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How Psychological Capital Shapes Parental Well-Being: Understanding Its Role in Reducing Stress

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Abstract

Parental stress is a critical factor influencing parental mental health, child development and family well-being. This study examines the impact of psychological capital on parental stress. Data was collected data from 300 parents (both working and non-working) from various cities in Pakistan using convenient purposive sampling technique. The study variables were assessed using compound psychological capital scale (Dudaova et al., 2021) and parental stress scale (Berry & Jones, 1995). Findings of correlation analysis indicated that psychological capital is negatively correlated with parental stress. Significant group differences were found on gender, education level, and current employment status. Post graduates reported a significantly higher levels of psychological capital then the graduate ones. These differences suggest that parents who have high level of education experience a notably higher level of psychological capital and display greater self-efficacy than the parents with lower education. The results also showed that parents who are employed show higher levels of psychological capital as compared to the unemployed ones. The findings have practical implications for parenting programs, mental health interventions, and policies aimed at promoting parental well-being.

Keywords: *Psychological Capital, Parental Stress, Parents*

Introduction

Parenting is one of the most acute, yet challenging, role an individual can undertake. It necessitates ongoing emotional, mental, and practical navigation as parents work to fulfil the many requirements of their kids. They will undoubtedly encounter major stressors along the way, which could compromise their ability to provide effective care and jeopardize their psychological health. According to recent study by Fang et al. (2024) the important psychological resource that are essential for lowering parental stress is psychological capital. Psychological capital which has its origins in positive psychology, consists of four separates but connected elements: optimism, self-efficacy, resilience, and hope. Together, these components show a person's psychological resources that support wellbeing, stress management, and problem-solving. Although psychological capital has been studied extensively in organizational contexts, its use in parenting has gained popularity recently because of its capacity to reduce parental stress (Burgdorf et al., 2019). Psychological capital refers to an individuals' strong points, positive psychological development, and capacity to increase one's chances of success via tenacity and dedication (Calvo

& Gracia, 2021). Psychological Capital is a higher (second) order construct that by nature is positive and is comprised of four core constructs as identified in the definition stated above.

Psychological capital, as a whole, has a stronger impact than the sum of its four individual components, as they interact synergistically. It focuses on an individual's intrinsic qualities rather than external factors such as social connections (social capital), accumulated knowledge and skills (human capital), or material assets. The core components—hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism—are united by a shared sense of control, intentionality, and commitment to goal attainment. They contribute to a positive perception of circumstances and an increased likelihood of success through motivated effort and perseverance. For instance, optimistic individuals tend to believe in their potential for success. With strong self-efficacy, they actively pursue challenging goals with confidence. Hope encourages the development of multiple pathways to achieve those goals, while resilience enables them to overcome obstacles and recover from setbacks. Collectively, these HERO (Hope, Efficacy, Resilience, and Optimism) resources foster a sense of internal control and purpose throughout the process of goal achievement (Luthans et al., 2007). According to Luthans (2015), it is a favorable psychological condition of growth marked by a person's efficacy, optimism, hope, and resilience. Efficacy, or more accurately self-efficacy, is the belief in one's ability to accept and dedicate the effort required to complete a difficult activity. Optimism is the expectation of favorable results, whereas hope is the persistence in achieving realistically stated goals and, when required, changing courses towards those goals to obtain. Furthermore, resilience is the ability to withstand adversity and recover (Younas et al., 2020).

Parental stress serves as a key indicator of the challenges faced by parents in managing their family responsibilities. This stress encompasses the emotional strain and pressures that arise from fulfilling the diverse needs of children while navigating the complexities of daily life and can impact parent's well-being, affecting their mental health and overall quality of life. Parental stress often defined as a complex and multidimensional experience that encompasses the emotional, cognitive, and physiological strains parents face due to the demands of childrearing (Zhao et al., 2023). Parenting stress refers to the feelings of distress or discomfort that arise from the various demands and challenges inherent in the role of raising children. Recent study reported that parenting stress is common among parents and approximately 36-50% parents experience concern related to parenting, child behavior and child development (Fang et al., 2024). Parents who experience high level of stress often report emotional exhaustion and burnout, and these emotional strains can result from the continuous pressure to meet the demands of parenting while managing other life responsibilities (Lee et al., 2023).

