteem, and maintaining healthy relationships (National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, 2022). Also, children may struggle with mental health challenges like depression, suicidal ideation, anxiety, eating disorders, or self-harm (National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children).

Self-Care

Dorothea Orem (1985) coined the term self-care to describe “activities that individuals initiate and perform on their own behalf in maintaining life, health, and well-being.” Originally, this concept was developed for clinical healthcare. Orem thought that teaching patients to do more for themselves related to their illness would be beneficial for their overall well-being. However, current research and ideas surrounding self-care cover a broader environment. The majority of research on self-care reviewed surrounds mental health professional and individuals living with mental illness.

Mental Health Providers

La Mott and Martin (2017) investigated moderating effects of self-care on compassion outcomes of mental health practitioners. The researchers found that the mental health providers

that implemented more self-care also reported lower burnout levels and higher compassion satisfaction scores. Similarly, Lucock et al. (2011) published a narrative review of qualitative studies related to self-care. It was found that research on the concepts of self-help, self-management, and recovery were looking to investigate the essence of self-care in the mental health community. All research on these topics focused on the idea concerning “individuals have more choice and control over treatment and a greater role in recovery and maintaining their health and well-being” (Lucock et al., p. 602).

Existing Research

Martyn (2003) identified five themes related to self-management in a study interviewing individuals with schizophrenia. These included maintaining morale and finding meaning, thriving, managing their illness, having relationships with other people, and coping (Martyn). Some behaviors that were categorized as self-management within this sample included creative works, therapy, exploring and understanding schizophrenia, and living a healthy lifestyle through diet and exercise. Rogers et al. (2004) published a research study investigating peoples’ understandings of a self-help clinic. Participants indicated an understanding of them needing to seek services due to their loss of ability to cope, and understand that the role of the clinic is to help them regain and retain control over their lives. In another study on self-help, researchers found that patients living with depression resort to coping strategies like seeking social support, distracting themselves, or going to places that make them feel safe (Khan et al., 2007). The patients’ motivations in these practices were to restore their social functioning in their everyday lives (Khan et al.).

Implications for the Current Study

The current study has potential to provide a foundation of research leading to a beneficial evidence-based practice (EBP) aimed to alleviate typical symptoms of parental stress to encourage parents to implement healthy parenting practices that promote healthy development for children. If a deficit in self-care correlates with high parental stress levels, perhaps there is a gap within parent education EBPs. Self-care strategies are not absolute and customizable for each parent. The Triple-P Positive Parenting Program mentions self-care briefly. Triple-P is based upon the idea that “parenting is affected by a range of factors that impact a parent’s self-esteem and sense of well-being.” This EBP suggests that parents should view being a parent as personal self-care through learning practical parenting skills they can implement (Sanders, 1999). This EBP does not view self-care in the context the current study aims to explore. This study views self-care as activities parents do that alleviate general stress. The purpose of this study is to examine if the correlation between self-care implementation in parents and stress levels.

Chapter 3: Method

The current correlational study investigated a statistical relationship between parent stress level and parent self-care habits. A correlational study is most appropriate for this study because it allows for several variables to be measured. Furthermore, it would be difficult to manipulate self-care as an independent variable within a true experimental design. While the use of a correlational design did not provide insight into a causal relationship, it allowed for the two variables in question to be studied with no manipulation from the researcher. Theoretically, this provided data from participants natural conditions and lives. The aim of this study was to determine if there was a correlational relationship between parental stress and self-care practices.

Sample Description

Through convenience sampling, 180 participants were included in the data reported in this study. Participants were recruited via social media, email, and text message. Participants' ages ranged from 21 to 79 years. The average age was 37. The majority participants were female (n = 159) with the remainder of participants being male, non-binary, or specifying a gender identity not listed as an option. Most participants indicated their race/ethnicity as white (87.2%). The remaining participants indicated they were Native American/ Alaskan Native (5%), Hispanic/Latin (2.2%), African American or Black (2.2%), or Asian or Pacific Islander (1.1%). A little over half (53.9%) of participants had an approximate yearly household income of \$100,000 or more, and 81.1% of participants had college degrees. Most households had two parents (83.3%) with the average of two children in the household.

