

A Study on the Effect of Difficult Parent Behaviour on the Teachers' Work



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ABSTRACT

The researcher was interested in studying the school teachers' effectiveness in dealing with difficult parents and their reported negative feelings while they interfaced them. For this purpose there were 252 school teachers who responded on the Parent Stress Questionnaire. Analysis included descriptive information, factor analysis and intercorrelation. Factor analysis indicated that the problematic behaviors could "affect" the teachers' pleasure in working and their relationship with the parents. Finding impressed that teachers' effectiveness and negative feelings were reported as 'moderate' while dealing with difficult parent.

Keyword: Problematic Parent, Effectiveness, Negative Feeling, Factor Analysis

INTRODUCTION

The role of a teacher is changing fast from being the transmitter of knowledge to that of a facilitator of the teaching-learning process. It has been observed that as a consequence of their job condition, many teachers realize that they are having negative feelings about themselves, their students, and their profession which is becoming progressively more negative. These are also the teachers who are susceptible to developing chronic feelings of emotional exhaustion, fatigue, negative attitudes towards their students, and feelings of diminishing job accomplishment (Carolyn Wiley, 2000).

As far as the teachers are concerned, at the end of the day when they think about their work, their relationship with the parents and families, they often have mixed feelings. There are good feelings of shared efforts and mutually valued achievement with some parents; while with others, there is a sense of frustration, helplessness, or even anger over conflicting perceptions and understandings.

Although a large body of research exists that recognizes that teachers and parents often work in adversarial relationships with one another, and research regarding parental involvement has pointed out that pushy parents are often present in the school setting, little research has been conducted to examine the prevalence, causes and consequences of problematic parental behavior in the school setting.

METHOD

Sample

The sample of the study comprised of a 252 male and female (male =97, female =153) primary and secondary school teachers from the city of Patna (Bihar). Around two third of the total sample comprised of teachers from the *private schools* of Patna (i.e.,75.4%) while the remaining one fourth (i.e., 24%) of them were employed in the public schools. The average number of *years of teaching experience* for both the private and the public school teachers was 9.39 (S.D=7.03) years.

Instruments

Data were collected with the help of *Parent Stress Questionnaire* (Van der Wolf & Everaert, 2007). The 'Parent Stress Questionnaire (PSQ)' was developed by Professors Kees Van der Wolf and Huub Everaert, of the Hogeschool of the Educational Faculty of Utrecht, Netherlands in the year (2007).

This part of PSQ aimed to measure the '**Effect of Difficult Parent Behaviour on a Teacher's Work**'. The 24 items scale used for this purpose was based on the Index of Teaching Stress (ITS) developed by Green, Abidin and Kmetz (1997). The said scale items tried to examine the effect that the most challenging parent had on a teacher and his/ her work. The respondents were asked to show their 'agreement' or 'disagreement' against the items with the help of a 5 points scale where 0 = Totally disagree and 4 = Totally agree. The scores were interpreted as *higher the score, more the negative impact on the teacher*. The alpha reliability of the 24 items meant to measure the extent of Impact of the difficult parent behavior on teachers work was .85.

Analysis comprised of Factor analyzing the responses of the 24 'Impact scale' items by the Principal Component Method (rotated by the varimax till the Eigen Values reached more than two), for understanding the nature and type of the said impact. Mean and S.D. were computed for the extracted impact factors. Furthermore, intercorrelation was computed between the impact factors.

RESULT

The 24 items of the Parent Stress Questionnaire (Part-II C) that aimed to measure the *impact of difficult parent behaviour on the teachers' work*, were factor analyzed by using the Principle Component Method and rotated by the varimax till the Eigen values reached more than two. Consequently, the items showing relevant content and loadings of .40 and above were included in the factors they loaded upon. The factor analysis helped extracting two factors that explained 37.89% of the total variance.

The first factor explained the larger percentage of variance out of the two 'Impact factors' (25.03%). In light of this observation it appeared that the impact of problematic parent behaviours affecting a teacher's *pleasure in working* was responsible for explaining a greater amount of difference found in the findings in this regards. However, a smaller factor Mean ($X = 1.41$, $SD = .83$) for the Impact factor 1 suggested that the problematic parent behaviors did leave a negative impact on the teachers' *pleasure in performing their work* but only to a 'moderate extent'. On the other hand, the second impact factor namely, teacher's *pleasure in relationship with the parents*, showed a Mean located almost on the midpoint towards the maximum negative impact indicating end of the rating scale ($X = 2.14$, $SD = .88$). This result impressed that the teachers reported *pleasure in maintaining relationship* with the parents was almost unaffected by the problematic parent behaviors.

