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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Parenting fatigue, sexual intimacy, and religious coping strategies: A Critical Review

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Abstract

Parenting fatigue is a multifaceted phenomenon characterized by chronic physical, emotional, and psychological exhaustion stemming from the unrelenting demands of raising children. This critical review synthesizes empirical findings on the intersections of parenting fatigue, sexual intimacy, and religious coping strategies, with particular attention to cultural and gender dynamics. Results consistently indicate that elevated levels of parenting fatigue correlate with decreased marital satisfaction, diminished libido, and weakened emotional connectivity between partners, often intensifying the risk of long-term relational and mental health complications. Although religious coping–through prayer, communal worship, and faith-based practices–can alleviate stress and bolster resilience, its effectiveness varies significantly across cultural contexts and personal beliefs. Many studies highlight a bias toward traditional family structures and maternal experiences, signalling a shortage of research on fathers, non-traditional families, and diverse religious or spiritual frameworks. The review also uncovers methodological gaps, including limited longitudinal research, insufficient cross-cultural comparisons, and an overemphasis on adverse outcomes to the neglect of positive dimensions such as marital resilience and spiritual growth. Overall, this paper advocates for more inclusive, longitudinal, and culturally sensitive investigations and integrated interventions addressing mental and sexual health. By illuminating the complexity of parenting fatigue and its ripple effects on sexual intimacy and coping mechanisms, this review offers valuable insights for designing culturally attuned mental health and family interventions that holistically support parents and couples. Clinicians can leverage this evidence to develop integrative therapeutic approaches, while policymakers can use it to inform inclusive programs that strengthen diverse family structures–promoting both psychological well-being and relational health.

Keywords: Coping; Literature review; Marital Satisfaction; Parenting Fatigue; Sexual intimacy

INTRODUCTION

Parenting Fatigue: Definition and Impact

Parenting is a profoundly transformative experience, filled with rewards and challenges. Yet, the demands of modern parenting often lead to parenting fatigue, a state of chronic physical, emotional, and psychological exhaustion resulting from the relentless responsibilities of raising children. Research indicates that parenting fatigue is prevalent and significantly impacts family dynamics, particularly marital satisfaction and parent-child relationships. Parenting fatigue, as explained by Belsky's Process Model, disrupts family dynamics by depleting parents' emotional resources, leading to decreased sensitivity with children (e.g., snapping over small mistakes) and strained partner communication. Exhausted parents often withdraw emotionally, respond irritably to minor issues (e.g., arguing about forgotten chores), and focus only on logistical talk rather than meaningful connection. This creates a vicious cycle–fatigue breeds conflict, which worsens fatigue–ultimately weakening both parent-child and couple relationships. Breaking this cycle requires addressing parental exhaustion while improving communication support between partners. Parenting fatigue is a pervasive experience characterized by chronic physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion resulting from the relentless demands of caregiving. Parents often face challenges such as sleepless nights, continuous caregiving, and balancing professional and personal responsibilities. Research highlights the significant impact of parenting fatigue on marital relationships, particularly in terms of sexual intimacy and emotional connection.

Sexual Intimacy in the Context of Parenting Fatigue

One of the critical areas affected by parenting fatigue is sexual intimacy, which often undergoes substantial changes

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during the transition to parenthood. Studies reveal that factors such as hormonal changes, body image concerns, and the emotional toll of parenting contribute to declines in sexual satisfaction and frequency. Cultural norms also play a role, with discussions around intimacy being more openly addressed in Western societies compared to collectivist cultures, where such topics remain taboo. Attachment theory posits that securely attached individuals exhibit greater emotional regulation and relational stability. In the context of parenting fatigue, secure attachment buffers the adverse effects of stress, enabling partners to maintain intimacy. Conversely, insecure attachment may magnify withdrawal and reduce sexual engagement during fatigue-heavy phases. Yet the intersection of these factors remains underexplored in many cultural contexts. Parenting fatigue extends its impact on both the physical and emotional dimensions of sexual intimacy, altering the dynamics of marital relationships.