Measures

Variables that are being measured in this study utilize the Qualtrics software. The measuring tools used are adapted to fit the formatting of the software, but gain the same information as the original tools.

Demographics

Collecting demographic information was collected to determine potential covariates within the relationship between parent stress and self-care. The information collected included the following:

- Age
- Race
- Ethnicity
- Education
- Gender Identity
- Marital Status
- Yearly Household Income
- Employment Status
 - How many hours/week
- Number of Parents in the Home
- Number of Children in the Home

Self-Care

Cook-Cottone and Guyker's Standard Mindful Self-Care Scale (2017) was used to assess the frequency of various self-care behaviors in parents. This tool is a 33-item Likert scale, and the items are ranked by participants from 1 to 5 based upon weekly occurrences of the self-care

behavior in question. For example, the participants ranked the statement “I did something intellectual (using my mind) to help me relax (e.g., read a book, wrote)” between 1 and 5 according to the indicated values: 1 – Never (0 days), 2 – Rarely (1 day), 3 – Sometimes (2 to 3 days), 4 – Often (4 to 5 days), or 5 – Regularly (6 to 7 days). The process for scoring the MSCS is finding the average response for each subscale based upon participants’ responses. The purpose of this tool is for survey participants to look at the value of their averages and reflect upon their behaviors. However, this was not the process the current study used. This study created an “overall self-care value” by averaging the values from each subscale for the purpose of finding a correlation coefficient encompassing all behaviors assessed by the questionnaire to compare with the results of the Perceived Stress Scale.

Stress

Participants’ stress levels were measured with the Perceived Stress Scale (Cohen et al., 1983). Each item is scored based on frequency from 0 (Never) to 4 (Very Often). This Likert scale measurement tool translates responses to numerical values from 1 to 5 based upon participants’ responses. The data collected from this assessment are indicative of participants’ thoughts and feelings on different situations. The added values of each response is an individual’s stress score. PSS scores are categorized into three groups: low stress (0 – 16), moderate stress (17 – 33), and high stress (34 – 50).

Data Analysis

Descriptive data was gathered to gain a clearer picture of the parents who have taken the survey, and assess for demographic influences. Also, a Pearson Correlation Coefficient will be measured to determine the strength of the relationship between self-care and stress.

Chapter 4: Results

The aim of the current study was to explore the relationship between parental stress levels and self-care behavior. This study addressed three research questions:

R1: What are parents' perceived stress levels?

R2: How often are parents engaging in self-care behaviors?

R3: Is there a significant correlational relationship between parental stress levels and self-care behaviors?

The data collected were analyzed using the SPSS software to find significant correlational relationships between the variables in question. Correlations were categorized as significant or insignificant by measuring Pearson correlation coefficients (r). Pearson correlation coefficients can measure anywhere from -1 to 1. If a $r = 0$, it indicates there is no correlation between two variables. Conversely, if $r = 1$, there is a strong positive correlational relationship between two variables meaning the higher the value of variable A, the higher value of the other variable B. If $r = -1$, there is a strong negative correlational relationship between two variables, meaning the higher the value of variable A, the lower the value of variable B. Therefore, the closer an r value is to 1 or -1, the stronger and more significant the relationship between two variables being compared.

R1: What are parents' perceived stress levels?

The average PSS score among participants was 31.583 and a median score of 32. This would categorize the sample as moderately stressed. PSS scores among participants ranged from 23 to 43.

R2: How often are parents engaging in self-care behaviors?

Responses indicated an average overall self-care value of 2.905. This number showed that, of the parents surveyed, a self-care behavior was completed two to three days per week. However, the average score varied for the subsections of the MSCS (Table 1).

