

COVID-19 PANDEMIC STRESSORS AND PARENTAL DIFFICULTIES IN EMOTION REGULATION IN PUERTO RICO

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ABSTRACT

PURPOSE: The COVID-19 pandemic introduced new life stressors that post an increased risk of mental health symptoms for families. Emotion regulation (ER) refers to processes by which an individual adaptively copes with different daily life situations. ER can be a risk factor of various forms of mental health conditions that could be exacerbated by life stressors. The current study aimed to determine the effects of COVID-19 stressors on difficulties in ER among Puerto Rican parents of children aged 3-17 years.

METHODS: We administered an online survey between April 2022-February 2023. 265 parents completed the survey. We used a scale developed by the NIH-ECHO COVID-19 Task Force to assess COVID-19 stressors and the Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale to evaluate ER.

RESULTS: Most parents were women ($n=253$, 93.9%). We used hierarchical multiple regression to assess COVID-19 stressors to predict ER, adjusting for parental age, adversity, and mental health history. As step 1, age, adversity, and mental health history explained 23.6% of the variance of ER. After entering COVID-19 stressors as step 2, the variance explained by the whole model was 27.2%, $F(4, 260)=24.225$, $p < .001$. In the final model, COVID-19 stressors ($\beta=.20$, $p < .001$), and adversity ($\beta=.16$, $p = .003$) were statistically significant.

CONCLUSION: COVID-19 stressors could significantly increase parental difficulties in ER. Health care professionals should identify those at elevated risk of COVID-19 stressors when providing physical and mental health care. These findings may lead to the development of interventions to ER coping skills to mitigate the long-term sequelae of COVID-19.

AIM

To determine the effects of COVID-19 stressors on difficulties of emotion regulation in parents of children aged 3 and 17.

METHODS

Research Design

- Cross-sectional correlational design
- An online survey between April 2022-February 2023

Sample

- 265 parents of children aged 3 and 17 years
- Age: 25 – 67 years; Women ($n=253$, 93.9%)

Measures

- Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale (Gratz & Roemer, 2004)
- NIH-ECHO COVID-19 Task Force-COVID-19 stressors
- CDC's (2023) Adverse Childhood Experiences Scale

COVID-19 stressors significantly increased parental difficulties in emotion regulation (ER)

Table 1

Descriptive statistics and correlations between study variables

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1. Mental Health History	.57	.76	–				
2. Age	40.25	7.60	1.00	–			
3. Adverse Childhood Experiences	4.18	3.55	.15*	-.08	–		
4. Covid Stress	4.59	2.47	.27**	-.10	.11	–	
5. Difficulties in Emotion Regulation	41.04	15.74	.39**	-.21**	.26**	.32**	–

* $p < .05$ (2-tailed), ** $p < .01$ (2-tailed)

RESULTS

We used Spearman correlations to assess associations between main variables. We found low positive correlations between parental difficulties in ER and: a) Covid-19 stressors, b) childhood adversity, and c) mental health history.

CONCLUSION

Difficulties in ER is central to the development and maintenance of mental health problems. Parental difficulties in ER is associated with COVID-19 stressors, adversity and mental health history.

Table 2

Hierarchical regression to determine effects of COVID-19 stressors in parental ER

Variable	B	95% CI for B		SE B	β	R ²	ΔR^2
		LL	UL				
Step 1							
Constant	50.028	40.508	59.547	4.83		.236	.236
Mental Health History	7.663	5.439	9.888	1.13	.371		
Age	-.415	-.637	-.193	.11	-.200		
Adverse Childhood Experiences	.807	.327	1.287	.24	.182		
Step 2							
Constant	43.682	33.719	53.645	5.06		.272	.035
Mental Health History	6.730	4.492	8.968	1.14	.326		
Age	-.378	-.596	-.160	.11	-.182		
Adverse Childhood Experiences	.729	.258	1.201	.24	.164		
Covid Stress	1.241	.551	1.931	.35	.195		

Note. CI = confidence interval; LL = lower limit; UL = upper limit.

RESULTS

We used hierarchical multiple regression to assess COVID-19 stressors to predict parents' difficulties in ER. After controlling for parental age, adversity, and mental health history, COVID-19 stressors ($\beta=.20$, $p < .001$) was significant associated with parental difficulties in ER, $F(4, 260)=24.225$, $p < .001$.

CONCLUSION

COVID-19 stressors could significantly increase parental difficulties in ER. Health care professionals should identify those at elevated risk of COVID-19 stressors (including diagnosis) when providing physical and mental health care.

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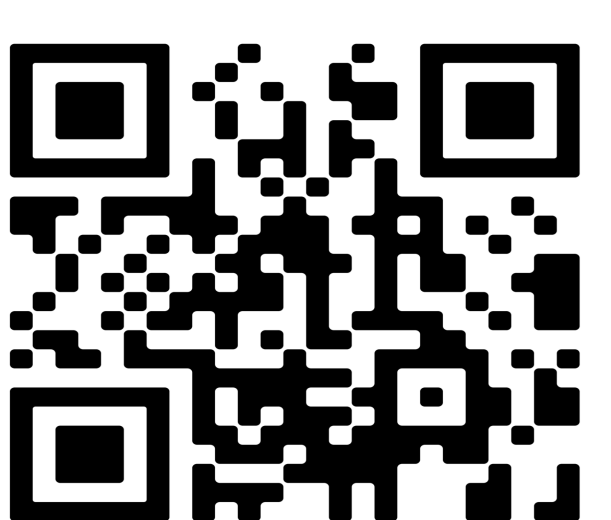
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