Psychological resource consisting of self-efficacy, resilience, optimism, and hope, serves as a psychological buffer, assisting parents in recovering from stress and setbacks with speed and positivity while embracing the trials of parenthood. Parents with high psychological capital scores are more likely to see setbacks as chances to learn and develop resilience, which will help them in the long run as parents. This viewpoint protects them from emotional exhaustion and improves their capacity to continue providing excellent care, enabling them to consistently nurture their children even under trying circumstances (Lippod et al., 2022).

It has been demonstrated that psychological capital functions as a stress reducer, giving parents the mental and emotional tools they need to deal with pressures more skilfully. Parents who score higher on psychological capital have less parental stress because they are better at solving problems and have a more optimistic view on life. Psychological capital' resilience component helps parents recover from stressful events faster, which lessens the overall negative effects of stress on their wellbeing. Bockorny and Youssef-Morgan (2015) contend that elevated psychological capital can prevent parental burnout by cultivating optimism and hope, which in turn permits parents to continue being actively involved and productive carers (Culbertson et al.,

2010).

Studies indicate a significant relationship between psychological capital and parental stress. Psychological capital, characterized by self-efficacy, optimism, hope, and resilience, plays a protective role in managing stress. A significant inverse correlation between Psychological capital and stress levels has been demonstrated in multiple studies, where increased psychological capital leads to lower levels of stress and better overall mental health outcomes (Liu et al., 2024; Yuan et al., 2024).

Stress related to performance is linked to low self-efficacy and a tendency to overestimate the difficulty of the tasks. As a result, one may perform below expectations on the tasks because stress impairs and affects one's capacity for problem-solving (Honicke & Broadbent, 2016).

Method

Objectives:

1. To investigate the relationship between psychological capital and parental stress.
2. To investigate group differences among various demographic in relation to study variables.

Hypotheses

1. Psychological Capital will have negative relationship with parental stress.
2. Mothers will have more parental stress than fathers.
3. Employed parents will have higher levels of psychological capital and low level of parental stress.

Research design

The present study employed a cross-sectional survey design. An elaborate consent form was included at the beginning of the questionnaire booklet, introducing the overall objectives of the study. The form informed participants about their ethical rights as respondents in a social survey and highlighted key ethical considerations such as informed consent and confidentiality. Additionally, the researcher's contact information was provided at the end for participants to reach out with any questions or concerns.

Sample

The study sample consisted of N = 300 parents from various cities of Pakistan (n = 111 fathers, 189 mothers). Participants ranged in age from 22 to 80 years (M ± SD = 37.1 ± 10.60 years). A convenient purposive sampling strategy was used. The inclusion criteria required parents to have at least one year of parenting experience and proficient in the English language. Individuals with any reading or writing difficulties, disabilities, or chronic illnesses were excluded from the study.

Instruments

Compound Psychological Capital scale

Psychological Capital of parents was evaluated utilizing a modified version (by Dudasova) of the original Compound Psychological Scale (Lorenz et al., 2016). The modified scale is consisted of 12 items having 9 items of the original scale and 3 new resilience items. Items are rated on a 4 point Likert scale ranging from 1(strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). Score range of the scale is from 12 to 48. High scores suggest a more of psychological capital, whereas lower score suggest a lower amount of psychological capital. (Dudasova et al., 2021).

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of the Sample (N = 300)

Demographic Variable	Category	n	%
Gender	Fathers	111	37.0
	Mothers	189	63.0
Education Level	Graduate	158	52.7
	Postgraduate	142	47.3
Family System	Nuclear Family System	111	37.0
	Joint Family System	189	63.0
Current Marital Status	Living with Partner	272	90.7
	Not Living with Partner	28	9.3
Employment Status	Employed	207	69.0
	Unemployed	93	31.0
Area of Residence	Urban	157	52.3
	Rural	143	47.7

Parental Stress Scale

Parental stress was assessed using the original 18 items Parental Stress scale. This scale consists of 18 items that are responded on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), with higher scores indicates higher levels of parental stress. In the total 18 items 8 positive items represent satisfaction and 10 negative worded items measure stress. Alpha reliability of PSS is .83 (Berry & jones, 1995).