Table 1

Average Sample Score for MSCS Subsections

Subsection Title	Average Score
Mindful Relaxation	2.446
Physical Care	2.4
Self-Compassion and Purpose	2.778
Supportive Relationships	3.797
Supportive Structure	3.412
Awareness	3.171

R3: Is there a significant correlational relationship between parental stress levels and self-care behaviors?

There were several significant correlational relationships found between perceived parental stress (PSS) and self-care. Table 2 displays the Pearson correlation coefficients (r) between all variables studied.

Table 2

Correlational Relationships Amongst Stress and Self-Care

	PSS	Overall Self-Care	Mindful Relaxation	Physical Care	Self-Compassion and Purpose	Supportive Relationships	Supportive Structure	Mindful Awareness
PSS	1	.254**	-0.127	-.152*	0.003	-0.111	-.364**	-.365**
Overall Self-Care	-.254**	1	.707**	.665**	.711**	.703**	.714**	.735**

PARENTAL STRESS AND SELF-CARE

Mindful Relaxation	-.127	.707**	1	.360**	.460**	.362**	.440**	.413**
Physical Care	-.152*	.665**	.360**	1	.283**	.274**	.333**	.355**
Self-Compassion and Purpose	.003	.711**	.460**	.283**	1	.421**	.340**	.404**
Supportive Relationships	-.111	.703**	.362**	.274**	.421**	1	.452**	.456**
Supportive Structure	-.364**	.714**	.440**	.333**	.340**	.452**	1	.603**
Mindful Awareness	-.365**	.735**	.413**	.355**	.404**	.456**	.603**	1

Chapter 5: Discussion

The aim of the current study was to determine if there was a correlational relationship between parental stress and self-care practices. If a negative relationship exists, parent education on self-care should be considered for becoming an evidence-based practice.

Significant relationships between parental stress and self-care

Participants' overall self-care scores and PSS scores indicated a significant negative correlational relationship ($r = -.254$). Additionally, there was a significant correlation between the number of children in the home and PSS scores ($r = .18$). This relationship indicated that participants that reported a higher stress score did less self-care behaviors. It would be reasonable to question if these participants made a conscious effort to implement more self-care in their daily lives it would result in them feeling less stressed. Self-care seems to lessen the impact stress may have on someone. As established by research, stress can lead to many maladaptive parenting behaviors (Chung et al., 2020). Parents may use more harsh words, shout or utilize corporal punishment as discipline (Chung et al.). Perhaps teaching self-care as a form of coping would be beneficial to parents. There are some areas of self-care that may be more important to teach parents.

The questions in the MSCM regarding mindful awareness, supportive structure, and physical care showed the strongest correlational relationships with stress scores. Mindful awareness self-care behaviors were the most significant relationship ($r = -.365$) displayed when

connected to stress. These questions asked parents how often they were aware of their thoughts, emotions, and body as well as if they were careful in selecting which of those components they used to guide their actions. Karreman and Bekker (2012) found adolescents who have higher levels of self-awareness experienced lower levels of anger. Researchers hypothesized this may have been associated with feeling secure and confident. This may be true across the lifespan. When confronted with day-to-day tasks that are stressful, sometimes people may subconsciously let negative thoughts or feelings guide their actions due to the majority of attention being allocated to those. For parents, this might manifest in maladaptive parenting behaviors guided by the feelings or sensations associated with external stressors unrelated or related to their children.

Closely following mindful awareness, there was also a significant correlation ($r = -.364$) between a supportive structure and stress scores. Self-care in the form of maintaining a supportive structure consists of maintaining a schedule that is manageable, keeping areas of activities related to school or work organized, balancing the demands of others and what is important to the individual and maintaining an environment that is comfortable and pleasing. It is helpful for people to feel as though they have a predictable day that, realistically, they are able to accomplish. Zucker (2019) that suggests there is a negative cognitive impact of feeling overwhelmed. Some indicators of being overwhelmed include forgetfulness, challenges related to logical thinking, decrease in problem solving abilities, and mental slowness (Zucker, 2019). If a parent is feeling this way, then they do not have the resources needed to live their life in a way that is beneficial for not only them but also their children.

