

Influence of social class on type and level of coping stress among parents of mentally challenged children

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■ **ABSTRACT :** The present study assessed and compared the type and level of coping stress by the parents of 150 mentally challenged children. The sample for the present study comprised of mothers and fathers of 150 mentally challenged children drawn randomly in equal proportions from two social classes under study viz. LIG and MIG across the three levels of mental retardation. The type and levels of coping stress by parents were assessed using Family Interview for Stress and Coping in Mental Retardation (Part II) developed by NIMHANS. The study revealed that social class had an impact on the level of coping. MIG mothers and fathers were observed to be better coped up. They were found to be more aware regarding child's condition, adopting better child rearing practices and also had more expectations and better attitudes towards the child's condition. Interestingly, the predominant reason was better educational level and financial status of MIG families as compared to the LIG.

■ **KEY WORDS:** Family stress, Mental disability, Mental retardation, Economic class, Social support

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Every parent wishes for the birth of a healthy baby. But some parents are gifted with children deprived of basic mental abilities and are considered as mentally challenged/retarded. The American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AAIDD, 2010) lists three criteria for an individual to be considered as mentally retarded (MR) or mental challenged: intellectual functioning level (IQ) is below 70-75; significant limitations in at least two of the following areas: communication, home living, social skills, community use, self-direction, safety, functional academics, leisure, or work activities and the condition starts before the age of 18.

Proper home environment plays an important role

in the life of children. Nobody can refuse the important role that parents play in developing their child's personality (Upreti and Singh, 2016 d). Parenting is a rewarding and wonderful experience, is often accompanied by high levels of stress. As child's disability become severe, it compels parents to devote maximum part of their time in taking care of the special need child and resulting in stress, which can be eradicated up to a certain extent by developing better, motivating home environment for MR children (Upreti and Singh, 2016 a).

Parenting stress can be defined as excess anxiety and tension specifically related to the role of a parent and to parent-child interactions (Abidin, 1995). Stress is

an inevitable, normal experience that is felt when an individual is unsure if she can meet the demands of her environment (Patnaik, 2014). Some people are unable to confront this psychological stress, while some are able to cope up with such situation.

Coping involves psychological resources and strategies that help to eliminate, modify, or manage a stressful event (McCubbin and Patterson, 1983). It also involves group of efforts or cognitive and behavioral activities an individual uses to handle stressful situation in order to reduce internal and external demands associated with this situation, in an attempt to re-gain state of psychological equilibrium individual used to live before (Bawalsah, 2016). Specifically for the families who are living with a disabled child, the goal of coping strategies is to bring continuous change in cognitive and behavioral efforts of family members to handle the increasing external and/or internal demands of caring the child with disability (Woodman and Hauser, 2013). Thereby, coping strategies are the initiatives taken by an individual or family to reduce the stressors of daily life, which strengthen their ability to endure hardships of life.

The significant influence of stress on each parent may vary from one to another, and it can also affect their personal, family and social lives in quite varying degrees. Coping involves family's attempt to deal with the stressful situation. It is of importance that families should learn to deal with their stress effectively in order to avoid negative physical, psychological and emotional consequences. In this context, researchers also explored that raising a special need child requires additional emotional strength and flexibility among parents. In order to cope up with the distress, parents should develop remarkable capacity for patience, compassion, kindness, and understanding (Upreti and Singh, 2016 c). Therefore, in order to survive, every human being has to learn to cope with various situations. However, coping ability of a person varies from one individual to another, depending on the internal strengths and external resources.

Parental support in particular, has often been considered to be the most important for a mentally challenged child. Parents always consider the upbringing of their child as a duty not as a burden but researchers investigated that in conditions of poverty, a child with a disability is regarded as a burden, an evil spirit, and an object of charity without rights, rather than as an unfortunate child (Pal and Choudhury, 1998). According

to several other researchers, parents who experience greater economic stress also experience greater parenting stress (Kotelchuck, 2006; Santiago *et al.*, 2012 and Sturge-Apple *et al.*, 2014). Moreover, Neeley-Barnes *et al.* (2008) revealed that higher income families were more involved specifically in financial decisions but had low involvement in planning and choosing support workers and received fewer services. In addition to this, the experience of living on low incomes and in poverty is almost always overwhelmingly negative, impacting on adults and children's lives in a variety of ways, including loss of self-esteem and feelings of powerlessness, damage to present and future health and well-being, feelings of isolation and restricted opportunities and choices (Beresford *et al.*, 1999 and Ridge, 2009). This in turn reduces parents' capacity to endure everyday distress under severe financial strain.