The sample comprised of (*N=300)* parents, data was collected from parents across various cities. The sample included both fathers (*n=111*) and mothers (*n=189*). Mean age of the sample was=37.1 and SD= 10.60 with maximum age 77 and minimum age 22. Income per month mean was= 2.23 and SD=1.16, from the lowest income (30 thousands) to highest income (250 thousands).

Results

Table 2 Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables

Variable	k	α	M	SD	Skew	Kurt	Range	
							(Potential)	(Actual)
Psychological Capital	12	.81	36.86	4.52	0.32	0.23	12–48	26–48
Parental Stress	18	.80	41.38	8.99	0.29	–0.39	18–90	21-66

Table 2 shows the Cronbach alpha reliability of all the scales fall in an acceptable range from 0.80 to 0.81 which indicates that the scales accurately measure the constructs and are internally consistent. Furthermore, the values of skewness and kurtosis fall between +1 to -1 which indicates that the data is normally distributed and that it may be subjected to parametric tests. Standard deviation of the scales indicated that the variability of the data is normally distributed.

Table 3 Correlation Matrix of Study Variables

S. No.	Variable	Psychological Capital	Parental Stress
1	Psychological Capital	—	
2	Parental Stress	-0.38**	—

Note. **N** = 300. **p** < .01**

Results in the table demonstrate the correlation pattern among the study variables, highlighting significant relationships among psychological capital and parental stress. Psychological Capital is negatively associated with parental stress (*r=-.38)***.**

Regression Model Predicting Parental Stress

Multiple Regression Analysis was performed to assess the variance by the variables in predicting parental stress.

Table 4: Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Parental Stress

Predictors	Model 1				Model 2			
	B	β	LL	UL	B	B	LL	UL
Constant	41.58		31.11	52.06	95.46		84.01	106.90
Age	-.04	-.05	-.15	.05	-.05	-.06	-.13	.03
Gender	-.63	-.03	-3.01	1.75	.79	.04	-1.07	2.66
EL	1.17	.06	-.94	3.29	1.51	.08	-.14	3.17
FS	-.83	-.04	-2.99	1.31	-.48	-.02	-2.17	1.19
PsyCap					-.27	-.13***	-.48	-.05
R^2	.01					.41		
ΔR^2	.89					.39		
F						22.49***		

***p < .001.

In the table, Model 1 shows that demographic variables (e.g., age, gender, education) have no significant impact on parental stress with no significant beta value. Model 2 shows the effect of psychological capital on parental stress while the demographic variables are controlled. Results show a significant negative effect of psychological capital with (*B*= -.13, p>.01) on parental stress explaining a total of 39% variance in parental stress. It explains that an increase in psychological capital will lead to a decrease in parental distress.

Table 5: Gender Differences across Study Variables (N = 300)

Variables	Fathers (n = 111) M	SD	Mothers (n = 189) M	SD	t (298)	P	95% CI LL	UL	Cohen's *d*
Psychological Capital	36.66	4.52	36.97	4.52	0.56	0.57	-1.37	0.75	–
Parental Stress	41.62	8.80	41.24	9.12	0.34	0.72			

Table 5 shows that there is no significant difference in psychological capital and Parental Stress fathers and mothers.

Table 6 Employment Differences across Study Variables (N = 300)

Variables	Employed (n = 207) M	SD	Unemployed (n = 93) M	SD	t (298)	P	95% CI LL	UL	Cohen's d
Psychological Capital	37.25	4.59	35.98	4.25	2.25	0.02	0.15	2.36	0.28
Parental Stress	41.51	9.54	41.10	7.67	0.36	0.71			

Table depicts that employed group scored significantly higher than unemployed group on psychological capital (*p=.02*) with a small effect size (*d=.28*). while there are no significant differences on the parental stress on the base of employment status.

