

Abstract

Introduction

Parenting stress is the tension parents feel in fulfilling their parenting functions (Abidin, 1995). Parenting children of any age is difficult, but it is especially difficult for older children, of pre-teen and teenage years.

Late adolescence is traditionally a difficult period of life from a social and sometimes physical standpoint. Thus coping strategies play a major role in the issue of parenting stress as parenting is not equally stressful to all mothers. Given that mothers have traditionally been more involved than fathers in the day-to-day responsibilities of child rearing it might be expected that mothers would experience more stress than fathers.

The present study was undertaken to translate and validate the Stress Index for Parents of Adolescents (SIPA), to determine the prevalence of parenting stress, compare coping strategies adopted by high stressed and low stressed mothers and identify risk factors of parenting stress among mothers of adolescents aged 15-19 years in the district of Colombo.

Methods

Component 1 of the study included translation and validation of SIPA. Criterion validity of SIPA-Sinhala version (SIPA-S) was assessed based on the diagnosis by a clinical psychologist. The validated cut off point for SIPA-S total score was 230, with a sensitivity of 86.7% and specificity of 84.8%. Reliability measured by Cronbach's alpha was 0.749. Construct validity of SIPA-S established by Spearman correlation coefficient to assess the correlation between SIPA-S and GHQ-12 scores was 0.719.

Component 2 determined the prevalence of parenting stress, compared coping strategies adopted by high stressed and low stressed mothers and identified risk factors of parenting stress. The Brief COPE-S was used for comparison of coping strategies and an interviewer administered questionnaire identified risk factors of parenting stress.

A cross sectional descriptive study was conducted in a sample of 1292 mothers of adolescents aged 15-19 years in the District of Colombo, Sri Lanka. A multi stage stratified cluster sampling technique with probability proportionate to size was used to select the study sample. A total of 44 clusters were included in the study with a cluster size of 30.

Results

Response rate was 97.9%. The mean age of study sample was 43.2 years \pm 5.9. Adjusted prevalence of high parenting stress among mothers of adolescents aged 15-19 years was 29.8% (95% CI: 27.32 – 32.29).

Significant differences were observed between mean scores of emotional focused ($p<0.001$), problem focused ($p<0.001$) and dysfunctional coping strategies ($p<0.001$) between the mothers of adolescents with high and low parenting stress.

Bivariate analysis and logistic regression analysis were carried out to identify risk factors of parenting stress. Logistic regression analysis identified not attending school (OR=2.89, 95% CI:1.34-6.24), Internalizing behaviours (OR=4.01, 95% CI: 2.17-7.42), Externalizing behaviours of the adolescent (OR=3.92, 95%CI: 1.03- 14.93), frequent internet browsing (OR=4.03, 95% CI: 1.35- 12.08), need for stylish clothing (OR=5.24, 95% CI: 2.50-11.01) as adolescent related risk factors of high parenting stress.

Among maternal factors, logistic regression analysis identified poor relationship with the adolescent (OR=4.23, 95% CI: 1.77- 10.09), stressful life events during adolescence of the mother (OR=3.45, 95%CI: 1.62- 7.35), stressful life events in the past year (OR=3.62, 95% CI:1.28-10.22), dysfunctional coping (OR=1.29, 95% CI: 1.20 – 1.39), poor perceived health status (OR=2.85, 95%CI: 1.00- 8.12) and dissatisfaction about the amount of sleep (OR=4.26, 95% CI:1.55- 11.67) poor as personal risk factors of high parenting stress among mothers of adolescents.

Out of the family factors, only marital satisfaction (OR=6.13, 95% CI:1.91- 19.69) and low overall support available at home (OR=4.34, 95% CI: 2.38- 7.91) were significant in the multivariate analysis.

Among the other factors related to the family, multivariate analysis identified, lack of moral support from society (OR=2.56, 95% CI: 1.38- 4.73) and unavailability of support from friends (OR=1.82, 95% CI: 1.01- 3.25) as risk factors of high parenting stress.

Conclusions and recommendations

SIPA-S is a valid and reliable tool to assess parenting stress among mothers with adolescents. Parenting stress could be considered as an emerging health problem as nearly one third of the mothers of adolescents in the study sample had high parenting stress. Measures should be taken to improve the psychological wellbeing of the mothers, organized programmes should be available in the society.

The findings of this study will be useful for the health planners to implement effective intervention programmes among parents of adolescents and among adolescents with the goal of reducing high parenting stress thus helping mothers to fulfil their parenting role effectively and to enable them to enjoy their life as parents.

Key words: Parenting stress, mothers of adolescents, risk factors, coping strategies, SIPA-S

