



Parental Locus Of Control, Coping Strategies, And Parenting Self-Efficacy Among Parents Of Children With ADHD: A Review Of Literature

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Abstract

Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) significantly affects not only children but also the psychological functioning of parents. The present review explores the role of parental locus of control, coping strategies, and parenting self-efficacy in influencing parental adjustment. Literature indicates that parents with an internal locus of control and higher self-efficacy are more likely to engage in adaptive coping strategies and experience lower stress levels. In contrast, external locus of control and maladaptive coping are associated with higher psychological distress. The review further highlights the mediating roles of resilience and social support. Despite extensive global research, limited studies exist in the Indian context. The paper emphasizes the need for culturally relevant research and interventions to improve parental well-being and child outcomes

Keywords: ADHD, parenting self-efficacy, locus of control, coping strategies, parental stress

Introduction

Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is a chronic neurodevelopmental disorder characterized by persistent patterns of inattention, impulsivity, and hyperactivity (Barkley, 2015). While the primary focus of research has traditionally been on children, increasing attention is now being directed toward the psychological experiences of parents raising children with ADHD.

Parenting a child with ADHD involves continuous behavioral monitoring, emotional regulation, and management of academic and social challenges. These demands often contribute to elevated levels of stress,

reduced quality of life, and emotional exhaustion among parents (Johnston & Mash, 2001; Theule et al., 2013). However, not all parents experience these challenges in the same way. Individual psychological factors play a crucial role in determining how parents perceive and respond to stress.

Among these factors, parental locus of control, coping strategies, and parenting self-efficacy have emerged as key constructs. These variables influence how parents interpret their child's behavior, regulate their own emotions, and adopt strategies to manage daily challenges. Understanding their interaction is essential for developing effective psychological interventions and enhancing family well-being.

Conceptual Framework

Parental Locus of Control

Locus of control refers to individuals' beliefs about whether outcomes are determined by their own actions or by external forces (Rotter, 1966). In the parenting context, it reflects the extent to which parents believe they can influence their child's behavior and development.

Parents with an internal locus of control tend to adopt proactive approaches, actively seeking solutions and engaging in consistent parenting practices. Conversely, parents with an external locus of control may feel helpless, attributing their child's behavior to uncontrollable factors.

Empirical evidence supports this distinction. Cohen et al. (2008) found that an external locus of control was associated with increased anxiety and depression in children, mediated through parenting behaviors. Similarly, Navroodi and Navroodi (2024) reported that parents of children with learning difficulties exhibited higher stress levels alongside reduced perceived control.

Parenting Self-Efficacy

Parenting self-efficacy refers to parents' belief in their ability to effectively manage parenting tasks (Bandura, 1977, 1997). It is a central determinant of parental behavior, influencing motivation, persistence, and emotional responses.

High levels of parenting self-efficacy are associated with positive parenting practices, including warmth, consistency, and responsiveness (Coleman & Karraker, 2000). In contrast, low self-efficacy is linked to stress, anxiety, and ineffective parenting strategies.

Research highlights its importance across contexts. Aminayi et al. (2015) observed that mothers of children with anxiety symptoms reported lower self-efficacy. Williamson (2016) further demonstrated that parenting self-efficacy mediates the relationship between maternal psychological symptoms and parenting stress.

Coping Strategies

Coping strategies refer to cognitive and behavioral efforts used to manage stress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). These strategies can be broadly categorized into problem-focused and emotion-focused coping.

Problem-focused coping involves actively addressing the source of stress, whereas emotion-focused coping involves regulating emotional responses. Adaptive coping strategies are associated with better psychological outcomes, while maladaptive strategies, such as avoidance, contribute to increased distress (Compas et al., 2001).

Cappe et al. (2017) found that parents who adopted problem-focused coping reported better quality of life, whereas those relying on emotional avoidance experienced greater psychological difficulties.

Review of Literature

Parenting Stress and ADHD

Research consistently indicates that parents of children with ADHD experience higher levels of stress compared to parents of typically developing children (Johnston & Mash, 2001; Theule et al., 2013). This stress arises from behavioral challenges, academic difficulties, and social stigma.

Winters (n.d.) reported that parents of children with ADHD exhibit higher parenting stress and more external control beliefs. Similarly, Lai (2013) found that parenting stress is influenced by child characteristics, social support, and parental coping strategies.

Locus of Control and Parental Adjustment

Locus of control plays a significant role in parental psychological adjustment. Parents with an internal locus of control tend to report lower stress levels and better coping abilities.

Usman et al. (2025) found that psychological distress was negatively predicted by internal locus of control and positively associated with emotional exhaustion. McCool (2015) highlighted that internal control beliefs contribute to resilience and improved psychological well-being.

Parenting Self-Efficacy and Child Outcomes

Parenting self-efficacy has been strongly linked to both parental well-being and child adjustment. High self-efficacy promotes consistent and effective parenting practices.

Ellis (2020) found that higher parental self-efficacy was associated with reduced child behavior problems. Gürbüz et al. (2025) further demonstrated that parental self-efficacy influences child emotional and behavioral adjustment, particularly in ADHD populations.

Coping Strategies and Psychological Well-being

Coping strategies significantly influence parental well-being. Parents who use adaptive coping strategies report better psychological outcomes.

