

**The Psycho-social Factors Associated with Stress and
Coping Experiences of Sri Lankan Parents of Children
with Autism, Cerebral Palsy or Down Syndrome**

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Abstract

This study aimed to identify psycho-social factors associated with parental stress and coping experiences of Sri Lankan parents of children with autism, cerebral palsy or Down syndrome. A mixed method study design was used. In a qualitative study (N=42), semi-structured interviews were carried out with parents of children with autism, cerebral palsy or Down syndrome and health care and educational professionals. The Sinhala versions of the Parental Stress Scale (PSS) and Brief COPE were validated (N=342). A case-comparison study (N=288) was conducted to identify individual and social factors associated with parental stress and coping. Thematic analysis of interview transcripts revealed six themes describing parents' perceptions of their child, themselves, families, support services, child's condition and societal acceptance. Exploratory factor analyses revealed a two factor solution for the Sinhala Parental Stress Scale and a four factor solution for the Sinhala Brief COPE. Both scales showed adequate test-retest reliability. In the case comparison study, multiple regression analyses revealed that socio-economic status and the use of avoidant coping were significant predictors of parental stress levels and in turn, parental stress levels along with avoidant coping and child's level of independence were significant predictors of parents' psychological morbidity. The results of this study point to the need for planning and implementing interventions and services for families of children with disabilities in Sri Lanka using a social-ecological framework and adopting a family partnership model when providing services to these families.

Key words: Parental stress, coping, children with developmental disabilities, Sri Lanka