BSc in Psychology
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Parental Stress in Parents of Young Children:
Effect from Social Support, Social Media Usage
and Gender Difference

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the BSc Psychology degree, Reykjavik University, this thesis is presented in the style of an article for submission to a peer-reviewed journal. This thesis was completed in the Spring of 2020 and may therefore have been significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The thesis and its findings should be viewed in light of that.
Abstract

The aim of this study is to examine parental stress in parents of young children in Iceland. Previous studies have mainly examined mothers and studies on the matter are getting old considering today’s society and technology. The main purpose of this current study is to see if there is a gender difference on parental stress in Iceland like majority of previous research studies have concluded. As well as if social support and communication through social media have a positive effect on parental stress and if time spent on social media has a negative effect on parental stress. A survey was submitted to participants of children at the ages between 1-6 years old. Participants were 120, 88 women and 32 men. The age ranged from 20 to 50 years and older. A multivariate regression was conducted to see if social support and social media usage had an effect on parental stress. The results showed no significant effect from the gender, social support or social media hypotheses nor how much time people spent on social media, on parental stress. Although, a significant positive effect was found by comparing oneself to other parents online on parental stress. Meaning, comparison increases parental stress.

Keywords: Parental stress, social support, social media, social comparison

Útdráttur


Efnið: Foreldrasteita, félaglegur stuðningur, samfélagsmiðlanotkun, félaglegur samanburður
Parental Stress in Parents of Young Children: Effect from Social Support, Social Media Usage and Gender Difference

Stress is a concept most of us are familiar with. Stress is a behavioural, physiological and psychological response to a stressor, and how we perceive that stressor determines how we react to it (Holt et. al., 2015). Becoming a parent is perceived to be one of the biggest stressors in a person’s life (Mulsow, Caldera, Pursley, Reifman, & Huston, 2002; Östberg, 1998). With that new role, many new changes and responsibilities may follow that parents must deal with.

Parental stress is stress specific to the parenting role. Abidin (as cited in Hildingsson & Thomas, 2014, p. 42) believed that parental stress was caused by “a disparity between perceived demands of parenting and the available resources parents had available to them to meet those demands”. Although most parents welcome this challenging new role, having support and resources the parent can seek when in need is presumed to be important.

Social support has been shown to be a protective factor against parental stress (Mulsow et al., 2002). Social support is generally defined as the perceived comfort, caring esteem or help an individual receives from others (Ogden, 2019). Parents with a good social network, support from the family and a partner have been shown to have lower parental stress than those parents with less support. A study by Mulsow and colleagues (2002) examined maternal stress in mothers over the first three years of their child’s life. Mulsow et al.’s results showed that social support was a significant predictor of parental stress the first three years after a child’s birth. Mothers with more social support reported less parental stress, but support from a partner was more important in the first six months. Overall, the more support the mother felt from her partner over those three years, the less parental stress she reported (Mulsow et al., 2002). Östberg & Hagekull’s study (2000) on mothers also found that social support could reduce parental stress to
some extent but said that it did not have a buffering effect against stress. Interestingly, Cairney, Boyle, Offord, & Racine (2003) did a study comparing single and married mothers together and if they differed in regard of parental stress. The results showed that single mothers were more stressed, perceived less social support and had fewer contacts with friends and family than married mothers (Cairney et al., 2003). By not having a partner, it may decrease the opportunities single mothers have to take part in social situations and get social support. Therefore, her social network may be smaller than of married mothers that have another caregiver (Cairney et al., 2003). This might also indicate that partner support is important. Partner support is generally described as a persons perceived emotional support or intimacy received from their romantic partner (Mulsow et al., 2002). Thorp, Krause, Cukrowicz, & Lynch did a study in 2004 on maternal stress eight weeks after birth and the quality in partner support the mother received. Their results showed that when the mother was dissatisfied with her communication with her partner and the support given, maternal stress increased (Mulsow et al., 2002; Thorp et al., 2004). Crnic and Greenberg (1990) and Hildingsson & Thomas (2014) came to the same conclusion that satisfactory partner support was related to lower parental stress. Additionally, they all showed that the mothers stress level was higher than that of fathers.