Discussion

The current study was conducted to see the impact of psychological capital on parental stress. This research aimed to address the growing recognition of how parental psychological resources influence their ability to manage stress and effectively engage in parenting roles. The present study is a cross-sectional research study comprised of two studies, the pilot study and the main study. After taking permission from authors, self-report questionnaires were used to collect data from parents for both the studies through purposive sampling.

After the satisfactory results obtained in study-I, study- II (main study) was conducted. Primary objectives of main study was to testing hypothesis, along with relationship of demographic variables with study variables and group differences across study variables were also explored. To measure the reliabilities of the instruments used in this study, Cronbach Alpha was used. Reliability coefficients values of the all the instruments met the acceptable criteria. Reliability coefficients values of the all the instruments met the acceptable criteria.

Descriptive statistics were also computed for the study variables for better understanding. Normality of the data was checked with the help of skewnes, kurtosis, mean, standard deviation and range (actual and potential). Values of these parameters were in range, which suggested that data is normally distributed.

Hypothesis I stated that psychological capital will negatively correlate with parental stress. To test this hypothesis correlation analysis was carried out. The hypothesis get supported from our

data. According to the results of correlation analysis psychological capital demonstrated significant associations with parental stress showing that psychological capital is negatively associated with parental stress. It could be said that psychological capital is a significant predictor of parental stress among Pakistani parents. It means that parents who have high levels of psychological capital will have low level of parental stress. Previous studies have found a strong negative association between higher levels of psychological capital and lower levels of parental stress. A study by (Luthans et al., 2007) found that higher psychological capital levels significantly reduce stress in occupational settings due to increased resilience, hope, and optimism. This finding has been extended to parental roles, where similar stress-reduction mechanisms operate. A study involving 205 caregivers of children with autism spectrum disorder demonstrated a significant negative correlation between psychological capital and various dimensions of caregiver stress. The findings indicated that higher levels of psychological capital were associated with lower levels of stress related to caregiving, family issues, and financial concerns, suggesting that enhancing psychological capital could be an effective strategy for reducing stress among parents of children with autism spectrum disorder (Zoromba et al., 2023).

Hypothesis 2 states that mothers will have high parental stress as compared to fathers. Findings of this study shows that there is no significant difference between mothers and father on parental stress. This might be due to that parental stress is equal for both mothers and fathers.

Hypothesis 3 states that employed parents will have high levels of psychological capital and lower level of parental stress. Post graduates shows high levels of psychological capital than the graduates. Several studies also support this. Higher education levels are often associated with stronger problem-solving, analytical, and decision-making skills (Robins et al., 2018). Postgraduate education often involves higher levels of stress, self-regulation, and time management**,** requiring individuals to develop emotional resilience and coping strategies (Schmidt et al., 2019).

The findings also shows that employed parents have high levels of psychological capital than the unemployed ones. Luthans et al. (2010) found that employees with stable jobs exhibited significantly higher levels of psychological capital, particularly in terms of self-efficacy and optimism, compared to unemployed individuals. McKee-Ryan et al. (2005) conducted a meta-analysis on unemployment and psychological well-being and found that unemployment was associated with lower self-efficacy**,** reduced hope, and higher stress levels, all of which negatively impact Psychological capital.

Limitations and suggestion of the study

1. This research utilized a cross-sectional design, where data were gathered at a single point in time. While significant relationships were identified between PsyCap, and parental stress, causality cannot be established. Future research should employ longitudinal designs to track changes over time and establish causal relationships between these variables.
2. The sample for this study may not fully represent the diverse range of parents across different cultures, socioeconomic backgrounds, and family structures as cultural differences play a crucial role in shaping parenting behaviors and stress responses. Future research should aim to include more diverse samples to assess whether the relationships identified in this study hold across different demographic groups and cultural contexts.

Implications of the study

1. The findings of this of this study suggests that Parenting programs and workshops

should incorporate strategies to enhance resilience and self-efficacy, such as: cognitive-behavioral techniques to develop optimism and problem-solving skills, resilience-building exercises to help parents cope with setbacks in parenting, and self-efficacy training to strengthen parents' belief in their ability to manage challenges effectively.

2. Organizations should implement family-friendly workplace policies that reduce parental stress, such as flexible work hours, parental leave policies, and mental health support services.

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