

# Parental Stress in Raising a Child with Developmental Disabilities in a Rural Community in South Africa

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## Abstract:

Higher parental stress among parents who raise children with developmental disabilities is further exacerbated by sociodemographic factors among parents in rural communities, disadvantaged in many ways.

**Objectives:** This study aimed to quantify parental stress among mothers and female caregivers of children with developmental disorders and investigate factors associated with such stress in rural Kwa-Zulu Natal, South Africa.

**Method:** A cross-sectional quantitative survey was used, in which the Parenting Stress Index-Short Form (PSI-SF) and a sociodemographic questionnaire was administered to mothers and caregivers who were raising children aged 1 to 12 years old who were living with developmental disabilities. A total of 335 participants consisted of 270 (80.6%) mothers and 65 (19.4%) caregivers, ages ranged from 19 to 65 years, with a mean of 33.9 ( $\pm 7.8$ ) years participated in the study. The children were mostly diagnosed with delayed developmental milestones, communication difficulties, epilepsy, cerebral palsy, autism, ADHD, cognitive impairment, sensory impairments, and learning difficulties.

**Results:** Majority (52.2%) of the participants reported very high-clinically significant stress levels ( $\geq 85\%$ ile). The four factors that independently and significantly predicted high parental stress were the advanced age of mothers and caregivers ( $p = 0.002$ , OR 2.3, 95% CI 1.34–3.95), caring for a child with multiple diagnoses ( $p = 0.013$ , OR 2.0, 95% CI 1.16–3.50), non-school enrolment of the child ( $p = 0.017$ , OR 1.9, 95% CI 1.13–3.46), and frequent hospital visits ( $p = 0.025$ , OR 1.9, 95% CI 1.09–3.44).

**Conclusion:** The study established high parental stress in mothers and caregivers raising children with developmental disabilities. Lack of access to school was an independent factor that consistently increased parental stress. There is a need for support and directed intervention programs aimed at supporting mothers and caregivers of children with developmental disabilities, which will enhance their parenting abilities.

**Keywords:** parental stress, developmental disabilities, caregivers, parenting stress index short form