Gender difference is present in parental stress level between mothers and fathers. Mothers are expected to be the main caregiver as well as work outside the home in today’s society (Pinquart & Teubert, 2010). So, it is not surprising that the majority of research studies concluded that mothers feel more stressed than fathers. Widarsson et al. (2013) examined couples to understand the need of support during the first years of parenthood. Their results showed that the mothers experienced higher levels of stress compared to the fathers, like the research studies mentioned above showed as well (Crnic and Greenberg, 1990; Hildingsson &
In Widarsson et al.´s study (2013), the fathers however showed more stress than the mothers regarding one factor, “social isolation”, supporting Hildingsson & Thomas (2014) results, which suggested that the gender difference is caused by the difference in men and women´s nature. Mothers are more likely to get stressed over their role as a parent and the relationship they have with their partner. Fathers on the other hand were more likely to experience parental stress regarding social isolation (Hildingsson & Thomas, 2014). Widarsson and colleagues (2013) hypothesized that the social isolation factor was higher for men because mothers have bigger social networks and therefore feel less isolated. Why this difference in stress level is present is not clear but there are various factors that can influence parents. The fact that fathers are left out in majority of research studies on parental stress may contribute to the fact that we know less about parental stress in fathers compared to mothers.

In times as today with all our technology, social support can be sought from places that were not available before. The Internet, especially social media, has given people an opportunity to communicate better and share various information. It has even become a supplemental source of parental support (Plantin & Daneback, 2009). In Iceland, groups for mothers-to-be and newly mothers or “bumbuhópar” on Facebook are popular. In those groups, mothers can ask questions and share tips on parenting and more. These groups often lead to socialization outside the network as well. Unfortunately, these groups are only geared towards mothers, which may contribute to feelings of paternal isolation in fathers, just like Hildingsson & Thomas (2014) and Widarsson et al. (2013) concluded. Holtz, Smock & Reyes-Gastelum (2015) did a research study with mothers on social support through a Facebook group where mothers could communicate with one another. Holtz and colleagues concluded that these kinds of groups were an important
source of social support. The study showed that the mothers saw the Facebook group as a convenient way to seek information, give advice and interact with someone. Having that opportunity has a positive effect because they can share and seek information and interact with people in the same position as them and engage in the conversation (Holtz et al., 2015). Doty & Dworkin (2014) also concluded that online groups targeted for parents have been a place of social support, but they saw a need for further examination on these online groups. From a critical review, they reported that parents gained informational and emotional support via the internet and overcame isolation. Being connected to friends and family through Facebook was positively associated with parental adjustment for both mothers and fathers. Isolated parents especially sought social support through the internet. Emotional support and sharing experiences was connected to receiving social support, which may reduce stress regarding parenting (Doty & Dworkin, 2014). A downside to these parenting sites is that they can become a ground for social comparison and bring pressure of portraying the “perfect parent” or comparing their parenting to other users (Coyne, McDaniel & Stockdale, 2017). This comparison might then lead to more stress. Another downside of social media usage is if parents use it for a long period of time. Parental stress has been related to spending more time on Facebook, so the more time spent on Facebook, the more stressed parents became (Bartholomew, Schoppe-Sullivan, Glassman, Dush & Sullivan, 2012; Coyne et al., 2017).

This current study will examine if social support and social media usage have an inducing or reducing effect on parental stress in a parent´s daily life and if there is a gender difference on parental stress in Icelandic parents. Knowing about these factors that can influence parental stress may reduce potential burden the parent might experience. By being aware of those components it might lead to parents seeking help or support to manage and prevent parental
stress. Parental stress has not been studied much in Iceland, especially in relation to social media usage. Previous studies are getting a bit old considering the social changes in recent years, so this study will be a good update to the literature. This research study will also examine both the mother and the father, which former studies lack (Cairney et al., 2003; Coyne et al., 2017; Crnic & Greenberg, 1990; Mulsow et al., 2002). The hypotheses of this research study are that women will have a higher score on the Parental Stress Scale showing the gender difference that has been present over the years (Crnic & Greenberg, 1990; Piskernik et al., 2018). Another hypothesis is that having less social support is associated with higher parental stress level. Spending more time on social media is hypothesised to be related to higher parental stress and lastly, being connected to other parents online is hypothesised to be related to lower parental stress.

