

# *Association between Parenting Stress Increase and Parental Burnout*

Ruirui Li<sup>a,\*</sup>

*School of Psychology, Northwest Normal University, Lanzhou, Gansu, China*

*<sup>a</sup>2089158904@qq.com*

*\*Corresponding author*

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**Abstract:** This study aims to investigate the connection between parenting stress and parental burnout, using a sample of Chinese parents. A total of 461 parents participated in the survey, and the data were analyzed using correlation and regression analyses to assess the relationship between parenting stress and burnout. The findings revealed a significant positive correlation between parenting stress and parental burnout ( $r = 0.555$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), with parenting stress emerging as a significant predictor of parental burnout ( $\beta = 0.550$ ,  $t = 14.445$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). This association remained robust even after controlling for demographic factors, including parents' gender, birth order, educational background, and family income. Further analysis revealed that parents' gender and birth order had significant effects on burnout levels, with female parents and parents of only children reporting higher levels of burnout. These findings support the theoretical hypothesis that parenting stress is a crucial antecedent of parental burnout, highlighting the depletion effect of parenting stress on parental emotional exhaustion in cultural contexts that emphasize family responsibility and children's achievements. The study's conclusions provide empirical evidence for understanding the formation mechanisms of parental burnout and offer insights for future targeted family interventions and support strategies.

## **1. Introduction**

Parents have always placed significant importance on the upbringing and education of their children, viewing it as a fulfilling and rewarding experience[1]. This includes higher overall well-being, daily emotional experiences, and a sense of meaning in life from parenting activities compared to non-parents[2]. However, research has highlighted that the parenting process can also be accompanied by significant psychological strain and emotional exhaustion[3]. Under the continuous accumulation of parenting stress, some parents may experience a specific emotional disorder, known as parental burnout. Parental burnout refers to a chronic emotional exhaustion state caused by long-term and excessive parenting stress that exceeds the resources parents can mobilize[4]. This concept differs from general parenting stress, emphasizing the chronic psychological exhaustion resulting from long-term imbalance.

In recent years, with changes in the social environment and rising expectations of parenting, the incidence of parental burnout has been on the rise, attracting widespread attention from scholars.

Large-scale cross-national surveys indicate that the incidence of parental burnout in Western countries is approximately 5%, while in Asian countries (including China), it ranges from 1% to 2%[5]. Although the incidence of parental burnout is relatively lower among Chinese parents compared to Western societies, the pressure faced by Chinese parents has significantly increased in recent years due to rising parenting costs and intensifying educational competition. Additionally, some studies have pointed out that parental burnout not only affects parents' own well-being but can also lead to neglect, abusive behavior, and negatively impact the parent-child relationship and children's development[3]. This makes parental burnout a critical issue that requires urgent attention.

Parenting stress is typically defined as the distress or discomfort experienced due to the various demands associated with fulfilling the parental role[6]. When individuals perceive external demands as exceeding their coping abilities, they are likely to experience stress responses, which, if not effectively managed over time, can lead to emotional exhaustion and other consequences[5]. In the context of parenting, stress not only arises from difficulties in managing children's behavior but is also closely linked to parents' own role expectations, economic burdens, and social support systems[7]. Although research on parental burnout has been increasing, existing literature predominantly focuses on general parental populations and lacks in-depth exploration of the direct mechanisms through which parenting stress affects parental burnout, particularly within different cultural contexts such as Chinese family settings. Given that Chinese culture emphasizes family responsibility and high expectations for children's success, these cultural traits may exacerbate the emotional burden parents experience when faced with parenting stress, thereby increasing the risk of parental burnout.

Against this backdrop, the present study focuses on Chinese parents and aims to systematically examine the direct impact of parenting stress on parental burnout. Understanding this relationship not only helps deepen our understanding of the mechanisms underlying parental burnout but also provides theoretical support for the development of effective family intervention and support strategies in the future.