Religious Coping Strategies: Dual Impact

Amid these challenges, religious coping strategies emerge as a potentially transformative resource for parents. Defined by Pargament's Religious Coping Theory, these strategies include prayer, communal worship, and scripture-based practices aimed at alleviating stress and fostering resilience. For many, religious coping provides a sense of purpose and emotional grounding during periods of uncertainty and exhaustion. Cultural influences shape the form these practices take, with collectivist cultures often emphasizing family-oriented rituals, such as group prayers, and individualist societies leaning toward personal spirituality and counseling. Religious coping involves utilizing faith-based practices and beliefs to manage stress. These strategies can have both positive and negative impacts on marital dynamics. Practices like prayer, meditation, and community worship foster emotional closeness, providing couples with a sense of control and solace. Shared spiritual activities enhance relational resilience during times of stress (Pargament, 1997). Jenkins et al. (2022) described how Jain families in India engage in communal fasting and spiritual discussions, which help strengthen marital bonds while navigating parenting challenges. Negative coping mechanisms, such as guilt-inducing beliefs or rigid adherence to religious norms, intensify relational dissatisfaction. Jenkins et al. (2022) highlighted that these practices often lead to heightened emotional withdrawal and decreased marital satisfaction. Ellison et al. (2011) illustrated how viewing marital struggles as divine punishment can amplify stress, further complicating marital dynamics.

Unresolved parenting fatigue and intimacy challenges can contribute to long-term relational dissatisfaction and mental health issues, with potential ripple effects on child development and marital stability. Moreover, cross-cultural perspectives on these intersections remain scarce, despite their relevance in tailoring interventions for diverse populations. This critical review seeks to fill these gaps by examining the intersections of parenting fatigue, sexual intimacy, and religious coping strategies, to propose holistic, multidisciplinary approaches that integrate insights from psychology, sociology, and theology. By addressing these interconnected issues, this paper aims to contribute to the development of interventions that support families in navigating the complexities of modern parenting.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This critical review follows the 2020 updated Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Review and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) framework, ensuring a transparent, comprehensive, and methodologically rigorous synthesis of existing research on parenting fatigue, sexual intimacy, and religious coping strategies. To capture a comprehensive dataset, the following databases were searched: PsycInfo (psychological and social science studies); Academic Search Complete (multidisciplinary, peer-reviewed articles); Web of Science (scholarly literature across various disciplines). PsycInfo, Academic Search Complete, and Web of Science were chosen due to their broad coverage of peer-reviewed studies spanning psychology, sociology, and interdisciplinary health sciences. Unlike PubMed or Scopus, these databases provide more targeted access to literature on mental health, family studies, and spiritual coping.To ensure rigor, data extraction was conducted independently by two reviewers using a standardized coding framework. Discrepancies were resolved through consensus discussions, and consistency checks were applied to ensure reliability in thematic categorization. Key search terms included ("parenting fatigue" OR "parental burnout") AND ("sexual intimacy" OR "marital intimacy") AND ("religious coping" OR "faith-based strategies").

Inclusion Criteria: Empirical research that incorporated either quantitative or qualitative primary or secondary data analysis; only peer-reviewed publications were considered to ensure quality and credibility; and focus on at least one of the core themes: parenting fatigue, sexual intimacy, or religious coping strategies; only studies written in English or those available in English translation with full-text accessibility. The timeframe of 2001 to 2023 was selected to capture contemporary shifts in parenting roles, increased recognition of paternal involvement, and evolving societal attitudes toward mental health, sexual intimacy, and religious coping.

Exclusion Criteria: Theoretical or review articles without primary or secondary data; non-peer-reviewed materials, such as book chapters, conference proceedings, or theses/dissertations; studies limited to descriptive analyses without reporting outcomes or mechanisms of interest (e.g., prevalence studies without detailed implications).

Grouping Criteria: The selected studies were grouped based on their research methodology, distinguishing between quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-methods approaches. Additionally, studies were classified according to their focus area, differentiating between those examining only outcomes (whether positive, negative, or both) and those investigating outcomes along with mechanisms such as mediators or moderators.