Now, it is quite obvious that coping ability/capacity of family might be dependent of family's economic class. Therefore, the present study has been taken up with the following objectives:

- To assess the type and level of coping among parents of mentally challenged children across social class of their family.
- To investigate if the coping of stress among parents of mentally challenged children is influenced by the social class of their family.

■ RESEARCH METHODS

To select the sample for study, a multistage purposive cum random sampling technique were used. The present research study was carried out exclusively in Delhi. Delhi was purposively selected as a research base, because it is one of the nearest region that has appropriate number of RCI (Rehabilitation Council of India) recognized special schools meant exclusively for mentally retarded (MR) children. Out of the nine RCI recognized institutes for MR children, three institutes namely NIMH (National Institute for Mentally Handicapped), Manovikas and C.B.S Memorial were randomly selected for the present study. It was observed that in all the three institutes under study, the population of mentally challenged children from high income group (HIG) was extensively low, thus, only those belonging to low income group (LIG) and middle income group (MIG) were considered for the present study. Out of the total population of mentally challenged children from LIG and MIG, 75 MR children were

selected from each social class by randomly drawing 25 from each level of mental challenge. Thus, the sample for the present study comprised of 150 mentally challenged children and their families.

The Directors of the selected institutions were contacted, who provided all the necessary required details pertaining to the enrolled MR children and their families. The required samples were drawn and then, first common meeting was organized by the researcher with the families of MR children. To maintain the confidentiality, assurance was given to the families that the information provided by them will be kept confidential and utilized only for the research purpose. For the data collection, parents were contacted on the place of their choice-institute or their home. They were then interviewed and observations made by the researcher. Self-designed general questionnaire was used to study the socio-demographic and socio-economic characteristics of respondents. Coping among the parents of mentally challenged children were assessed by using Family Interview for Stress and Coping in Mental Retardation (Part II) (Girimaji, 1999) developed at NIMHANS. The collected data was finally classified and tabulated as per the objectives. Analysis was done by taking levels of mental retardation as control. The data was analyzed using statistical techniques like frequency, percentage, mean and t-test.

■ RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The data presented in Table 1 (a and b) clearly represents that majority of parents from low income families had slightly inadequate general awareness about mental challenge. Out of which more percentage of mothers of mildly and moderately challenged children (84.00 % and 80.00%) as compared to fathers were found to have slightly inadequate general awareness. Whereas more numbers of fathers of severely challenged children (80.00 %) had slightly inadequate general awareness. From middle income families it was found that more proportion of fathers of moderately challenged children (92.00 %) and mothers of severely challenged children (76.00 %) had slightly inadequate general awareness. Across social class, more proportion of mothers and fathers (78.67% and 74.67%) from LIG had slightly inadequate general awareness as compared to MIG.

An overview of the misconceptions among LIG reveals that parents of moderately challenged children

were comparatively less who had no misconception (84.00 %). Similar kind of pattern was also observed among middle income families. Across family's income more numbers of mothers and fathers from middle income families (98.67% and 97.33%) had no misconceptions.

The findings on expectation from child depicted that in LIG more percentage of mothers of mildly, moderately and severely challenged children (72.00 %, 76.00 % and 48.00 %) had mildly appropriate expectations. Similar results were also drawn from middle income families, where 60.00 per cent, 72.00 per cent and 56.00 per cent of mothers of mildly, moderately and severely challenged children also had mildly appropriate expectations. And across level of income, more proportion of mothers and fathers from low income families (65.33% and 50.67%) had mildly appropriate expectations.