**Method**

**Participants**

Participants were parents of children at the ages from one to six years old. Participants were gathered from three public nursery schools in the capital area of Iceland and from participants on Facebook, therefore, a convenience sample. Participants received a link to an online survey via email or via Facebook. Participation was optional and no reward was given for partaking in the study. The number of participants was 120. 88 participants were women (73.3%) and 32 were men (26.7%). The age ranged from 20-29 to 50 and older with the most frequent and mean age range at 30-39. The majority of participants were either married (49.2%) or in a cohabiting relationship (42.5%). Majority had college education (70%) and most or 58.3% were in a full-time job. Most participants had two children (33.3%) and most of them had children at the ages between 0-2 (30.8%) or 3-5 (29.5%).
Measures

**Parental Stress Scale (PSS):** The PSS was used to measure the parental stress level of participants. It is a measurement tool composed of 18 questions. Eight of them are constructed as to indicate lesser stress and the other ten are worded as to indicate more stress, so it captures both the joys and demands of parenting (Louie, Cromer & Berry, 2017). It is a self-report questionnaire for parents on their interaction with their child and their role as a parent (Louie et al., 2017). The questions are on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree. An example of a question is “Having children leaves little time and flexibility in my life” (Berry & Jones, 1995). To score the stress level of parents, all the items scores are summed up to get the final sum. The possible final scores range from 18 (low stress) to 90 (high stress). So, the higher the PSS score, the higher the parental stress (Berry & Jones, 1995). An advantage to the PSS is that it is short and easily understood and administered (Louie et al., 2017). The scales reliability is thought to be good (coefficient alpha of .83) as well as test-retest reliability of .81 (Louie et al., 2017). In this research study, the items were translated to Icelandic by the author but it was back-translated and pre-tested without trouble. A Cronbach’s alpha reliability test was conducted for the translated PSS in this study. The test showed acceptable reliability of .71.

**The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS):** The MSPSS was used to measure the participant’s perception on social support. It is a self-report measurement on social support received from others (Zimet, Dahlem, Zimet & Farley 1988). Social support is divided into three subscales, from friends, family and a significant other. The questions are all in all 12, four on each subscale. They are on a seven-point Likert scale, ranging from 1=very strongly disagree to 7=very strongly agree. An example of a question is “I can count on my
friends when things go wrong” (Zimet et al., 1988). To find the final sum of social support, the sum of scores from all the questions are divided by 12. The highest score from all the questions is 7 and lowest 1. The same calculation is used for the individual subscales. Those are scored by adding the scores together and dividing them by 4. The responses are categorized by outcome into low, medium and high perceived social support. Low social support is considered to be scores between 1-2.9, medium social support with scores between 3-5 and high social support between 5.1-7 (Zimet et al., 1988). The list is considered to have good internal validity and test-retest reliability, a moderate construct validity as well as strong factorial validity on the three subscales (Zimet, Powell, Farley, 1990). The list is simple which makes it easy for participants to answer. The list was translated by the author of this study to Icelandic and it was also back-translated and pre-tested without any trouble. A Cronbach´s alpha reliability test was conducted for the translated MSPSS in this study. The test showed excellent reliability of .95.

Additionally, there were six questions regarding social media usage and social connections via social media. Four of those questions were on a three-point scale (yes, to some point, no). An example of a question is “Do you compare yourself to other parents on social media?”. The other two examined what social media site was the most popular (Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter, other) and the other how much time participants spent on social media on average each day (1 hour or less, 2-3hrs, 4-5hrs, 6hrs or more). Other questions in the study were for background information. Age was on an eight-point scale, 19 years or younger, 20-24, 25-29, 30-34, 35-39, 40-44, 45-49 or 50 years or older. Gender was on a three-point scale (male, female, other). Highest education level was on a five-point scale with the choices elementary school, high school, undergraduate degree, post graduate degree or other. Work status was on a six-point scale, full-time job, part-time job, unemployed or invalid, on parental
leave, or other. Relationship status was also on a six-point scale with the choices married, in a cohabiting relationship, non-cohabiting relationship, single or divorced. How many kids do you have was on a five-point scale (1, 2, 3, 4, 5 or more) and what are their ages was on a six-point scale (0-2, 3-5, 6-8, 9-11, 12-14 and 15 or older).

