



Psychological Well- Being Of Indian Mothers During Covid-19 Pandemic: The Roles Of Psychological Flexibility, Parental Stress And Social Safeness

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ABSTRACT

In the context of the COVID-19 epidemic, this research examined the connections between psychological well-being (PWB), self-compassion, psychological inflexibility (PI), and parenting stress (PS) in 242 urban Indian women with children aged 10 and under. Results from a regression analysis showed a correlation between the participants' reported levels of psychological well-being and their scores on measures of self-compassion (SC), psychological Flexibility, and perfectionism. This study's findings add to the body of knowledge on maternal mental health by demonstrating that SC, PI, and PS are associated with the PWB of urban Indian mothers even in the context of the COVID-19 crisis, thereby calling attention to the need for adapting gender-based policies and putting an emphasis on targeted interventions for this at-risk group.

Keywords: mothering, self-compassion, psychological inflexibility, well-being, parenting stress, COVID-19

1.INTRODUCTION

Mothers have had to take on a great deal of extra work after the COVID-19 outbreak and subsequent lockdown in March of 2020. Mothers have several responsibilities outside the home, including those of spouse, employee, employer, sibling, caretaker/guardian, friend/peer, and educator. Mothers' stress and depletion are compounded by the lack of education, day care, nannies, grand-parents, or domestic assistance they get (Coyne et. al, 2020; Davenport et al., 2020). Pandemic conditions have been associated with a rise in parental stress (PS), emotions of helplessness, and difficulties in coping with everyday life (Calarco et al., 2020; Janssen et al., 2020; Miller et al., 2020; Prime et al., 2020; Spinelli et al., 2020). (Chung, 2020; Cooney, 2020). Half of all parents in a research by Lee and Ward (2020) said they felt isolated from others, 52 percent said they worried about money, and 61 percent said they had yelled at their children in the preceding two weeks, while generally being warm and loving toward them. Some of these difficulties may still do the lion's share of the heavy lifting when it comes to domestic and child care work. Mothers' mental health is taking a hit due to the disproportionate amount of work they're being asked to put in during the present epidemic (Alon et al., 2020; Calarco et al., 2020; Craig, 2006; Deshpande, 2020a, 2020b; Power, 2020; United Nations [UN], 2020). (Hamel & Salganicoff, 2020; Jungari, 2020). What it means to be a mother in India is shaped by a wide range of factors, including the mother's own beliefs and values, the culture in which she lives, and the social and religious norms that have developed around her (Pandey, 2010).

In contrast to the individualistic values of the West, Indian culture places a premium on group solidarity and familial success (Avasthi, 2011; Triandis, 1993). A woman's primary role in life is as a mother, which gives her special status in society (Oxfam India, 2020). As a result, the struggles and tiredness of Indian women may go unnoticed (Pandey, 2020a; Sarkar, 2020). As a result of the cultural pressures on women to take on more traditionally "familial" responsibilities, working moms in India are more likely to feel overwhelmed by their responsibilities as parents than males who are not working outside the home (Aryee et al., 2005; Buddhapriya, 2009). There has been a dramatic increase in the number of working-age women in India, yet women still have far lower rates of employment and political representation than males do (Komarraju, 1997; Rajadhakshya &

Bhatnagar, 2000). The societal narratives that portray women as the main and preferred caretakers for children have altered little throughout the years (Krishnaraj, 2010; Sinha, 2007).

Many Indian houses lack basic appliances like washing machines, dishwashers, and vacuum cleaners, thus cleaning must be done by hand (Buddhapriya, 2009; Pandey, 2020a). Because of the time and effort required, many families, especially in metropolitan areas, choose to engage domestic assistance such as cleaners, chefs, and nannies to take care of these tasks. Those workers constitute a vital component of the nuclear family unit, especially for working women (Basnet & Sandhya, 2020; Dickey, 2000).

As a consequence of the epidemic and subsequent lockdown, many moms were forced to make do without their regular networks of family and friends (Deshpande, 2020a, 2020b; Hazarika & Das, 2020; Pandey, 2020a, 2020b). Concerns were raised concerning the mothers' ability to adapt to the new reality of COVID-19 in the face of the seemingly endless demands placed on them by their children (Chauhan, 2020; Deshpande, 2020a, 2020b; Jungari, 2020).

When dealing with adversity that is beyond our control, such as the current COVID-19 epidemic, self-compassion (SC) has been proven to be a key aspect in successful coping techniques (Neff, 2003b; Neff & Faso, 2015) (Sirois et al., 2019). Inner-directed compassion, or SC, is what we focus on when we look within and it's even better for moms (Davenport et al., 2020; Pandey, 2020a). According to research done in the UK, home office interruptions for women are almost 50% higher than those for males (Andrew et al., 2020).