In low income families, mothers and fathers of mildly challenged children shared equal percentage (80.00 %) who had favourable attitudes. It was pleasurable to note that mothers of severely challenged children (84.00 %) had more favourable attitudes than fathers. From the analysis of middle income families it was revealed that exactly equal number of mothers and fathers (81.33%) had favourable attitudes. Fathers of moderately challenged children (96.00 %) had more favourable attitude as compare to mothers. Across family's income class it was noticed that more proportion of fathers and mothers from middle income class (81.33%) had favourable attitudes.

In attitudes towards child management mothers of mildly, moderately and severely challenged children in majority (92.00%, 76.00% and 68.00%) had more favourable attitudes as compare to fathers in low income families. Besides this, in middle income families, percentages of mothers with mildly and severely challenged children were more (80.00% and 68.00%) who favourable attitudes as compare to fathers. Analysis across family's income revealed that more proportion of mothers and fathers from low families reported more favourable attitudes.

Under the dimension general rearing practices, in low income families more proportion of mothers of mildly, moderately and severely challenged children (96.00 %, 84.00% and 76.00%) had somewhat favourable rearing practices. Middle class families also showed more number of mothers as compare to fathers at somewhat

Table 1(a): Frequency and percentage distribution of LIG parents of mentally challenged children on the type and level of coping stress (n=75)

Areas of coping	Subscales	Levels of coping	Score range	LIG (n=75)																
				Mildly challenged children (n ₁ =25)				Moderately challenged children (n ₂ =25)				Severely challenged children (n ₃ =25)				Total				
				Mothers		Fathers		Mothers		Fathers		Mothers		Fathers		Mothers	Fathers			
				n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%			
Awareness	General awareness	Largely adequate	9-15	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	2	8.00	2	8.00	2	2.67	2	2.67	
		Adequate	16-22	4	16.00	7	28.00	2	8.00	3	12.00	3	12.00	3	12.00	9	12.00	13	17.33	
		Slightly inadequate	23-29	21	84.00	17	68.00	20	80.00	19	76.00	18	72.00	20	80.00	59	78.67	56	74.67	
		Highly inadequate	30 +	0	0.00	1	4.00	3	12.00	3	12.00	2	8.00	0	0.00	5	6.67	4	5.33	
	Misconceptions	No	4-6	23	92.00	23	92.00	21	84.00	21	84.00	25	100.00	23	92.00	69	92.00	67	89.33	
		Almost absent	7-9	2	8.00	2	8.00	4	16.00	4	16.00	0	0.00	2	8.00	6	8.00	8	10.67	
		Present	10-12	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	
Expectations and attitudes	Expectations from child	Present to a large extent	13 +	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	
		Largely appropriate	10-17	5	20.00	3	12.00	1	4.00	0	0.00	1	4.00	1	4.00	7	9.33	4	5.33	
		Mildly appropriate	18-25	18	72.00	14	56.00	19	76.00	14	56.00	12	48.00	10	40.00	49	65.33	38	50.67	
		Moderately inappropriate	26-33	2	8.00	8	32.00	5	20.00	11	44.00	12	48.00	14	56.00	19	25.33	33	44.00	
	Attitudes towards child	Highly inappropriate	34 +	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	
		Most favourable	15-26	5	20.00	5	20.00	3	12.00	22	88.00	4	16.00	5	20.00	12	16.00	32	42.67	
		Favourable	27-38	20	80.00	20	80.00	19	76.00	3	12.00	21	84.00	20	80.00	60	80.00	43	57.33	
		Unfavourable	39-50	0	0.00	0	0.00	3	12.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	3	4.00	0	0.00	
	Attitudes towards child management	Most unfavourable	51 +	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	
		Most favourable	17-29	1	4.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	2	8.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	1	1.33	2	2.67	
		Favourable	30-42	23	92.00	14	56.00	19	76.00	13	52.00	17	68.00	11	44.00	59	78.67	38	50.67	
		Moderately unfavourable	43-55	1	4.00	11	44.00	3	12.00	10	40.00	8	32.00	14	56.00	12	16.00	35	46.67	
	Child rearing practices	General rearing practices	Most unfavourable	56 +	0	0.00	0	0.00	3	12.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	3	4.00	0	0.00
			Most favourable	13-22	1	4.00	0	0.00	1	4.00	2	8.00	2	8.00	2	8.00	4	5.33	4	5.33
			Somewhat favourable	23-32	24	96.00	20	80.00	21	84.00	14	56.00	19	76.00	18	72.00	64	85.33	52	69.33
			Somewhat unfavourable	33-42	0	0.00	5	20.00	3	12.00	9	36.00	4	16.00	5	20.00	7	9.33	19	25.33
Rearing practice specific to training		Most unfavourable	43+	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	
		Most favourable	7-12	2	8.00	1	4.00	1	4.00	0	0.00	2	8.00	0	0.00	5	6.67	1	1.33	
		Somewhat favourable	13-18	23	92.00	24	96.00	21	84.00	22	88.00	23	92.00	25	100.00	67	89.33	71	94.67	
		Somewhat unfavourable	19-24	0	0.00	0	0.00	3	12.00	3	12.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	3	4.00	3	4.00	
Social support		Most unfavourable	25+	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	
		Best social support	3-5	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	
		Adequate	6-8	4	16.00	4	16.00	1	4.00	1	4.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	5	6.67	5	6.67	
		Somewhat inadequately	9-11	17	68.00	17	68.00	21	84.00	21	84.00	19	76.00	19	76.00	57	76.00	57	76.00	
	No support	12 +	4	16.00	4	16.00	3	12.00	3	12.00	6	24.00	6	24.00	13	17.33	13	17.33		