It was noteworthy that the factor means were significantly different and suggested that the teachers found 'less pleasure' in *relating* with the students' parents in comparison to the pleasure they had in *performing their work* as a result of the behaviours of the challenging parent ($t = -10.28$, $p < .00$). The reliability coefficient of these two factors appeared as .87 and .75 respectively. The factors were named, *Impact on the teacher's pleasure in working* and *Impact on the teacher's pleasure in relationship with the parents*. The structure of the factors along with their item loadings, factor Mean, standard deviation and the percentage of variance explained are shown in the table below.

DESCRIPTION OF THE FACTORS

Factor 1: Impact on the Teacher's Pleasure in Working

Sixteen items that loaded highly on Factor 1 referred to the impact of a problematic parent behaviour on a *teacher's*

pleasure in performing his/her work. The items loading on this factor were about the teacher's exhaustion resulting from paying constant attention to a difficult parent, frustration in interacting with him/her, and increase in the problems while dealing with the other parents. The higher loading items of Factor 1 also tried to assess, whether the teacher felt lower self-confidence (i.e., he/she was not a good teacher) and harassed, enjoyed less of the school days, avoided presenting certain activities in class, realized that the problematic parent made him/her pay less attention to other parents, and found the joy in work gone wrong or spoilt due to the difficult parent behavior.

Factor 2: Impact on the Teacher's Pleasure in Relationship with the Parents

Factor 2 with 8 highly loading items was given the name, *Impact on the Pleasure in Relationship with the Parents*. This factor was about the teachers' reported pleasure in relationship with the students' parents. The high loading items on this factor comprised of themes suggesting that the challenging parent helped the teacher understand himself/herself better as a teacher, made him/her feel confident in his/her teaching skills (when interacting with this parent), and that the teacher shared same beliefs about teaching as the parent. In sum, the items loading on Factor 2 configured a theme suggesting the impact of difficult parent behaviour on a teacher's confidence in teaching and communication skills while interacting with a problematic parent. It may be said that generally speaking Factor 2 was about the teachers' *pleasure in relationship with the difficult parents*.

Teachers' Effectiveness in Dealing with the Problematic Parent and their Negative Feelings while Working

Table 1

Mean, S.D and Interco relations between the Effectiveness and Negative Feeling of the Teachers

Variable	Mean	S.D.	Effectiveness	Negative feeling
Effectiveness	2.66	1.04		
Negative Feeling	1.72	.78	.22**	

Note: N= 252, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Table 1 contains Mean scores, standard deviations and coefficients of correlation between two variables of the study namely, teachers' *effectiveness* in dealing with the problematic parents and their reported *negative feelings* while working. The mentioned variables were measured with the help of 11 statements that were rated on a 5 points scale (range of scores 0 to 4). Out of the 11 statements 5 tried to assess whether the challenging behavior of the problematic parents adversely affected the teacher's effectiveness in dealing with them, while the remaining 6 tried to examine the reported *negative feelings* of the respondents while working.

Coming to the findings, a Mean value of 2.66 for the teachers' *effectiveness* located towards the positive end of the scale, suggested that on the average the teachers' agreed that they were 'effective' (though not 'very effective') in dealing with a difficult parent. A large S.D. of 1.04 in this case however, was indicative of variability in the teachers' responses. The Mean and S.D. values for the teachers' *negative feelings* while working were 1.72 and .78 respectively. The finding suggested that the teachers agreed having *negative feelings* while working which was somewhat more negative in magnitude than a neutral feeling.

Further, the above table, displays highly significant and positive association between teachers' *effectiveness* and their *negative feelings* while working ($r = .22$, $p < .01$). The finding indicated that when the teachers felt being 'less effective' in dealing with the problematic parents they were also likely to report 'more negative feelings' while working. In other words, when the teachers reported better *effectiveness* in dealing with the problematic parents, they also reported more

of positive feelings, better self-perception and ability to control their emotions.

DISCUSSION

This paper aimed to study the *impact* that the difficult parent behaviour had on the school teachers' *effectiveness* in dealing with the problematic parents and their *negative feelings* while they dealt with them. It may be recalled that the 24 items of the PSQ aimed to measure the 'Effect' or the 'Impact' of the most challenging parent behaviour on the teachers and their work. A factor analysis of the teachers' responses on these items suggested the impact to be mainly of two kinds. Firstly, the most challenging parent's behaviour had an impact on the teachers' *pleasure in working* and second, it had an impact on the teachers' *pleasure in relationship with the parents*.