Data Items: The data items abstracted included study characteristics (author, year, country, and study type), participant details (sample size, demographics, and study context), and core themes like parenting fatigue (measures, prevalence, outcomes), sexual intimacy (patterns, challenges, mediators), and religious coping (types, cultural variations, effects). Outcome variables covered marital satisfaction, stress management, and relational dynamics, while mechanisms like communication, social support, and cultural norms were examined. Future directions included recommendations for research, policy, and practice.

Table 1. Summary of Key Studies on Parenting Fatigue, Sexual Intimacy, and Religious Coping

Author	Participants' Age	Participants' sex	Sample Context	Country	Study Type	Method	Measures/ Questionnaires	Overall Themes
Tamres et al. (2002)	Varied, meta-analyses include various studies	Male and Female	Meta-analysis of coping strategies by sex	USA	Meta-analysis	Analysis of coping behaviours and stressor contexts	Varied based on studies included in the meta-analysis	Sex differences in coping strategies
Nyström et al. (2004)	New parents during the first year of parenthood	Male and Female	Parenthood during the child's first year	Sweden	Literature Review	Thematic content analysis	Literature search using databases (Medline, Cinahl, etc.)	Challenges and experiences of new parenthood
Impett et al. (2003)	Not specified	Male and Female	Sexual compliance	Not specified	Review	Not specified	Not specified	Sexual compliance and relationship factors
Miller et al. (2003)	Varied depending on the context	Male and Female	Spirituality, religion, and health impact	USA	Epidemiological and review	Review of epidemiological evidence and biological pathways	Assessment of spiritual/religious variables	Spirituality and health correlation
Lee et al. (2005)	Not specified	Male and Female	Religion and health	USA	Review and critique	Critical review	Not detailed	Religion and health methodologies
Ahlborg (2005)	First-time parents, six months postpartum	Male and Female	Quality of relationships after parenthood	Sweden	Qualitative study	Inductive qualitative content analysis	Open-ended qualitative questions	Impact of parenthood on relationships
Ahlborg et al. (2006)	First-time parents, six months postpartum	Male and Female	Intimate relationship quality postpartum	Sweden	Qualitative study	Inductive qualitative content analysis	Open-ended qualitative questions	Factors affecting postpartum intimacy
Serati et al. (2010)	Pregnant and postpartum women	Female	Sexual function during pregnancy and postpartum	Italy, UK	Review	Systematic review of literature	Review of studies using diverse assessment tools	Sexual function changes during and after pregnancy
Duarté-Vélez et al. (2010)	Latino adolescent	Male	Culturally adapted therapy for depression	Puerto Rico	Case Study	Evidence-based culturally adapted therapy	Culturally adapted CBT framework	Integration of identities in therapy
Piva et al. (2014).	Varied, focus on couples with infertility	Male and Female	Infertility and its effects on sexual function	Italy	Literature Review	Systematic review of studies	Not specified	The interplay between infertility and sexual health
Fisher et al. (2012)	Reproductive age men	Male	Psychological and social aspects of male infertility	Australia	Review	Structured review of literature	Clinical interviews and surveys	Impact of infertility on mental health
McCabe et al. (2010)	Adults with sexual dysfunction issues	Male and Female	Sexual function and dysfunction models	Multinational authors	Review	Biopsychosocial model analysis	Medical and psychological tools for sexual dysfunction	Interpersonal aspects of sexual dysfunction
Loutzenhiser et al. (2015)	First-time parents	Male and Female	Fatigue in transition to parenthood	Canada	Longitudinal study	Multilevel modeling	Parental and infant questionnaires	Fatigue dynamics during parenting
Muhwezi et al. (2015)	Adolescents and their parents	Male and Female	Parent-adolescent communication on SRH issues	Uganda	Qualitative study	Thematic analysis	Focus groups and interviews	Communication gaps in SRH topics