Table 1a contd.....

Contd... Table 1a

Global rating of family adaptation	Extremely well adapted	1	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	2	8.00	0	0.00	2	2.67
	Adequately adapted	2	19	76.00	18	72.00	13	52.00	0	0.00	14	56.00	12	48.00	46	61.33	30	40.00
	Inadequately adapted	3	5	20.00	7	28.00	9	36.00	15	60.00	8	32.00	6	24.00	22	29.33	28	37.33
	Very poor coping/ adaptation	4	1	4.00	0	0.00	3	12.00	10	40.00	3	12.00	5	20.00	7	9.33	15	20.00

favourable level. After analysis it was found that almost same proportion of mothers from both the families and more proportion of fathers from low income families (69.33%) had somewhat favourable rearing practices.

In rearing practice specific to training, among LIG, more percentage of fathers of mildly, moderately and severely challenged children (96.00 %, 88.00 % and 100.00 %) were found at somewhat favourable level. Same pattern was found in middle income families, where percentages of fathers were found to be more at somewhat favourable level. Across income class it was noticed that percentage of fathers and mothers were more among low income families (94.67% and 89.33%) who reported somewhat favourable rearing practices specific to training.

From the Table 1(a and b), it was revealed that in low and middle income families majority of parents experienced somewhat inadequate social support. Overall it was also observed that more parents from low income families experienced no/very little support.

Universally, the families exist in all human societies and it is described as a social institution responsible for child production, child rearing, and emotional and economic support for its members (Lamanna and Reidman, 2003). Moreover, the crucial role of parents and family in caring, nurturing, protecting and socializing young children is well established across the cultures (Lezin *et al.*, 2004). Parental happiness is closely associated with the happiness of their child. But as the child is diagnosed with mental retardation it can cause high level of stress in parents because of the challenges, difficulties and frustrations that they face in everyday life (Upreti and Singh, 2016 b). Some are able to cope up with such a situation and some experience psychological stress. According to Picci *et al.* (2015), parents of children with disabilities tend to use various strategies to cope up with stress such as, avoidance strategies, drug abuse, looking for support, self-blame, reconstruction of stressful situation in positive manner,

or denial.