Women in India, like women everywhere else, do more unpaid care work than males (Chauhan, 2020). According to Charmes's (2019) research for the International Labor Office, prepandemic urban Indian women spent an average of 312 minutes per day on unpaid care labour, while men spent just 29 minutes, and rural Indian women spent 291 minutes, or 32 percent more than males. In addition, women in India spend an average of 536.6 minutes per day on paid and unpaid labour, while males spend an average of 442.3 minutes per day doing the same (OECD, 2020). This disparity between mothers and dads has been exacerbated by the spread of COVID-19. While the lockdown resulted in increased housework time for both men and women in India, Deshpande (2020a) found that women were disproportionately impacted.

(2003a; 2003b) defined SC as self-compassion, universal humanism, and a focus on the present moment. It has been proven to be significant in motherhood since it improves the health of both parents (Sirois et al., 2019). Without SC, a mother may become short-fused, exhausted, and burdened by feelings of guilt, all of which may reduce her capacity as a caregiver (Bogels et al., 2010).

The focus of PB is on eudaimonic well-being, which may be defined as "achieving one's potential and having one's life have significance" (Ryff, 1989). Consistent research (Akin & Akin 2015; Beshai et al. 2017; Neff, 2011; Neff & Germer 2017) shows that PWB is linked to SC and promotes resilience by protecting against and mitigating the harmful impacts of stressful situations (MacBeth & Gumley, 2012; Sirois et al., 2015). However, the additional time families have spent together has strengthened the sensation of good bonding (Grover et al., 2020; Roshgadol, 2020), which may have helped to positive well-being and partly counteracted the stress brought on by the epidemic. The term "parental stress" (PS) refers to an adverse psychological reaction that occurs when "parental demands exceed parental resources" (Deater-Deckard, 1998; Rantanen et al., 2015). Meier et al. (2018), Musick et al. (2016), Nelson-Coffey et al. (2019), Skreden et al. (2012), and others have shown that PS in mothers is associated with increased anxiety, decreased well-being, decreased happiness, increased weariness, and less time for oneself (Mousavi, 2020). Moreover, PS has been linked to negative parenting styles and attitudes toward children (Deater-Deckard, 2004), and it has been suggested that it may also increase maternal anxiety and result in unsuccessful parenting practises (Grant et al., 2012).

When individuals try to get rid of negative emotions and ideas, they may develop psychological rigidity (PI), which is described as the "rigid dominance of psychological responses over selected values and circumstances in driving behaviour" (Bond et al., 2011, p. 678). Instability in interpersonal relationships (PI) is considered a maladaptive psychological condition due to the added stress it causes (Calvo et al., 2020). On the other hand, various indicators of psychological health have been linked to adopting a psychologically flexible coping strategy (Butler & Ciarrochi, 2007). There was a correlation between SC and improved well-being, optimism, and purposeful behaviour (Neff & Faso, 2014). In addition, it was shown to have favourable associations with happiness and psychological adaptability, and to have negative associations with both child stress and parental stress (Marshall & Brockman, 2016; Neff & Faso, 2014; Sirois et al., 2019). Most urban Indian moms have to work full-time jobs in addition to caring for their children, other family members, and the home. - fledged professional career.

The current study aims to look at the connection between PWB, SC, PI, and PS among Indian moms with young children (under the age of 10). Three factors—social capital, psychological well-being, and pathological

gambling—were proposed as potential predictors of progression to weight gain. In addition, we theorised that SC, PI, and PS would predict a greater share of unique variation in comparison to sociodemographic characteristics.

2.METHODS

Participants

Two hundred and forty two Indian women with children under the age of ten who were living in urban areas and had finished high school were surveyed during COVID-19. They had all graduated from high school. A snowball sampling strategy was used to get them back on board. Institutional Review Board at Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai, gave the research the go light to proceed.

Procedure

The COVID-19 travel ban in India necessitated the use of an online survey to obtain quantitative data. The survey started with a short sociodemographic profile, then moved on to four scales assessing SC, PWB, PI, and PS. Many Indian women were reached by the survey link through social media platforms including Instagram, Facebook, and WhatsApp.