Folkman and Moskowitz (2004) emphasized that effective coping enhances emotional regulation and reduces stress. Gorjian (2021) found that coping strategies mediate the relationship between stress and psychological outcomes in mothers of children with disabilities.

Interrelationship Among Variables

The interaction between locus of control, self-efficacy, and coping strategies is well-established. Parents with an internal locus of control are more likely to exhibit higher self-efficacy and engage in adaptive coping strategies.

Qazi (2009) reported positive correlations between authoritative parenting style, internal locus of control, and self-efficacy. Papoulidi and Maniadaki (2025) demonstrated that self-efficacy mediates the relationship between locus of control and resilience.

Role of Resilience and Social Support

Recent studies highlight the importance of resilience and social support. These factors enhance parental well-being and buffer the effects of stress.

Andayani et al. (2025) found that parenting self-efficacy influences well-being indirectly through resilience. Similarly, Mohammadchenari et al. (2022) emphasized the role of locus of control in improving quality of life.

Research Gaps

Despite extensive research, several gaps remain. Most studies are conducted in Western contexts, limiting generalizability. Cultural factors such as family structure, societal expectations, and parenting norms are underexplored in Indian settings.

Additionally, there is limited research examining all three variables together in a single framework. Addressing these gaps is essential for developing culturally sensitive interventions.

Discussion

The present review synthesizes existing literature to examine the interconnected roles of parental locus of control, coping strategies, and parenting self-efficacy in influencing parental adjustment in families of children with ADHD. The findings across studies consistently indicate that these psychological constructs do not function in isolation; rather, they interact dynamically to shape parental experiences and behavioral responses.

One of the central observations emerging from the literature is the critical role of perceived control in determining parental adaptation. Parents who demonstrate an internal locus of control tend to interpret challenges as manageable and are more likely to engage in proactive parenting strategies. This sense of agency facilitates constructive engagement with the child's needs, leading to more effective behavioral management. In contrast, an external locus of control is often associated with feelings of helplessness and disengagement, which may exacerbate stress and reduce parenting effectiveness. This distinction aligns with foundational theoretical perspectives, which emphasize the importance of perceived control in psychological adjustment.

Parenting self-efficacy further strengthens this framework by influencing how parents translate their beliefs into action. The literature suggests that self-efficacy operates as a motivational and regulatory mechanism. Parents with high self-efficacy are more resilient in the face of challenges, maintain consistency in

discipline, and exhibit greater emotional stability. Conversely, low self-efficacy may lead to avoidance, inconsistency, and increased emotional reactivity. Importantly, self-efficacy not only affects parenting behaviors directly but also mediates the relationship between stress and coping, highlighting its central role in parental functioning.

Coping strategies represent the behavioral expression of these cognitive beliefs. Parents who perceive greater control and possess higher self-efficacy are more likely to adopt problem-focused coping strategies, such as seeking information, implementing structured routines, and engaging in supportive interventions. These strategies have been consistently associated with better psychological outcomes and improved family functioning. On the other hand, reliance on maladaptive coping strategies, including avoidance and emotional withdrawal, is linked with higher levels of stress and reduced well-being.

Another important aspect highlighted in the literature is the role of contextual and supportive factors, particularly resilience and social support. These variables appear to enhance the effectiveness of internal psychological resources. For instance, resilience enables parents to recover from setbacks and maintain a positive outlook, while social support provides both emotional reassurance and practical assistance. The interaction between these factors suggests that parental adjustment is influenced not only by individual traits but also by environmental conditions.

Despite these insights, the literature reveals certain limitations that warrant attention. A significant proportion of studies have been conducted in Western contexts, where parenting practices and family structures may differ from those in collectivistic societies such as India. Cultural values, extended family involvement, and societal expectations may significantly influence parenting perceptions and behaviors. Therefore, the applicability of existing findings to the Indian context remains uncertain.

Furthermore, many studies adopt cross-sectional designs, limiting the ability to establish causal relationships among variables. Longitudinal research is necessary to understand how these constructs evolve over time and how interventions may influence parental outcomes. Additionally, there is a need for integrative models that simultaneously examine locus of control, self-efficacy, and coping strategies within a unified framework.

Overall, the discussion underscores the importance of adopting a multidimensional perspective when examining parental adjustment in ADHD. Interventions aimed at improving parental well-being should focus on enhancing internal locus of control, strengthening parenting self-efficacy, and promoting adaptive coping strategies. Such approaches have the potential to create meaningful improvements not only in parental mental health but also in child developmental outcomes.

Conclusion

The present review highlights the important role of parental locus of control, coping strategies, and parenting self-efficacy in shaping the psychological adjustment of parents of children with ADHD. These variables are closely interconnected and influence how parents perceive challenges and respond to stress.

An internal locus of control and higher parenting self-efficacy are associated with more adaptive coping strategies and better psychological outcomes. In contrast, external control beliefs and maladaptive coping are linked with increased stress and emotional difficulties.

Despite extensive research, there remains a need for culturally relevant studies, particularly in the Indian context. Strengthening parental confidence and promoting adaptive coping may contribute significantly to improved parental well-being and child outcomes

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