



COMPARATIVE STUDY OF ANXIETY LEVEL BETWEEN MOTHERS AND FATHERS OF AUTISTIC CHILDREN

Dr. Vivek Bambal¹ & Dr. Subodh Bansod²

AFFILIATIONS

^{1& 2} Post Graduate Teaching Department of Psychology, Rashtrasant Tukadoji Maharaj Nagpur University, Nagpur,

ABSTRACT

The anxiety levels of fathers and mothers of children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) were compared in this study. Anxiety scores were gathered from 50 fathers and 50 mothers of autistic children using the Beck Anxiety Inventory (BAI) by (Shamasundar et al., 1996). Mothers (M = 19.70, SD = 3.71) reported substantially higher levels of anxiety than fathers (M = 15.70, SD = 2.93), according to the independent samples t-test ($df(98) = 5.98, p < .001$). These results underline the need for gender-sensitive support measures in clinical practice and draw attention to the disproportionate psychological weight placed on mothers of autistic children.

Keywords: autism, parental anxiety, Beck Anxiety Inventory, mothers, fathers, mental health

1. INTRODUCTION

Parents' mental health may be greatly impacted by the particular difficulties of raising a child with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) (Yorke et al., 2018). Prior studies have consistently shown that parents of autistic children are more stressed and anxious than parents of children with typical development (Hayes & Watson, 2013). However, more research is still needed to determine how mothers and fathers share this psychological load, particularly within culturally diverse settings.

A popular tool for evaluating anxiety symptoms in clinical populations is the Beck Anxiety Inventory (BAI), which was created by Beck et al. in 1988. Good psychometric qualities have been shown by Shamasundar et al. (1996) in their Indian adaptation, which makes it appropriate for evaluating anxiety in Indian populations. Given the cultural propensity for the somatization of psychological distress in Indian contexts, the BAI's emphasis on somatic symptoms is especially pertinent (Shamasundar et al., 1996).

Few studies have specifically used standardized measures to compare the anxiety levels of mothers and fathers, despite the fact that many have looked at parental stress in families with autistic children. By examining whether there are notable differences in the anxiety levels of fathers and mothers of autistic children as determined by the BAI, this study seeks to close this gap.

1.1 Objective

To assess the anxiety levels between mothers and fathers of autistic children.

1.2 Hypotheses

Mothers of autistic children will experience significantly greater anxiety compared to fathers of autistic children.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Participants

The study sample consisted of 100 parents (50 mothers and 50 fathers) of children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder. Participants were selected using purposive sampling from special schools and therapy centres catering to children with ASD in India. All participants provided informed consent.

2.2 Tool

The Beck Anxiety Inventory (BAI; Beck et al., 1988) in its Indian adapted version (Shamasundar et al., 1996) was used to assess anxiety symptoms. The BAI is a 21-item self-report measure that assesses the severity of anxiety symptoms. Respondents rate how much they have been bothered by each symptom over the past week on a 4-point scale ranging from 0 (not at all) to 3 (severely). Total scores range from 0 to 63, with higher scores indicating greater anxiety severity. The Indian adaptation has demonstrated good reliability and validity (Shamasundar et al., 1996).

2.3 Procedure

Parents were individually administered the BAI. Data were collected, scored, and statistically analysed using independent samples t-test to examine differences in anxiety between mothers and fathers.

3. RESULT

TABLE 1
MEAN, STANDARD DEVIATION, DEGREES OF FREEDOM, T-VALUE, AND SIGNIFICANCE LEVEL OF ANXIETY SCORES AMONG MOTHERS AND FATHERS OF AUTISTIC CHILDREN.

Group	N	Mean	SD	df	t-value	p-value
Mother	50	19.70	3.71	98	5.98	p < .001
Father	50	15.70	2.93			

Descriptive statistics revealed that mothers had higher mean anxiety scores ($M = 19.70$, $SD = 3.71$) compared to fathers ($M = 15.70$, $SD = 2.93$). The independent samples t-test indicated a statistically significant difference between groups, $t(98) = 5.98$, $p < .001$.

4. DISCUSSION

The results of this study demonstrate that mothers of autistic children experience significantly higher anxiety levels compared to fathers. This finding aligns with previous research suggesting that mothers often bear the primary caregiving burden in families with autistic children (Phetrasuwan et al., 2009). The large effect size ($d = 1.20$) underscores the clinical significance of this difference.

Several factors may explain the higher anxiety levels in mothers. Mothers typically spend more time in direct caregiving activities and are more involved in therapy sessions and educational interventions (Hartley et al., 2010). Additionally, societal expectations often place greater emotional responsibility on mothers for their children's well-being and development. The somatic focus of the BAI may also capture culturally expressed anxiety manifestations that differ between genders in the Indian context.

The mean anxiety scores for both groups fall within the moderate anxiety range according to BAI guidelines (Beck et al., 1988), highlighting the substantial psychological impact of raising an autistic child on both parents. However, the significantly higher scores among mothers indicate their particular vulnerability and the need for targeted support interventions.

5. CONCLUSION

This study provides clear evidence that mothers of autistic children experience significantly higher anxiety levels than fathers. The findings emphasize the need for gender-sensitive approaches in supporting families affected by autism. By recognizing and addressing the disproportionate psychological impact on mothers, healthcare professionals can develop more effective support systems that benefit the entire family unit.

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