## **2. Methods**

### **2.1 Subject**

This research targeted parents from different provinces and cities across China, employing an online random sampling survey. Out of 465 collected questionnaires, 461 were deemed valid after filtering out those with inconsistent response times or uniform answering patterns, achieving a valid response rate of 99.13%. Among the valid samples, 74 were male (16.1%) and 387 were female (83.9%). Regarding educational background, 3.6% (17 participants) had a middle school education or below, 8.2% (38 participants) had high school education, 76.5% (353 participants) had a college degree, and 11.4% (53 participants) held a master's degree or higher.

### **2.2 Research Tools**

#### **2.2.1 Demographic Information**

The first section of the questionnaire included demographic information: parents' gender, children's age, household monthly income, education level, and children's gender.

#### **2.2.2 Parenting Stress Scale**

This study utilized the 15-item short form of the Parenting Stress Scale, revised by Yeh et al.

(2001), which measures three dimensions: parenting distress, difficulties in parent-child interactions, and challenging child behaviors. The scale uses a 5-point Likert response format (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree), with higher scores reflecting greater parenting stress. In this study, the scale demonstrated high internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.89 [8].

### 2.2.3 Parental Burnout Scale

The Parental Burnout Scale - Short Form, revised by Wang Wei et al. (2021), was used in this study. The scale consists of 7 items, with a 7-point rating scale ranging from 1 (never) to 7 (every day). A higher score indicates a higher level of burnout [9].

## 2.3 Data Analysis

Data analysis for this study was performed using SPSS 26.0. Correlation and regression analyses were used to examine and confirm the relationship between parenting stress and parental burnout.

## 3. Results

Table 1: Correlation Analysis between Parenting Stress and Parental Burnout (N = 461)

	1) Parent's Gender	2) Birth Order	3) Education Level	4) Household Monthly Income	5
5) Parenting Stress	0.029	-0.025	-0.032	-0.115*	——
6) Parental Burnout	0.194***	-0.113*	-0.003	-0.035	0.555***

Note:\*\*\*P<0.001,\*\*P<0.01,\*P<0.05.

As presented in Table 1, Pearson correlation analysis indicated a significant positive relationship between parenting stress and parental burnout ( $r = 0.555$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), suggesting that higher levels of parenting stress are linked to an increased risk of parental burnout. Additionally, a significant correlation was found between parents' gender and parental burnout ( $r = 0.194$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Birth order was also correlated with parental burnout ( $r = -0.113$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), and household monthly income showed a correlation with parenting stress ( $r = -0.115$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ).

Table 2: The Impact of Parenting Stress on Parental Burnout (N = 461)

	Parental Burnout					
	Model1			Model2		
	$\beta$	t	p	$\beta$	t	p
1) Parent's Gender	0.193	4.222	0.000	0.181	4.774	0.000
Birth Order	-0.120	-2.596	0.010	-0.098	-2.550	0.011
Education Level	-0.009	-0.189	0.850	-0.008	-0.189	0.850
Household Monthly Income	-0.036	-0.742	0.459	0.029	0.729	0.467
2) Parenting Stress				0.550	14.445	0.000
R2	0.052			0.350		
F	6.280***			49.047***		

Note:\*\*\*P<0.001,\*\*P<0.01,\*P<0.05.

As indicated in Table 2, linear regression analysis showed that educational level and monthly household income were not significant predictors of parental burnout ( $ps > 0.05$ ). In contrast, parental gender and birth order did predict burnout levels ( $ps < 0.05$ ). Additionally, parenting stress was a significant positive predictor of parental burnout ( $\beta = 0.550$ ,  $t = 14.445$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ).

