



The Impact of Parental Stress on Attitudes towards Child Performance

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Abstract

Parental stress is a significant factor that influences family dynamics and child development. This paper explores how parental stress affects children's academic performance. Based on data from 92 parents, the study shows that high levels of stress are linked to lower school achievement, especially in rural areas. It examines the causes of stress - such as educational pressure, lack of time, and limited support - and its impact on the parent-child relationship. We will also analyse how parents with a positive attitude toward their child's performance and a strong social network can contribute to their child's development and how the most common causes of parental stress can affect parents' attitudes toward their child's performance. The purpose of this research is to offer suggestions for reducing the negative effects of parental stress on children and to help parents support their children in their academic and personal development.

Keywords: academic performance; educational anxiety; family environment; parental burnout; parental burnout; parental stress

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1. Introduction

Parental stress refers to the psychological pressure experienced by parents in fulfilling their parenting roles, especially when the demands of raising children exceed available resources (Abidin, 1992). According to the Job Demands-Resources theory, parenting is a "job" with many demands, and parental burnout occurs when resources (social support, time, resilience) are insufficient relative to the requirements (Roskam et al., 2017). Parental stress has multiple aspects, ranging from daily concerns about the child's safety and well-being to educational anxieties - that is, intense fear regarding children's school performance or special needs (Priego-Ojeda & Rusu, 2023). For example, Cheng (2020) defines educational anxiety as an anxious response in the educational context, where high expectations and fear of failure generate tension and excessive concern about the child's academic future. In extreme cases, chronic stress leads to parental burnout - a syndrome of emotional exhaustion and detachment from the child. Overall, parental stress is influenced by both individual factors (personality, resilience) and the family and social context, in line with modern approaches that emphasize the multidimensional nature of family stress (Clipa et al., 2014; Marici et al., 2023; Wu et al., 2022).

Stress experienced by parents is transmitted to children in several ways. First, the emotional climate and parenting style deteriorate: stressed parents often become more irritable, less patient, and more authoritarian, reducing the number of positive interactions and the support given to children (Cheng et al., 2020). In this tense environment, children may develop insecurity, performance anxiety, and behavioral problems. For instance, in Romania, it has been shown that deficient parental supervision increases exam anxiety, which in turn undermines academic outcomes (Albulescu et al., 2023).

Parental stress also affects early cognitive development. Longitudinal European studies show that a high level of parental stress is associated with initially weaker phonological abilities in children, which later translates into deficient vocabulary and reading. For example, Acha et al. (2025) found that at age 5, children of highly stressed parents scored lower on memory and phonological awareness tests, and at age 6, they had significantly lower vocabulary and reading scores compared to their peers, regardless of explicit literacy activities at home. At older ages, parenting patterns directly affect school performance. Albulescu et al. (2023) report that a permissive parenting style correlates with lower scores in Romanian Language and Mathematics, partially through increased test anxiety in students. Furthermore, the tense family environment influences students' attitudes towards school. Wu et al. (2022) indicate that parents' increased anxiety regarding their children's education leads to academic burnout, which deteriorates students' concentration and academic performance.

An important concept for understanding the impact of parental stress on child performance is that of cumulative stress. According to recent research by Yim (2020), cumulative stress occurs when stressful events accumulate over time and ultimately have a negative effect on an individual's psychological and physical health. Parental stress can be considered one of the factors contributing to a child's cumulative stress (Yim, 2020). Perez et al. (2020) conducted a longitudinal study that analyzed the relationship between parental stress and children's academic performance, highlighting that high levels of parental stress can negatively affect children's academic performance. Bazzini et al. (2022) examined the impact of parental communication on children's socio-emotional development, concluding that positive and open parental communication can contribute to healthy socio-emotional development in children and impact on psychomotor competence.

Ahmad et al. (2023) investigated the link between parenting style and levels of anxiety and depression in adolescents, showing that authoritarian and permissive parenting styles may be associated with higher levels of anxiety and depression in adolescents, especially during pandemic times. Motti-Stefanidi (2021) examined the impact of parenting style on adolescents' academic performance and concluded that an authoritative permissive parenting style may be

associated with lower academic performance in an immigration context. Sorkhabi et al. (2019) conducted a synthesis of several studies on the impact of the social and cultural environment on child development, highlighting that this environment can play an important role in shaping child development. Another important concept is that of parenting styles, which have been identified as a determining factor in the relationship between parental stress and child performance. According to a meta-analysis by Pinquart and Kauser (2018), authoritarian and permissive parenting styles are associated with negative effects on child development, while authoritative parenting is associated with better school performance and greater satisfaction in adult life (Pinquart & Kauser, 2018). Chen et al. (2022) examined the relationships among parental stress, parenting style, and academic performance during the pandemic. The results showed that parental stress is negatively associated with children's academic performance and that this effect is mediated by authoritative parenting style.