Measures

To investigate these psychological concepts, we used the following self-report instruments. The Self-Compassion Scale-Short Form was used to conduct the analyses of SC (SCS-SF; Raes et al., 2011). The words "When anything terrible happens, I try to take a balanced view on the issue" are printed on the scale. There are a total of 12 statements that correspond to the six facets of SC that make up the scale. The total possible score on this scale is between 12 and 60. To date, SCS-SF shown a striking correlation with the broader SCS ($r = .097$; Raes et al., 2011). The Cronbach's alpha for the current study is .79, which indicates strong internal consistency. The level of PWB was measured with the use of the Psychological Well-Being Scale-Short (Ryff, 1989). The original scale included 42 items, and this is a shortened version of it. Among the 18 items listed is, "The demands of everyday life regularly make me melancholy." Happiness may be broken down into six categories, and well-being that it assesses. The total score on this scale lies somewhere between 18 and 126. The internal consistency was high, as shown by a Cronbach's alpha of .81. The Parental Stress Scale (Berry & Jones, 1995) was used to ascertain the extent to which PS was present. It's an 18-item scale that evaluates the ups and downs of being a parent, including questions like "Caring for my children often requires more time and energy than I have to contribute." There is a wide range of possible results, from 18 to 90 on this scale. With a .79 Cronbach's alpha, the reliability of the data was found to be satisfactory. PI was evaluated with the use of the Acceptance and Action Questionnaire-II (Bond et al., 2011). It consisted of 7 questions, with a total score between 7 and 49, and included statements like "I worry about not being able to manage my fears and sentiments." Excellent internal consistency was suggested by a Cronbach's of .91.

Analytical Plan

IBM SPSS Statistics version 25 was used to evaluate the quantitative data. Continuous but non-normally distributed variables were examined for their association via bootstrapping and then Pearson's correlation. The associations between SC, PI, and PS and PWB in mothers were then analysed using hierarchical regression. In Step 1, demographic information including age, education, and occupation was input. In Step 2, psychiatric factors were included. Dummy variables were used to code the levels of education and employment to assist the regression analysis.

3.RESULTS

Participants were 242 Indian moms whose ages ranged from 26 to 47 ($M = 35.50$, $SD = 4.25$). Table 1 displays their demographic and social information. In a non-normal distribution, as shown by the Shapiro-Wilk test, were the results from all four measures taken together. Therefore, in order to use Pearson's correlations, the data were converted using the bootstrapping technique. There was a somewhat favourable correlation between SC and whereas there was a somewhat unfavourable correlation between PI and PWB (see Table 2). To determine the distinct effect of age, education, and work status on PWB, the first hierarchical regression model analysed these factors. Over total, the two-stage approach (which consists of sociodemographic characteristics and psychological variables) accounted for 46.6% of the variance in PWB (see Table 3).

Table 1. Sociodemographic characteristics of participants

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| Sociodemographic characteristic | N = 242 | |
|---------------------------------|---------|----|
| | N | % |
| highest educational level | | |
| Bachelor's degree | 72 | 30 |
| Master's degree | 170 | 70 |
| Employment | | |
| Employed | 176 | 73 |
| Homemaker | 66 | 27 |
| Location | | |
| Mumbai | 63 | 26 |
| Delhi NCR | 37 | 15 |
| Kolkata | 36 | 15 |
| Bangalore | 26 | 11 |
| Pune | 19 | 8 |
| Others | 61 | 26 |
| Family type | | |
| Joint | 82 | 34 |
| Nuclear | 160 | 66 |
| No. of children | | |
| One | 168 | 69 |
| Two | 67 | 27 |
| More than two | 7 | 3 |

4.DISCUSSION

Having a mother is a cliché of femininity and gender roles because of the way in which the experience is often portrayed in popular culture (Arendell, 2000). To an even greater extent than in the West, women in India are discouraged from pursuing careers in favour of caring for their children and other family members (Aryee et al., 2005; Buddhapriya, 2009), and motherhood is seen as central to a woman's sense of self (Oxfam India, 2020). There was a rise in unpaid care labour, domestic tasks, and even professional commitments for urban Indian moms during COVID-19, leading to increased stress while working from home or remotely (Basnet & Sandhya, 2020; Deshpande, 2020a, b). 2020b;

Table 2. Descriptive statistics and correlations for psychological well-being, SC, PI, and ps

| Variable | N | M | SD | PWB | SC | PI | PS |
|----------|-----|-------|-------|--------|---------|----|----|
| PWB | 242 | 90.40 | 14.97 | — | | | |
| SC | 242 | 38.66 | 7.74 | .564** | — | | |
| PI | 242 | 23.88 | 11.34 | — | -.641** | — | |
| PS | | | | .589** | | | — |

Note. PI = psychological inflexibility, PS = parenting stress, PWB = psychological well-being, SC = self-compassion. Bootstrap results are based on 1,000 bootstrap samples.

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Table 3. Summary of hierarchical regression analysis for variables predicting PWB (N = 242)

| Variable | <i>b</i> | β | ΔR^2 | <i>b</i> | β | ΔR^2 |
|----------|----------|---------|--------------|----------|---------|--------------|
| Age | 0.107 | .028 | — | —0.126 | — | — |
| | | | | .033 | | |

References: (Hazarika & Das, 2020; Pandey, 2020a, 2020b; Sarkar, 2020).