It can be clearly seen from the Table 2 that across family's income overall significant differences were observed in mediating factors for stress among parents of mentally challenged children. Only the dimension social support is not at all affected by the family's income. It was revealed from the present study that although parents from both economic classes perceived stress due to the presence of children with special need but among middle income class, parents were comparatively better coped up with stress. This finding is parallel with the finding of Brooks-Gunn *et al.* (2013) who stated that the greater and more chronic the economic stress a family experiences, the more likely it is that its members will engage in maladaptive coping strategies. In conditions of poverty, a child with a disability is regarded as a burden, an evil spirit, and an object of charity without rights, rather than as an unfortunate child (Pal and Choudhury, 1998). Poverty often brings along with it a lack of opportunity, limits the availability and accessibility of resources and increases the chances of experiencing difficult events. Limited resources often results in reduced opportunity for education.

Education is a systematic process or art through which a child or an adult acquires knowledge, skill and judgment. Education is a key for a civilized and socialized society. Every society gives importance to education because it is an antidote for all evils. It gives direction to solve various problems of life. In the present study, education level of the respondents from middle income families were found much better, and as explained above that education improves the knowledge, so parents were found more aware regarding the child's level of intellectual ability as well as had less misconception. Parental expectations and attitudes towards child and child management were also comparatively high among middle income families. This might be because of better education, more patience, positive attitudes, will power and adequate cooperation and support of husband. Kumar

Table 1(b): Frequency and percentage distribution of MIG parents of mentally challenged children on the type and level of coping stress (n=75)

Areas of coping	Subscales	Levels of coping	Score range	MIG (n=75)															
				Mildly challenged children (n ₁ =25)				Moderately challenged children (n ₂ =25)				Severely challenged children (n ₃ =25)				Total			
				Mothers		Fathers		Mothers		Fathers		Mothers		Fathers		Mothers		Fathers	
				n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Awareness	General awareness	Largely adequate	9-15	2	8.00	2	8.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	1	4.00	1	4.00	3	4.00	3	4.00
		Adequate	16-22	8	32.00	10	40.00	7	28.00	2	8.00	4	16.00	5	20.00	19	25.33	17	22.67
		Slightly inadequate	23-29	15	60.00	13	52.00	18	72.00	23	92.00	19	76.00	18	72.00	52	69.33	54	72.00
	Misconceptions	Highly inadequate	30+	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	1	4.00	1	4.00	1	1.33	1	1.33
		No	4-6	25	100.00	25	100.0	24	96.00	24	96.00	25	100.00	24	96.00	74	98.67	73	97.33