The literature offers several theoretical frameworks to interpret the relationship between parental stress and children's performance. Deng et al. (2022), for example, apply the cognitive appraisal theory of stress to show that the negative impact on students depends on how stressors are perceived; in their study, combined family and school stress increased student depression and decreased performance. Complementarily, Bronfenbrenner's ecological model emphasizes the fundamental influence of the family as a microsystem; recent studies based on this framework note that a positive and supportive family environment promotes academic success, while a dysfunctional one undermines it. For instance, Zhang et al. (2025) found that contextual factors fully mediate the relationship between children's emotional self-regulation and their behavior, while children's emotional abilities play a secondary role. Practically, children with higher self-control do not develop optimally if their parents are stressed; they suffer if the family lacks emotional balance. Another valuable framework is the Job Demands-Resources model. Zhao et al. (2023) built their analysis on this theory, highlighting that high parental "demands" (excessive homework, high academic expectations, children's behavioral problems) lead to burnout when the "resources" available are limited. Their analysis confirms that parental stress directly predicts parental burnout, but resources such as perceived family support and parental resilience significantly reduce these effects. Thus, the JD-R model illustrates the importance of maintaining a dynamic balance between risks and protections in parenting.

Recent studies highlight several factors that mediate or moderate the impact of parental stress on children. Parental stress influences children through their emotional and cognitive states. For example, test anxiety mediates the relationship between deficient parental supervision and lower school results; children whose parents do not adequately monitor them are more anxious during exams, which undermines their grades (Albulescu et al., 2023). In other words, parental stress "translates" into the child's perception that they cannot cope with academic demands, thus amplifying learning difficulties.

Parental burnout itself is a crucial mediator. Wu et al. (2022) demonstrate that parents' educational anxiety increases their stress to the point of burnout, and this burnout prevents them from offering necessary support to their children. Therefore, the parents' psychological state mediates how their anxiety is transmitted to the child as a negative school experience. Practically, an anxious parent becomes overwhelmed and less involved, and the child feels the effects of this pattern in their own relationship with school. The effects of parental stress on performance are not uniform across students. A child who has support, a calm learning environment, engaged, balanced parents, good self-esteem, and motivation can perform well even when the family is going through stressful times. Conversely, where these mediations are lacking, parental stress can have a much more serious impact on motivation, emotional health, and academic performance.

Children's individual characteristics may influence their sensitivity to parental stress. Gender is a well-documented moderator: Peng et al. (2025) show that the negative effects of parental burnout are much stronger in girls, who lose more of their academic self-efficacy in the face of parental exhaustion, while in boys, this effect is not significant. It appears that girls

internalize family-related emotional stress more when it comes to school performance. Age and special needs are other important moderators: the Finnish study by Pöysä et al. (2024) highlights that families with children with special educational needs or younger children reported increased levels of stress and found it more difficult to perceive their children's school adaptation. During the pandemic, these very children had additional difficulties with online schooling, and their parents were under significant stress to maintain their educational progress.

The results of these studies underscore the need to address parental stress as an integral part of educational efforts. In schools, teachers and counsellors must be aware that fluctuations in school performance or behavioural problems may have roots in a tense family environment. Instead of intervening only with the child, an effective approach would involve supporting the parents.

The objectives of this research are as follows:

O1: assessing the level of parental stress among parents of primary school students;

O2: assessing the school performance of primary school students;

O3: identifying possible associations between parental stress levels and students' school performance.

O4: identifying the mechanisms by which parental stress can affect children's school performance.

The research hypotheses are:

Hypothesis 1: There is a significant correlation between the level of parental stress and the academic performance of primary school students.

Hypothesis 2: Parents' ages are correlated with students' performance.

Hypothesis 3: The parents' ages are correlated with the level of stress.

Hypothesis 4: Parents from rural areas experience significantly higher levels of stress as compared to urban area parents.

2. Methodology

2.1. Participants

The sample will consist of 92 parents of students from urban and rural areas. A total of 92 parents participated in this study, of which 88 were female (95.7%), and 4 were male (4.3%). 18.5% came from urban areas and 81.5% from rural areas, and in terms of age category, 8 people were in the 20-25 age category, 28 in the 30-35 age category, 34 in the 35-40 age category, 21 in the 45-55 age category, and one person was in another category. Similarly, in terms of the number of children they had, 38 people had only one child, 39 of them had 2 children, 9 people had 3 children, 5 people had 4 children, and only one person had 5 children.