**Procedure**

An online survey was conducted on the website Questionpro and left open for four weeks. The nursery schools were contacted through email to see if they were interested in sending out the online survey to parents at each kindergarten. The three nursery schools that granted permission were sent a link to the survey to send forward to the parents or the researcher herself sent it out for them. Two weeks later, the survey was put up on Facebook where parents of 1-6-year olds were encouraged to partake in the survey. This was done because nursery schools were hard to contact and get involved in this current study because of the Covid-19 pandemic. Participants were informed that there was no attributable risk of participating and that the data conducted would not be used in any other way besides in this current research study. Participants were informed that they could quit the survey at any time or skip specific questions. After the data was gathered through the website, the data was transferred to SPSS.

**Data analysis**

Data analysis was conducted with the statistics program IBM SPSS 26. Descriptive statistics were first found to examine the data. A Pearson correlation and independent t-tests were conducted to see if there were any correlations or differences between variables. Lastly, a multivariate regression was conducted to test the hypotheses and see if any of the variables had an effect on parental stress.
Results

The mean score from the Parental Stress Scale was 35 ($SD=7.5$). For women the mean score was 35.4 ($SD=8.1$) and for men the mean was 34.7 ($SD=5.6$). The minimum score was 19 points and the maximum score was 52 points (figure 1). The most frequent score was 30 points. Most participants (78.2%) scored on the lower side on the parental stress scale and the rest scored in the middle (21.8%). No one scored as having high parental stress level. The score distribution can be seen in figure 1.

Figure 1. Distribution of the scores from the Parental Stress Scale.

The scores on The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support ranged from the minimum of 1 to the maximum of 7. The most frequent score was 7 points. The mean score was 5.9 points ($SD=1.3$). The mean score for women was 5.9 ($SD=1.3$) and the mean for men was 5.7 ($SD=1.0$). Only five participants scored on low social support (4.2%), 15 participants scored on medium social support (12.5%) and 100 participants scored in the high social support (83.3%) (figure 2).
Most participants (66.7%) spent 2-3 hours on social media on average each day (table 1). The most frequently used social media platform was Facebook with 49.2% of participants and 41.7% participants using Instagram the most (table 1). Participants that were in contact with other parents online were 70% of the sample. Participants who compared themselves to other parents online were 32.5% and only 22.5% said they were affected by social media influencers (table 2).

Table 1
A frequency table of which social media platform is the most common and how many hours participants spend on social media on average each day.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Platform</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Hours</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>49.2</td>
<td>1 hr or less</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>25.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instagram</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>41.7</td>
<td>2-3 hrs.</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>66.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snapchat</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>4-5 hrs.</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twitter</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2
A frequency table regarding participant’s relationship with other users online.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social media exchange</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Connect to other parents online</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>70.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comparison to other parents online</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>32.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affected by social media influencers</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>22.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Independent t-test.** An independent t-test was calculated to compare parents that used social media and those who did not to see if that had any difference on parental stress and social support. Being connected to other parents online did not have a significant difference on parental stress nor social support, compared to those who did not. Comparing oneself to other parents online ($M=37.4$, $SD=7.1$) showed a significant difference on parental stress compared to those who did not compare themselves ($M=34.1$, $SD=7.4$); $t(117)=2.12$, $p=.028$ but no difference was found on social support. Being affected by social media influencers or not did not show a significant difference on parental stress nor social media. An independent t-test was also calculated to see if there was a significant gender difference on parental stress and perceived social support. The conclusions showed that there was not a significant difference between mothers and fathers on parental stress nor social support.

**Bivariate correlation.** A bivariate Pearson correlation test was conducted between parental stress and social support. A weak negative correlation was found between the two variables $r=-.165$, $p=.072$, although non-significant.

**Multiple regression.** A multiple regression analysis was conducted to calculate if five of the independent variables (social support, gender, connections on social media, time spent on social media and comparison to others) had an effect on parental stress. No significant effect was
found by four out of the five variables tested on parental stress $F(5,113)=2.285$, $p=.051$ with an $R^2$ of .052. So, the independent variables explained only 5.2% of parental stress. The independent variable that showed a significant effect and the most effect on parental stress (Beta=.207) was whether parents compared themselves to other parents online. Comparison to other parents had a positive effect by the unstandardized coefficient (B) of 2.746 on parental stress if comparison would increase by one (table 3). So, parental stress would increase with comparison to other parents.