		Almost absent	7-9	0	0.00	0	0.00	1	4.00	1	4.00	0	0.00	1	4.00	1	1.33	2	2.67
		Present	10-12	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
	Present to a large extent	13+	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	
Expectations and attitudes	Expectations from child	Largely appropriate	10-17	7	28.00	9	36.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	2	8.00	2	8.00	9	12.00	11	14.67
		Mildly appropriate	18-25	15	60.00	12	48.00	18	72.00	18	72.00	14	56.00	6	24.00	47	62.67	36	48.00
		Moderately inappropriate	26-33	3	12.00	4	16.00	7	28.00	7	28.00	9	36.00	17	68.00	19	25.33	28	37.33
		Highly inappropriate	34+	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
	Attitudes towards child	Most favourable	15-26	10	40.00	10	40.00	2	8.00	1	4.00	2	8.00	3	12.00	14	18.67	14	18.67
		Favourable	27-38	15	60.00	15	60.00	23	92.00	24	96.00	23	92.00	22	88.00	61	81.33	61	81.33
		Unfavourable	39-50	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
		Most unfavourable	51+	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
	Attitudes toward child management	Most favourable	17-29	1	4.00	1	4.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	1	1.33	1	1.33
		Favourable	30-42	20	80.00	18	72.00	18	72.00	19	76.00	17	68.00	9	36.00	55	73.33	46	61.33
		Moderately unfavourable	43-55	4	16.00	6	24.00	7	28.00	6	24.00	8	32.00	16	64.00	19	25.33	28	37.33
		Most unfavourable	56+	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
Child rearing practices	General rearing practices	Most favourable	13-22	7	28.00	3	12.00	3	12.00	1	4.00	0	0.00	1	4.00	10	13.33	5	6.67
		Somewhat favourable	23-32	18	72.00	18	72.00	22	88.00	17	68.00	25	100.00	13	52.00	65	86.67	48	64.00
		Somewhat unfavourable	33-42	0	0.00	4	16.00	0	0.00	7	28.00	0	0.00	11	44.00	0	0.00	22	29.33
		Most unfavourable	43+	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
	Rearing practice specific to training	Most favourable	7-12	7	28.00	5	20.00	4	16.00	0	0.00	1	4.00	0	0.00	12	16.00	5	6.67
		Somewhat favourable	13-18	18	72.00	20	80.00	21	84.00	25	100.00	23	92.00	25	100.00	62	82.67	70	93.33
		Somewhat unfavourable	19-24	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	1	4.00	0	0.00	1	1.33	0	0.00
		Most unfavourable	25+	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
Social support	Best social support	3-5	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	1	4.00	0	0.00	1	1.33	0	0.00	
	Adequate	6-8	5	20.00	5	20.00	2	8.00	2	8.00	2	8.00	2	8.00	9	12.00	9	12.00	
	Somewhat inadequately	9-11	19	76.00	19	76.00	22	88.00	22	88.00	22	88.00	22	88.00	63	84.00	63	84.00	
	No/very little support	12+	1	4.00	1	4.00	1	4.00	1	4.00	1	4.00	1	4.00	3	4.00	3	4.00	
Global rating of family adaptation	Extremely well adapted	1	2	8.00	4	16.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	1	4.00	2	2.67	5	6.67	
	Adequately adapted	2	16	64.00	12	48.00	17	68.00	18	72.00	9	36.00	10	40.00	42	56.00	40	53.33	
	Inadequately adapted	3	5	20.00	9	36.00	8	32.00	6	24.00	15	60.00	14	56.00	28	37.33	29	38.67	
	Very poor coping/adaptation	4	2	8.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	1	4.00	1	4.00	0	0.00	3	4.00	1	1.33	