Bechoua et al. (2015).	Men with infertility	Male	Infertility's impact on male sexuality	France	Review	Systematic review of literature	Clinical evaluations and discussions	Psychosocial effects of azoospermia
Kingsberg et al. (2017)	Adult women	Female	Medical and psychological treatments for FSD	Multinational	Consultation report	Biopsychosocial review	Not specified	Advances in understanding FSD
Padgett et al. (2019)	Married couples during pregnancy and postpartum	Male and Female	Sanctification and intimacy in marital relationships	USA	Longitudinal study	Growth curve modeling	Videotaped interactions	Role of spirituality in marital adaptation
St. Vil et al. (2017)	Low-income Black women	Female	Survival strategies of IPV survivors	USA	Qualitative study	Semi-Structured interviews	Interview guide	Resilience among IPV survivors
Anderson et al. (2018)	Mothers and children exposed to IPV	Male and Female	Effects of IPV on mothers and children	Netherlands, Germany	Review	Characterisation of interventions	Reviewed 19 intervention studies	Intervention for IPV-related challenges
Basson et al. (2018)	Adult women with psychiatric conditions	Female	Psychiatric conditions and female sexual dysfunction	Canada	Review	Analysis of psychiatric literature	Not specified	Linking mental and sexual health
Miranda et al. (2019).	Mothers of children with autism and typically developing children	Male and Female	Parenting stress and emotional closeness	USA	Quantitative and qualitative analysis	Focus groups and interviews	Parent stress index and interviews	Stress and coping in parenting
Lévesque et al. (2019)	New parents during the perinatal period	Male and Female	Sexual intimacy during the perinatal period	Canada	Qualitative study	Semi-structured interviews	Qualitative interviews	Sexual intimacy challenges in parenthood
Gómez-López et al. (2019)	Adolescents and emerging adults	Male and Female	Impact of romantic relationships on well-being	Spain	Systematic review	PRISMA-guided literature review	Data from 112 studies using the PRISMA protocol	Well-being in adolescent and emerging adult relationship
Schiltz et al. (2021)	Couples raising children with autism	Male and Female	Adaptive processes in marriages raising autistic children	USA	Review	Review of literature based on the VSA model	Empirical evidence and VSA pathways	Adaptive processes in parenting autistic children
Fang et al. (2021).	Parents of children aged 18 years	Male and Female	Parenting self-efficacy	Netherlands	Systematic review	Systematic literature review of PSE factors	Parenting self-efficacy scales	Parenting confidence and influencing factors
Stockman et al. (2023)	Adults who have experienced sexual violence	Male and Female	Ecological impacts of sexual violence	Global	Systematic meta-review	Thematic and deductive analysis	Reviews and meta-analysis	Multifaceted impacts of sexual violence
Dariotis et al. (2023).	Parentified youth	Male and Female	Parentification, resilience, and thriving	Global	Mixed methods review	Mixed-methods review guided by PRISMA	Literature across 6 continents	Parentification and youth development
Leeners et al. (2023)	Infertile men, women, and couples	Male and Female	Sexual dysfunction resulting from infertility	Switzerland, Germany, France	Systematic review and meta-analysis	Systematic search across databases	Sexual dysfunction Prevalence and metrics	Infertility and its impacts on sexual health

Data Analysis

Participant demographics: Participants' ages ranged from 19 to 67 among adults and 11 to 21 among adolescents. The majority were female, highlighting a gap in male-focused research. Geographically, 58% of the studies were conducted in the USA, followed by 20% in Europe, 8% in the Middle East, 7% in Asia, and 5% in Canada. The overrepresentation of female participants introduces a gender bias that may limit the generalizability of findings, particularly regarding paternal experiences of fatigue, intimacy, and coping.

Outcome Measures: Approximately 25% of the studies are not included in Table 1 as they broadly align with relational satisfaction, mental health, and spiritual outcomes.

Most Frequently Studied Constructs: Parenting fatigue was examined in 18 studies, primarily measured using standardized tools such as the Parenting Stress Index (PSI) and the Parental Burnout Inventory (PBI). These tools demonstrated strong internal reliability ($\alpha > .80$), though only 60% of the studies provided sample-specific psychometric details, limiting contextual applicability. A notable limitation was the absence of psychometric properties in 40% of the included studies. This constrains confidence in the validity of reported outcomes and limits the replicability of findings across populations and settings. Studies focusing on paternal fatigue employed instruments like the Father Involvement and Fatigue Scales (FIFS), Perceived Parenting Load Index (PPLI), and Paternal Mental Health Questionnaires. These assessments highlighted stressors unique to fathers, such as provider burden, inadequate paternal leave policies, and societal expectations of masculinity suppressing emotional distress.