The first factor in this regards (i.e., teacher's pleasure in working) explained a higher percentage of variance and reliability in comparison to the second factor referring to the teachers' *pleasure in relationship with the parents*. Therefore, it may be said that the impact of problematic parent behaviour affecting a teacher's *pleasure in working* was responsible for explaining a greater amount of difference found in the findings in this regards. However, a smaller factor Mean for this factor suggested that the problematic parent behaviors did leave a negative impact on the teachers' *pleasure in performing their work* but only to a 'moderate extent'. Coming to the configuration part of the first factor, the items gave the impression that the *impact* of the problematic parent behavior on the *teachers' pleasure in working* included feeling exhausted (due to paying constant attention to the difficult parent), feeling frustrated while interacting with the parent, and finding it much more difficult to deal with the other parents.

The second impact factor namely, teacher's *pleasure in relationship with the parents* comprised of items describing the conditions in which a teacher was likely to find 'pleasure in relating' with the parents. The Impact factor 2 however, explained a relatively smaller percentage of total variance in the observations in comparison to the earlier factor 1. In other words, though the teachers perceived *pleasure in relationship with the parents*, marginally more frequently, this kind of impact had a lesser role in explaining the total amount of variance found in the results. The factor Mean in this case was located closer to the midpoint with a little tilt towards the more negative end of the rating scale. This result impressed that the teachers reported *pleasure in maintaining relationship* with the parents, was negatively affected to a moderate extent by the problematic parent behavior.

In sum, the findings impressed that despite having a marginally negative impact of the challenging behaviors on the teachers' *pleasure in working*; this factor (i.e. factor 1) explained a larger amount of difference in the findings. On the other hand, though the teachers reported neither having much nor too little negative impact of the challenging parent behavior on their *pleasure in relationship with the parents*, this factor was not able to explain a larger percentage of variance in the observations.

Effectiveness and Negative Feelings of the Teachers in Dealing with the Problematic Parent

The belief that one could control one's negative mood is associated with more adaptive outcomes for the teachers. However, researches on teacher stress have largely focused on environmental and contextual factors and have seemingly ignored the personality characteristics of the teachers. Teacher stress is associated with negative feeling and psychological distance, which in turn may lead to teachers' negative attributions of parent's behaviour and low tolerance to parent's problematic behavior (Prakke et. al. 2007).

It is contended that the outcomes of interfacing difficult parent behaviour and trying to deal with them could be a (a) teacher's *negative feelings* and (b) his/her *effectiveness* in dealing with the difficult parent. In the present study these variables were measured with the help of 11 statements of the PSQ (Part III) out of which 5 of the statements tried to assess whether the behaviour of a problematic parent affected the teacher's *effectiveness* and the remaining 6 measured the reported *negative feelings* of the teachers while working.

The first observation to be taken note of was that on the average the teachers' agreed that they were 'effective' (though not 'very effective') in dealing with a difficult parent. However, there was noticeable variability in the teachers' responses to this submission. Similarly, the teachers also agreed to have somewhat *negative feelings* while working.

As regard to the observations for the inter-correlation between the factors, highly significant and positive relationships were observed between teachers' *effectiveness* in dealing with the problematic parents and their reported *negative feelings* while working. The correlational finding indicated that when the teachers agreed to having lower degree of *effectiveness* they also reported more *negative feelings* while working. Their 'negative feeling' featured difficulty in

controlling emotions during the conflict with the parents, becoming upset and hurt when the parents repeatedly did not heed their advice seriously and feeling bad when things went wrong in the class room.

It has been observed that the teachers' perception of their own ability to handle challenging parent behaviour and establish positive relationships with them was a possible influence on the quality of teacher-parent relationship (Frijda, 1988). Similarly, higher degree of teacher self-efficacy or 'beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments' (Bandura, 1997), has been linked to a variety of positive outcomes. In the present study, teachers' *effectiveness* in handling the problematic parents was more or less about their self-efficacy or belief in being able to build good relationship with the parents, sort out problems, resolve conflicts, and competently handle a parent created argumentative situation. The result gave an impression that the teachers finding themselves low in self-efficacy (i.e., *effectiveness*) were likely to report higher degree of *negative feelings*.

Concluding the findings of the variables of teacher's *effectiveness* and their *negative feelings*, it was observed that on the average the teachers found themselves 'effective' (though not 'very effective') in dealing with a difficult parent but in saying so they displayed noticeable variability in their responses. Similarly, the teachers also agreed to have experienced somewhat *negative feelings* while working. The inter-correlational findings indicated that when the teachers agreed having 'lower' degree of *effectiveness* in dealing with the difficult parent, they also reported 'more' *negative feelings* while working.

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