Table 2 : Mean differences in coping stress among parents of mentally challenged children across family's social class

Subscales of coping	Mothers of mildly challenged children (n ₁ =50)			Mothers of moderately challenged children (n ₂ =50)			Mothers of severely challenged children (n ₃ =50)			Fathers of mildly challenged children (n ₄ =25)			Fathers of moderately challenged children (n ₅ =25)			Fathers of severely challenged children (n ₆ =25)		
	Low income families	Middle income families	t	Low income families	Middle income families	t	Low income families	Middle income families	t	Low income families	Middle income families	t	Low income families	Middle income families	t	Low income families	Middle income families	t
	n _{1a} =25 Mean (S.D)	n _{1b} =25 Mean (S.D)		n _{2a} =25 Mean (S.D)	n _{2b} =25 Mean (S.D)		n _{3a} =25 Mean (S.D)	n _{3b} =25 Mean (S.D)		n _{4a} =25 Mean (S.D)	n _{4b} =25 Mean (S.D)		n _{5a} =25 Mean (S.D)	n _{5b} =25 Mean (S.D)		n _{6a} =25 Mean (S.D)	n _{6b} =25 Mean (S.D)	
General awareness	23.94 (3.2)	21.64 (2.67)	3.89*	24.89 (3.50)	22.32 (3.56)	4.12*	25.44 (3.70)	23.12 (3.20)	4.58*	23.00 (2.76)	21.16 (2.34)	4.68*	23.97 (3.05)	22.09 (2.88)	2.25*	24.79 (3.10)	23.00 (3.80)	2.87*
Misconceptions	3.95 (1.40)	1.20 (1.12)	4.56*	4.02 (0.98)	2.08 (0.98)	2.89*	4.36 (1.8)	2.75 (1.22)	3.45*	3.83 (1.56)	1.07 (0.98)	3.01*	3.97 (0.83)	1.86 (0.82)	3.02*	4.12 (1.97)	2.63 (1.33)	3.01*
Expectations from child	24.87 (4.30)	23.12 (2.56)	2.25*	26.43 (2.1)	25.09 (2.78)	2.15*	28.28 (4.67)	26.94 (3.89)	3.20*	23.98 (4.14)	22.60 (2.67)	2.12*	25.59 (1.98)	24.17 (2.77)	2.44*	27.56 (4.23)	26.78 (3.42)	2.08*
Attitudes towards child	27.88 (2.78)	26.24 (3.45)	2.32*	28.37 (1.78)	27.12 (2.77)	2.34*	29.23 (2.87)	28.04 (1.56)	2.11*	26.96 (1.98)	25.65 (3.12)	2.33*	27.68 (1.65)	26.31 (2.55)	2.34*	28.55 (2.77)	27.19 (2.11)	2.58*
Attitudes towards child mgt	37.28 (4.56)	36.08 (4.10)	2.18*	40.52 (4.30)	39.42 (4.67)	2.11*	42.25 (3.78)	41.11 (3.89)	2.67*	36.89 (4.23)	35.71 (3.89)	2.11*	39.97 (3.78)	38.64 (4.13)	2.10*	42.78 (4.56)	41.56 (4.12)	2.13*
General rearing practices	23.44 (3.60)	22.14 (2.78)	2.42*	23.58 (3.400)	22.37 (3.24)	3.45*	24.28 (2.7)	22.86 (3.25)	3.40*	21.85 (3.02)	20.66 (2.50)	2.34*	22.36 (2.98)	20.97 (3.10)	2.78*	22.48 (3.20)	21.12 (3.60)	2.15*
Rearing practices specific to training	10.68 (2.56)	9.52 (2.20)	3.55*	12.03 (2.60)	10.86 (2.59)	3.90*	14.84 (1.89)	13.26 (3.55)	2.98*	8.76 (2.65)	7.12 (1.87)	2.55*	10.98 (2.43)	9.14 (1.78)	2.30*	12.16 (2.05)	10.75 (2.76)	2.56*
Social support	9.80 (1.23)	9.70 (1.10)	0.32	10.02 (1.89)	9.98 (1.67)	0.03	10.64 (2.66)	10.32 (1.47)	0.46	9.61 (1.11)	9.50 (1.45)	0.12	9.98 (1.76)	9.56 (1.70)	0.30	10.08 (2.45)	10.01 (1.80)	0.50

Note: 1. p<0.05, 2. * stands for significant at 0.05 level, 3. Higher the score, lower the coping

(2008) also stated that, mothers with higher educational status had low psychological stress and high coping strategy scores. Most of the mothers who are educated seek professional help for coping and are also able to provide appropriate and timely treatment for various problems of the child.

Income level found as a contributing factor that has made difference in the child rearing practices. It might be because of the more exposure of parents from middle income families to the prevailing facilities that would improve their child's condition and augment the strategies so that they can adopt them to cope effectively with the psychological stress. Middle income families were financially stronger than that of low income families. Therefore, besides school's training they utilised their income in providing extra training to child at home also. For that purpose some families hired maid or helper especially for their mentally challenged child.

Conclusion :

It was concluded from the study that economic class had impact on the coping strategies of families of mentally challenged children. MIG mothers and MIG fathers were observed to be better coped up. They were found to be more aware regarding child's situation, adopting better child rearing practices and also had more expectations and better attitudes towards the child's condition. Interestingly, the predominant reason for the significant difference was better educational level and financial status of MIG families as compared to the LIG. Education opens the gate way of mind, broadens the thinking which results in the acceptability of the child's disability, which develop more patience, positive attitudes and strong will power among parents. While, more exposure of MIG families to the prevailing facilities because of their better financial status would improve their child's condition and enhance their coping strategies. In order to cope with the stressful situation of upbringing of mentally challenged

child, for an individual, internal resources such as faith in God, energy, self-determination and positive perception towards life, and the external resources such as support from family members, friends, relatives, neighbours, professionals, policies and programmes of government plays an important role. These internal and external resources help the family to deal with the stressful situation. As parents' personal educational backgrounds and social class have a significant effect on their coping mechanisms. Therefore, being more and more educated have a positive influence on children's everyday lives, in this way the future of our society will look brighter and brighter everyday.

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