Self-care was the other subsection of self-care that produced a significant correlation ($r = -.152$) with stress. Physical self-care is indicated by behaviors such as drinking enough water, eating a balanced diet, planning a diet, and exercising. It is easy to forget that humans have basic

needs. Feeling hydrated and properly nourished puts a body in a state of being able to function at a higher cognitive level. Exercising provides bodies with endorphins as well as endurance to get through the day. Endorphin hormones are released when the body feels pain or stress (Cleveland Clinic, 2022). Exercising is a form of healthy stress where endorphins are released. These hormones are directly linked to reducing stress and improving mood (Cleveland Clinic, 2022). Parents who are not meeting their body's basic needs could be more irritable than they would be if they would regularly make sure their body is taken care of. Doing physical self-care activities could make being aware of the body less of a challenge as discussed regarding mindful awareness self-care.

Theory

As established by research, the authoritative style of parenting is most beneficial for children (Baumrind, 1966). Achieving this style of caregiving requires great effort from parents. They must be responsive, reasonable, and allow children autonomy when appropriate (Baumrind). If a parent is stressed, it is harder to implement these things because there are more pressing issues on the mind. Furthermore, Belsky (2012) argues that the biological phenomenon of natural selection has made it to where humans undergo an exchange of personal resources to decide where to focus their attention. It could be possible that stressed parents do not have enough resources to be able to accommodate their stressor and implement beneficial parenting behaviors simultaneously. Self-care could potentially increase a parent's ability to successfully cope with stressors as well as parent their children in more of an authoritative manner, which is often more effective.

Implications for Parenting Programs

Parent education on self-care has potential to be an effective evidence-based program. Effective interventions address the unique needs of every family (Center for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2023). The MSCM accommodates this element in that there are several subcategories of self-care. Professionals may have parents take the assessment and identify the areas of self-care they are lacking in (i.e. mindful awareness, mindful relaxation, etc.) and provide suggestions or education on how they can implement this within their lives. An additional element of effective interventions is providing opportunities for parents to receive support from others in similar circumstances (CDC). It is likely that multiple parents will struggle in similar areas of self-care. A support group doing self-care activities could be an option to achieve this.

Limitations

The most prevalent limitation of the current study was the biased sample. The majority of participants (88.3%) were female. Furthermore, the majority of participants were white, married, received some form of higher education, and had an approximate yearly household income of \$100,000 or more. Additionally, parents reporting having a child with a disability were not administered different measures for self-care and stress to compare with those who did not. This sample is not representative of all populations. The reasoning behind this limitation may be due to utilizing convenience sampling to recruit participants. This population would be assumed to experience lower levels of stress due to these factors, but there was still a significant relationship shown between parental stress and self-care. For this research to be more representative of all populations, this method should be administered a more diverse sample such as parents living below the poverty line, minority families, or parents who did not receive higher education. The correlational strength of the relationship between parental stress and self-care would most likely

be higher than the one found by the current study. An additional limitation of the study was utilization self-report measurement tools. Response bias could have impacted the findings in such a way that participants reported false information in hopes to provide the desired response. However, the risk of this was minimized by not providing the hypothesis of research within the informed consent. Lastly, it is important to note that there is minimal research on the current topic so the researcher needed to create a new research typology for the variables in question.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the current study showed a relationship between parental stress and self-care behaviors. A statistically significant relationship indicated that parents who reported higher PSS scores had lower overall self-care scores. This information provides a foundation for the implementation of parent education on self-care as an evidence-based practice. Future research could explore relationships between parent self-care habits and parenting style or differences between stress and self-care amongst more diverse populations.

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