2.2. Research instruments

The questionnaire for parents will include questions regarding the level of stress felt in the last month, parents' educational level, the time spent with the children, children's performance in relation to their parents' effort, but also the child's involvement in school activities. The Questionnaire - Importance of Grades and School Performance, as well as the Perceived Stress Scale (Cohen & Williamson), were used. The Perceived Stress Scale questionnaire includes 14 questions with answers ranging from 1-4, 1 meaning never and 4 meaning very often. The questions also refer to how parents felt during the last month, how they managed time and resources, or how they coped with stressful situations. From the Questionnaire - Importance of Grades and School Performance, we selected questions regarding how parents relate to their children's performance, but also how they perceive it in relation to the effort they put in as parents. The response scale was identical to that of the previous questionnaire.

2.3. Data analysis

The data will be analysed using statistical programs such as Jamovi. Statistical tests such as Pearson's correlation coefficient and t-tests will be used to test the research hypotheses. The data collection procedure consisted of distributing a questionnaire to students' parents from both urban and rural areas. The questionnaire was designed to assess the parental stress level and collect relevant demographic information. To collect data from parents, the questionnaires were sent through students or classroom teachers, ensuring the confidentiality and anonymity of the collected data. Parents' questionnaire included questions regarding the level of parental stress, how their children perceive parental stress, their attitudes towards their children's education, and their school performance. In addition, to ensure the validity and reliability of the collected data. We also used appropriate statistical analysis methods to examine the relationships between the research variables. Data collection will be carried out through a structured questionnaire for parents. The questionnaire was administered via the internet to the teachers.

3. Results

3.1. Descriptive statistics

The main variables of the present study are: gender, the place of residence, the subject's age, and the number of children. The gender variable has a mean of 1.96 (SD = 0.205), the subjects' responses vary between 1 and 2, and the value that divides the database into two equal parts is 2.00. The most frequent score was 2, which means that most of the people in the study are female. The data distribution is not normal, representing a negative distortion (SK = -4.55), with most scores being higher than the average. Regarding the degree of data dispersion, it is slightly chaotic (Table 1).

Table 1. Distribution of the research group by gender variable

2. What is your gender?		Counts	% of Total	Cumulative %
1	male	4	4.3 %	4.3 %
2	female	88	95.7 %	100.0 %

The variable environment of origin has a mean of 1.82 (SD = 0.390), the subjects' responses vary between 1 and 2, and the value that divides the database into two equal parts is 2.00. Since the most frequent score was 2, this means that most of the people in the study are from rural areas. The data distribution is not normal, representing a negative distortion (SK = -1.65), with most scores being higher than the mean. Regarding the degree of data dispersion, it is slightly chaotic (Table 2).

Table 2. Distribution of the research group by the place of residence variable

3. What is your background ?		Counts	% of Total	Cumulative %
1	Urban area	17	18.5 %	18.5 %
2	Rural area	75	81.5 %	100.0 %

The variable number of children has a mean of 1.83 (SD = 0.897), the subjects' responses range between 1 and 5, and the value that divides the database into two equal parts is 2.00. The

most frequent score is 2, which means that most people have two children. The data distribution is normal, representing a positive distortion ($SK = 1.19$), with most scores being lower than the mean, and the data representation being framed in positive asymmetry (Table 3).

Table 3. Distribution of the research group by the number of children of the parents

5. How many children do you have?	Counts	% of Total	Cumulative %
1 1 child	38	41.3 %	41.3 %
2 2 children	39	42.4 %	83.7 %
3 3 children	9	9.8 %	93.5 %
4 4 children	5	5.4 %	98.9 %
5 More than 4 children	1	1.1 %	100.0 %

The age variable has a mean of 3.78 ($SD = 0.970$), the subjects' responses vary between 2 (meaning ages between 25-30) and 7 (meaning ages between 55-60), the value that divides the database into two equal parts being 4.00. The most frequent score is 4, which means that most people are 40-45 years old. The data distribution is normal, representing a positive distortion ($SK = 0.158$), with most scores being lower than the mean, and the data representation being framed in positive asymmetry (Table 4).

Table 4. Distribution of the research group by the age variable

4. What age group do you fall into?	Counts	% of Total	Cumulative %
2 25-30 years	8	8.7 %	8.7 %
3 35-40 years	28	30.4 %	39.1 %
4 40-45 years	34	37.0 %	76.1 %
5 45-50 years	21	22.8 %	98.9 %
7 50- 60 years	1	1.1 %	100.0 %

The study variable has a mean of 2.26 ($SD = 0.709$); the subjects' responses vary between 1 (secondary school studies) and 4 (postgraduate studies). The value that dividing the database into two equal parts is 2, and the most frequent score was 4, which means that most people have postgraduate studies. The data distribution is not normal, representing a negative distortion ($SK = -0.234$), with most scores being higher than the mean. Regarding the degree of data dispersion, it is slightly chaotic (Table 5).