Seventy percent of the moms in this survey had professional or graduate student jobs, while the other thirty percent stayed at home. Despite their economic independence, many Indian moms continue to take on the role of main caretaker for their children (Krishnaraj, 2010). Despite studies on parents' perspectives (Jambunathan & Counselman, 2002), parents' efforts to strike a healthy work-life balance (Buddhapriya, 2009; Munn & Chaudhuri, 2016), and the importance of nutrition education (Agarwal et al., 2010), & Udipi, 1989), and postpartum depression (Goyal et al., 2015) among Indian mothers, but there is little research on the experiences of urban Indian mothers in relation to PWB, SC, PI, and PS.

Results showed that SC, PI, and PS, three psychological factors, accounted for 46.8% of the variation in PWB. Consistent with the previous studies, moms with elevated PWB also had elevated SC (Akin & Akin 2015; Beshai et al., 2017; Neff, 2011; Neff & Germer, 2017). Mothers who were kinder to themselves by accepting their circumstances and doing the best they could may have experienced better growth and resilience. Conversely, parents who reported greater levels of well-being were better equipped to deal with the stresses of parenthood and, as a result, took better care of themselves (Bogels et al., 2010; MacBeth & Gumley, 2012; Sirois et al., 2015). In this research, we discovered that both PI and PS had a negative association with PWB. This result agreed with the previous research (Calvo et al., 2020; Kashdan & Rottenberg, 2010; Leary et al., 2007). Maladaptive mental health professionals consider PI to be a serious issue (Calvo et al., 2020). Possible contributors to PS in mothers include a dearth of resources, discrimination based on gender, high social expectations on moms, and a heavier workload as a result of the pandemic (Calarco et al., 2020 Deshpande, 2020b; Meier et al., 2018; Mousavi, 2020). Musick et al., 2016; References: (Nelson-Coffey et al., 2019; Pandey, 2020a). PS may contribute to lower PWB when it is linked to parental dysfunction and possible child-directed negativity (Deater-Deckard, 2004). (Calarco et al., 2020; Janssen et al., 2020; Miller et al., 2020; Prime et al., 2020; Spinelli et al., 2020).

These results may also be influenced by the buffering benefits of spending more time with partners, family, and children, which may enhance relationships and foster better bonding, leading to higher levels of pleasant emotions and an overall sense of well-being (Grover et al., 2020; Roshgadol, 2020). The benefits of rekindling ties with loved ones may extend beyond the family unit, perhaps resulting in improved interpersonal connections (Calarco et al., 2020; Foster, 2020; Grover et al., 2020). Despite these buffers, the epidemic has led to an increase in isolation, despair, panic, stress, and exhaustion among parents (Calarco et al., 2020; Grover et al., 2020; Mousavi, 2020). There may have been a trend toward re-alignment of conventional gender roles and conventions as a result of the pandemic, with many dads taking up active parenting and homeschooling tasks and relieving some of the obligations that normally fell on women (Alon et al., 2020; Deshpande, 2020b; Power, 2020)

5. IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

In light of the dearth of previous research on motherhood in India, this study's results are welcome additions to the literature. Furthermore, a qualitative inquiry exploring the lived experiences of these mothers may help identify factors contributing to SC, PI, PWB, and PS and further explore their coping strategies; this information may be useful in designing effective interventions to enhance maternal mental health and well-being. As a result, treatments aimed at moms should include SC, PI, and PS as factors that contribute to their happiness. It is also important to broaden the scope of this research to include India, a nation with a rich cultural heritage and a wide variety of ethnic group's populaces of the community and the rural areas, where social stratification is more pronounced.

United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 5 calls for "universal recognition and appreciation of unpaid care and domestic labour," and these findings emphasise the need of establishing and enforcing such regulations (UN, 2016). Despite rapid economic development, gender inequality in India continues to worsen (UNDP, 2020). Protecting and educating girls at no cost is one way India is working to increase the proportion of females to males in its young population (Ministry of Women & Child Development, Government of India, 2015). To yet, however, neither the private sector nor the government has implemented any programmes or policies to promote gender parity in the workplace or the home. These can be implemented via psychoeducation and advocacy for a rebalancing of traditional gender roles and norms, through the promotion of shared domestic responsibilities, and via the creation of suitable physical and social infrastructure, as well as the introduction of appropriate social protection policies and the provision of necessary public services.

6.CONCLUSION

The present research aimed to better understand how SC, PI, and PS influence PWB among urban Indian mothers of children under the age of 10. Researchers found that SC, PI, and PS were linked to PWB among mothers in India.

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