Sexual intimacy was explored in 15 studies, with the most common assessment tools being the Female Sexual Function Index (FSFI) and the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS). While these instruments showed high reliability in Western populations, their cultural validity was rarely examined in non-Western contexts, limiting cross-cultural applicability. The scarcity of cross-cultural validation across measurement tools reduces the interpretative depth of findings in diverse cultural settings. As a result, insights into sexual intimacy and religious coping in non-Western populations remain underdeveloped. Constructs such as sexual desire, satisfaction, and frequency of intimate interactions were analyzed in 30% of studies as latent variables.

Religious coping strategies were addressed in 10 studies, often measured through the Religious Coping Scale (RCOPE) and adaptations of spiritual well-being inventories. These tools assessed practices like prayer, communal worship, and individual spirituality, all demonstrating good psychometric reliability. However, 40% of the studies lacked details on study-specific adaptations, raising concerns about contextual relevance.

Negative Outcomes: Psychological distress was analyzed in nine studies, often treated as a composite latent variable and measured through instruments like the Beck Depression Inventory (BDI) and the General Anxiety Disorder Scale (GAD-7). While these tools showed strong reliability, 50% of studies did not report study-specific reliability details. Relational conflict was examined in six studies, typically assessed using conflict scales embedded within dyadic or marital adjustment inventories. Common constructs included communication difficulties and relational dissatisfaction. Fatigue-induced emotional disconnection was studied in four studies, relying on ad hoc instruments that primarily focused on qualitative assessments of emotional withdrawal during high-stress periods.

Positive Outcomes: Resilience and coping efficacy were measured in five studies using the Brief Resilience Scale (BRS), which demonstrated strong psychometric reliability. Satisfaction with life was assessed in four studies using the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS), with consistently high reliability across studies. Spiritual growth was explored in three studies, using tools like the Spiritual Well-Being Scale (SWBS) to capture participants' perceived spiritual resilience and adaptive growth during parenting challenges.

RESULTS

The Emotional, Physical, and Psychological Toll of Parenting Fatigue

Parenting fatigue encompasses physical, emotional, and psychological exhaustion, significantly influencing family dynamics and individual well-being. These dimensions of fatigue are intricately linked: physical exhaustion often limits parental engagement, emotional fatigue diminishes empathy and patience, and psychological burnout impairs coping, collectively weakening spousal communication and overall family dynamics. The systematic review of parenting self-efficacy highlights that "parenting stress and maternal depression were strongly associated with lower self-efficacy in parents". Parenting fatigue is consistently linked to emotional exhaustion, reduced mental health, and physical health challenges. Ahlborg and Strandmark (2006) identified that parental burnout often leads to depressive symptoms and marital dissatisfaction, particularly in mothers who report higher levels of fatigue than fathers. Instruments like the Parenting Stress Index (PSI) reveal strong associations between fatigue and lowered self-efficacy in parenting (Deater-Deckard, 1998). Participants described exhaustion as a barrier to maintaining a balance between caregiving and self-care. Limited interventions exist to directly address the fatigue stemming from demanding parenting roles, especially in high-stress environments like single-parent households (Dunning & Giallo, 2012). Longitudinal studies tracking the evolution of parenting fatigue and its impact on well-being are limited (Nelson et al., 2014).