Table 5. Distribution of the research group by the studies for the parents

6. What is your level of education?	Counts	% of Total	Cumulative %
1 Secondary school studies	13	14.1 %	14.1 %
2 High school studies	43	46.7 %	60.9 %
3 University studies	35	38.0 %	98.9 %
4 Postgraduates' studies	1	1.1 %	100.0 %

3.2. Correlational analyses

This research aims at identifying how parental stress has an impact on student performance, the results being presented because of the analysis of this aspect in Suceava County.

For the first hypothesis, data analysis revealed a positive correlation between parental stress and students' academic performance ($r = 0.351$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that, in the sample studied, as parental stress levels increase, students' academic performance tends to increase slightly. This relationship is statistically significant, confirming the hypothesis. Although the result may seem counterintuitive, it suggests that a certain level of parental stress may be associated with more active parental involvement in the educational process, which could contribute positively to children's school performance. This interpretation emphasizes that stress is not necessarily negative but may reflect the parents' concern and attention to their child's education.

The second hypothesis indicates that parental age harms children's performance, was not confirmed, as the correlation between parental age and children's performance is insignificant ($r = -0.012$, $p = 0.912 > 0.05$). This indicates that the age of the parents does not significantly influence the school performance of the children in the sample analysed. The children's performance is influenced by other factors such as style of parenting, the relationship with other children and with parents, implication of the parents in school life, etc.

The third hypothesis concerns the influence of the time spent by parents with their children on the quality of the parent-child relationship. The hypothesis was confirmed, demonstrating a significant positive correlation ($p < 0.001$, $r = 0.419$) between the time spent and the quality of the parent-child relationship. The results indicate that, in general, a greater investment of time by parents leads to a closer and healthier relationship with children. The third hypothesis that the age of parents is correlated with stress level was not confirmed, as the correlation between the age of parents and stress levels is insignificant ($r = -0.043$, $p = 0.682 > 0.05$). This suggests that the age of parents does not significantly influence stress levels in the sample analyzed.

The fourth hypothesis, regarding the differences in the level of parental stress between rural and urban areas, was confirmed.

Table 6. Correlation between the stress level and the residential environment

	Group	N	Mean	Median	SD	SE
Level of stress	1- urban	17	30.9	29.0	7.32	1.77
	2- rural	75	28.3	29.0	5.27	0.608

The $t(90)$ test revealed a significant difference ($t = 0.082$, $p < 0.001$), and Table 6 illustrated a positive difference for the level of stress for parents from rural and urban areas. The conclusions indicate that, in general, parents in rural areas face a significantly higher level of stress as compared to those in urban areas.

Strengths and limitations of the paper

The results obtained from this research agree with studies conducted in other countries and published in recent years in journals with an impact factor. Studying the impact of parental stress on children's performance was a real challenge, because we live in an increasingly crowded society full of new meanings. Also, among the strengths of this study, we mention the use of the Jamovi program, which enables accurate data interpretation and the production of relevant, objective results for the research. The significant results obtained support the need to also relate

to the parents' background, their age, and last but not least, the fact that a wide range of factors influence children's performance.

The use of self-reports by participants for data collection and the online application of the questionnaire are part of the limitations of this research. The imbalance between the number of female and male participants, predominantly from the Suceava area, may limit the generalizability of the data. Resumption of the study with the expansion of the sample by applying the questionnaire to other areas of the country is one of the future research directions, which would help minimize the limits in data generalization.

Conclusion

Positive parental involvement is associated with better motivation and increased student engagement in learning. This study reveals essential aspects of the relationship between parental stress and children's development. One of the strengths of this paper is the relevance of the topic, which underlines the necessity for managing the stress of parents. The detailed analysis of the factors influencing parental stress makes a significant contribution, providing a broader understanding of the complexity of this problem. Positive parental support characterized by attentive involvement, emotional support, and balanced expectations is a key factor in supporting school performance and adaptation. Good communication, empathy, and acceptance from parents contribute to the child's well-being, reduce school-related stress, and increase the chances of success.

This study opens doors for future research and invites a balanced and interdisciplinary approach to the topic. In conclusion, this research makes a valuable contribution to the understanding of the relationship between parental stress and school performance, highlighting the importance of continuing investigations in this complex and relevant field. Reducing parental stress contributes to establishing a healthy emotional climate, which favors the development of social skills, self-esteem, and responsibility, factors that are, indirectly, essential for school success. To capitalize on the connection between family and school success, there should be a holistic approach. The school should not be limited to teaching the subject, but can also strengthen the family relationship, parental support, and real and healthy involvement.

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