Table 3
Results from a multiple regression analysis of the dependent variable (parental stress) and the five independent variables.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>B</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>$p$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Constant)</td>
<td>52.325</td>
<td>-0.889</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MSPSS</td>
<td>-0.889</td>
<td>-0.152</td>
<td>0.095</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>-0.081</td>
<td>-0.005</td>
<td>0.960</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connect to other parents</td>
<td>0.183</td>
<td>0.020</td>
<td>0.832</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>online</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hours on social media</td>
<td>1.575</td>
<td>0.118</td>
<td>0.210</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comparison to other parents online</td>
<td>2.746</td>
<td>0.207</td>
<td>0.030</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Discussion

This research study was conducted to see if social support and social media usage related to parental stress as well as if there was a gender difference among Icelandic parents on parental stress. A questionnaire was sent out to parents of children at a particular age to examine their stress level, perceived social support and social media usage. Participants were quite homogeneous concerning their background. There was little variety in age, education, job status
and marital status. Despite sufficient participants, no significant effect was found on parental stress from any of the hypothesised variables. Considering that the hypotheses came out non-significant, it cannot be said that any of them had an effect on parental stress. Yet, some indications can be seen and surprising findings.

Results from the Parental Stress Scale showed that the majority of participants scored on the lower side of the scale, a few in the middle but no one scored higher than 52 points out of the 90 possible. This shows that parental stress is low in this particular sample and no one qualified as having high parental stress. Women scored more often on the higher end of the scale than men but the mean score did not differ by much between men and women. The regression analysis on gender difference came out non-significant so we cannot say that there is a difference between mothers and fathers regarding parental stress in this current research study. Although, the indication that mothers were more stressed than fathers can be seen. Conclusions from the independent t-test did not show a difference between mothers and fathers on parental stress either. The results on gender difference in this current study are therefore not in line with previous studies. The studies by Widarsson et al. (2013) and Hildingsson & Thomas (2014) concluded that mothers were more stressed than the fathers, besides the factor social isolation. Östberg & Hagekull (2000) and Crnic & Greenberg (1990) also concluded that mothers had a higher stress level like many others before and after them but these results have been constant over the years (Crnic & Greenberg, 1990; Piskernik et al., 2018). The hypothesis of this research study that there is a gender difference in parental stress, specifically, that mothers have higher stress level cannot be seen from the results of the regression analysis. Therefore, the gender hypothesis cannot be confirmed nor are the results in line with previous studies (Crnic and Greenberg, 1990; Hildingsson & Thomas, 2014; Piskernik et al., 2018; Widarsson et al., 2013).
The reason for the results in this current study may be because the sample represents participants of a high socioeconomic status (SES) and may therefore have lower stress than people of lower SES. With more variety in participants and more variance in the scores, a gender difference might be found.

Results from the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support showed that most participants would say they had high support from their family, friends and significant other, with the majority scoring at the highest possible score (7). Men and women scored very similarly on the MSPSS with the mean score differing only by .2 points. These results show that men and women perceived themselves to get the same amount of support. Those results are not in line with Hildingsson & Thomas (2014) and Widarsson and colleagues (2013) results. Their results showed that fathers experienced themselves having less support and were more isolated than mothers. Having more social support did not show to be a significant factor on parental stress from the regression analysis nor did the independent t-test show a significant difference on social support between mothers and fathers. The Pearson correlation test showed only a weak correlation between parental stress and social support. The hypothesis that having less social support was associated with higher level of stress can therefore not be confirmed from the results of the regression analysis. The results indicated that less support had a negative effect on parental stress but not significant. These results do not show the same effect as previous studies where social support has been shown to be a positive influence on parental stress. The research by Mulsow et al. (2002) and Östberg & Hagekull (2000) showed that social support was important for mothers for lower stress level but they concluded that the more social support a mother reported, the less parental stress she had. Partner support is additionally an important factor in social support and having satisfactory partner support has been shown to have a positive effect
on parents (Mulsow et al., 2002; Thorp et al., 2004). The fact that most participants in this current study scored as having high social support can be one reason for there not being a significant effect from social support on parental stress. This might be due to the ceiling effect which makes discrimination difficult.