## 4. Discussion

This study aims to explore the relationship between parenting stress and parental burnout, with empirical verification conducted within the Chinese cultural context. The findings demonstrate a significant positive association between parenting stress and parental burnout, indicating that increased levels of parenting stress are linked to a greater risk of experiencing burnout. This finding supports the theoretical hypothesis that parenting stress is an important antecedent variable of parental burnout. Previous studies have emphasized that prolonged, high-intensity parenting stress is a critical contributor to emotional exhaustion, emotional disengagement from children, and diminished parental self-efficacy [3]. The relationship was further replicated in the Chinese parent sample, indicating that even within a cultural context that emphasizes family responsibility and achievement orientation for children, the depleting effect of parenting stress remains prevalent. Even after adjusting for demographic variables including parents' gender, birth order, education level, and household income, parenting stress maintained a significant independent predictive effect on parental burnout, underscoring the pivotal role of stressors in the emergence of burnout. Notably, the analysis also found that parents' gender and birth order significantly influenced parental burnout, which aligns with some studies suggesting that female parents and parents of only children may face greater psychological pressure and a higher risk of burnout due to heavier role burdens or higher expectations for their children [1].

From a practical perspective, this study emphasizes the importance of intervening in parenting stress. Previous research has shown that effective social support, good family functioning, and positive emotion regulation strategies can buffer the negative impact of parenting stress on parental burnout [7,10]. Therefore, future interventions could focus on enhancing parental resources (such as social support, emotion regulation abilities, and parenting efficacy) and reducing parenting demands (such as adjusting expectations for children's achievements) in order to reduce the incidence of parental burnout. Overall, this study deepens our understanding of the mechanisms underlying parental burnout and highlights the critical role of parenting stress as a key risk factor. The findings provide empirical evidence for developing mental health interventions and family support policies aimed at parents, and lay the groundwork for further exploration of parental burnout phenomena in diverse cultural contexts.

## 5. Limitations and Future Directions

Despite the meaningful findings this study has provided in revealing the relationship between parenting stress and parental burnout, several limitations remain, which should be addressed in future research. This study employed a cross-sectional design, which cannot establish causal relationships between the variables. Although a significant association was found between parenting stress and parental burnout, the specific causal pathways need further verification through longitudinal tracking or experimental studies. Future research could adopt multiple time-point measurements to dynamically examine the long-term effects of changes in parenting stress on the development of parental burnout.

This study primarily relied on self-reported questionnaires, which may be influenced by social desirability bias or participants' subjective cognitive biases. Future studies could incorporate multi-source data, such as evaluations from children, teacher observations, or behavioral assessments, to enhance the objectivity and ecological validity of the findings. The sample in this study was mainly drawn from certain provinces and cities in China, predominantly consisting of parents with higher education levels, which limits the representativeness of the sample. Future research should expand the diversity of the sample's geographical location and socioeconomic background, particularly by including more rural or low-income families, to increase the

generalizability and applicability of the findings. This study did not delve into potential mediating or moderating variables, such as emotion regulation strategies, perceived social support, or parenting efficacy, which may play a role in the relationship between parenting stress and parental burnout. Future studies could construct more complex models to explore the pathways of multiple variable interactions, providing a comprehensive understanding of the mechanisms underlying parental burnout.

In summary, future research should further expand upon research design, data sources, sample diversity, and the exploration of underlying mechanisms to deepen our understanding of the causes and intervention strategies for parental burnout, and provide a scientific basis for developing more targeted family support policies.

## 6. Conclusion

This study systematically examined the impact mechanism of parenting stress on parental burnout within the Chinese parent population. The findings revealed that parenting stress is not only significantly and positively associated with parental burnout but also remains a strong predictor of burnout, even when controlling for demographic factors such as gender, birth order, education level, and household income. This finding supports the theoretical hypothesis that parenting stress is an important antecedent variable of parental burnout, further emphasizing the depleting effect of accumulated parenting stress on the risk of emotional exhaustion in parents within the current social environment. Additionally, the study found significant differences in parental burnout levels based on parents' gender and birth order, with female parents and parents of only children showing higher levels of burnout. This suggests that intervention measures should focus on the risk characteristics of specific groups. Overall, this study not only enriches the empirical research in the field of parental burnout but also provides important insights into the relationship between family parenting stress and parental mental health within the Chinese cultural context. In future intervention practices, reducing parenting stress, enhancing family support systems, and strengthening emotional regulation resources will be crucial directions for preventing and alleviating parental burnout.

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