Majority of participants said they were connected to other parents on social media. Nevertheless, the hypothesis that parents that were more connected to other parents online had lower parental stress could not be confirmed. The regression analysis did not show a significant effect from connection to other parents on parental stress. The results indicated that it had a very weak positive effect, although, not significant. Similarly, the independent t-test did not find a significant difference between parents that were connected to other parents online compared to those who were not. Despite this study not showing a significant effect from connection to others online, previous studies have shown that being in touch with others and sharing tips on social media, can reduce parental stress (Bartholomew et al., 2012; Doty & Dworkin, 2014; Holtz et al., 2015). Previous studies showed that parents felt that social media sites like Facebook were a good way to seek information, give advice and interact with others. These sites are an important source of social support for parents, especially isolated parents (Doty & Dworkin, 2014; Holtz et al., 2015). The results of this current study are therefore not in line with previous studies as well as the hypotheses of social media connections failed. The normalization of social media usage could be a part of the reason for these results.

What is interesting is that having social support according to the MSPSS did not show a significant effect on parental stress nor being connected to other parents through social media but comparing oneself to other parents online showed a significant effect on parental stress. The regression analysis showed that comparing oneself to other parents online had a significant
positive effect on parental stress. So, participants who compared themselves to others online would increase in stress level. The independent t-test also showed a significant difference between those who compared themselves and those who did not. These were surprising results and not one of the hypotheses, but these are not new findings. Like was mentioned briefly from Coyne et al.’s research study (2017), comparison has a negative effect on parents when they start comparing themselves and their parenting together with other parents on social media. Which then leads to more stress (Bartholomew et al., 2012; Coyne et al., 2017). Upward comparison can especially be a negative thing and might lead to more stress. People on social media only show others a small and prearranged part of their life they want others to see. Comparing oneself to others on social media is therefore not rational and might have a negative effect on people, like heighten stress or other negative consequences.

Parents spent a moderate time on social media but the hypothesis was that the more time spent on social media, the more parental stress parents had. The results from the regression analysis did not show that time on social media had a significant effect on parental stress. The results indicated that more time spent on social media had a negative effect on parental stress, though not significant. This hypothesis can therefore not be confirmed and is not in line with previous studies. Previous research studies have shown the effect that the greater time spent on social media, more specifically Facebook, the more stress parents reported (Bartholomew et al., 2012; Coyne et al., 2017). This current study did not specifically focus on Facebook but it was the social media platform that parents most often used. It is a platform where parents can be in contact with other parents and has been used for that purpose successfully like Doty & Dworkin (2014), Holtz et al. (2015) and Bartholomew et al. (2012) have shown. But not for an unduly amount of time.
To conclude, none of the hypotheses could be confirmed but surprising findings were found instead. Despite non-significance, indications can be seen from the regression analysis from the variables tested. With a few modifications, this study could be improved so more reliable conclusions can be found. A few limitations to this research study and what might have had an effect on the results was that the participation group was very homogeneous. Their socioeconomic background was very similar. Because of that, it would be difficult to generalize these results to other populations with more diversity to them. This study only focused on parents of children at the ages from one to six years old so the results cannot be generalized to other age groups. The PSS and MSPSS questionnaires were not translated to Icelandic by a professional which is recommended. Also, having an accepted measurement to examine social media usage would have been an advantage for more reliable results. The majority of data in this study came from a self-report questionnaire so the results might be biased from participants answers. The pandemic Covid-19 had its effect on this research study. This study was conducted and processed around the time the pandemic was emerging in Iceland. Recruiting more participants was therefore difficult. Although, the stress level parents experienced should not have been affected by the circumstances it caused whereas parents answered the questionnaire before the pandemic had spread out in Iceland. Advantages to this research study are that it is the first of its kind in Iceland to examine parental stress in regard of social media usage and connections online. This research study examined both mothers and fathers which has not been done enough, but it is important to know where both mothers and fathers stand on this matter. The fact that comparison to other parents online has a significant effect on parental stress is a new finding in the literature in Iceland and should be examined further. The literature on parental stress has become quite old so this research study is a timely update.
Future researchers should consider having more participants and a more diverse group in their sample in future studies. Getting the questionnaires properly translated would also be recommended for better validity as well as have an accepted measurement for the social media questions. What would be interesting to examine is if there is a difference in stress level in single parents versus married ones in Iceland, as well as study parental stress in regard of social media further. Overall, parental stress should be continually studied, including both mothers and fathers. This topic is important to research because stress can have great effects on parents as well as the children of those parents.
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