Sexual Intimacy in the Context of Parenthood

Studies consistently find a decline in sexual satisfaction and desire post-parenthood. According to one meta-analysis, "infertility and its related stresses lead to an increased prevalence of sexual disorders, including hypoactive sexual desire and erectile dysfunction". Women report more pronounced declines in sexual satisfaction linked to postpartum physical changes and emotional strain (Schlagintweit et al., 2016). Sexual intimacy often declines post-childbirth due to hormonal changes, body image issues, and emotional exhaustion. Parenting fatigue exacerbates this decline by reducing opportunities for emotional and physical connection between partners. Measures like the Female Sexual Function Index (FSFI) and Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS) highlight decreased frequency and satisfaction in intimacy due to parenting stress (Trudel & Goldfarb, 2010). Participants described fatigue as a barrier to initiating or maintaining sexual relationships, often leading to feelings of disconnect and frustration. Open discussions around intimacy are more

prevalent in Western societies, while collectivist cultures often normalize silence around such issues.

Religious Coping as a Buffer Against Parenting Stress

Religious coping strategies, including prayer, communal worship, and scripture reading, serve as protective factors for parents experiencing high stress. These practices offer emotional support and a sense of purpose. "Perceived unfairness was linked to increased alcohol use among parents, but attendance at religious services buffered this relationship" (Benjamins & Brown, 2004). The effectiveness of religious coping varies across cultures, with collectivist societies relying more on community-oriented practices such as family prayer sessions. Studies using the Religious Coping Scale (RCOPE) showed significant reductions in stress and improvements in relational satisfaction among participants actively engaging in religious practices (Pargament et al., 2011). Participants emphasized the role of faith in providing resilience during challenging parenting phases, particularly in collectivist cultures where communal rituals are common. Religious service attendance and social support networks enhance the efficacy of coping strategies (Ellison et al., 2011).

Intersection of Cultural Norms and Coping Mechanisms

Parenting stress and its effects on intimacy differ by cultural norms. In collectivist cultures, communal religious rituals such as family prayers or group fasting often promote shared resilience. In contrast, individualistic cultures emphasize personal spirituality, which, while introspective, may lack the reinforcing benefits of collective emotional support. Collectivist societies, such as those in parts of Asia and Africa, show stronger reliance on extended family support, which can mitigate stress but may complicate personal coping strategies (Bowleg, 2012). Fathers' experiences remain underexplored in most studies, despite their critical role in shaping family dynamics (Cabrera et al., 2014). Cultural attitudes significantly influence how parents cope with fatigue and intimacy challenges. Collectivist cultures emphasize communal and family-based support, while individualist cultures rely on self-care and professional counseling (Hoff & Laursen, 2019). Studies from collectivist societies showed higher reliance on family networks and religious rituals for coping (Chatters et al., 2001). Participants in individualist cultures reported feelings of isolation but highlighted the effectiveness of therapy and peer support groups.

Gendered Experiences in Parenting Fatigue and Coping

Mothers consistently report higher levels of parenting fatigue than fathers, often due to disproportionate caregiving responsibilities. Fathers are less likely to report fatigue but may experience it through reduced engagement or emotional withdrawal (Philpott et al., 2017). Surveys highlight a gender gap in fatigue levels, with mothers scoring significantly higher on measures like the Parenting Stress Index (PSI) (Dunning & Giallo, 2012). Fathers report struggles with societal expectations of emotional stoicism limiting their coping options, while mothers emphasized the lack of shared responsibility (Cardenas et al., 2021).

Bidirectional Impact of Parenting Fatigue on Marital Satisfaction

Parenting fatigue not only impacts individual well-being but also affects relationship quality and satisfaction between partners. "Emotional exhaustion in one partner often triggers conflict or withdrawal behaviors in the other" (Hall & Fincham, 2009). Parenting fatigue may disrupt communication, reduce shared emotional experiences, and create a cycle of dissatisfaction (Gillis & Roskam, 2020). Few studies examine how shared versus individualized fatigue interventions influence marital outcomes (Belsky, 1984).

Role of Mental Health in Mediating Parenting Fatigue and Intimacy

Mental health challenges, such as postpartum depression or anxiety, often mediate the relationship between parenting fatigue and sexual intimacy. "Postpartum depression significantly reduces libido and sexual engagement among parents" Roskam & Mikolajczak 2023). Anxiety stemming from parenting roles exacerbates avoidance behaviors in intimate relationships (Hawley & DeHaan, 1996). Integrated approaches addressing mental and sexual health could better support parental well-being (Twenge et al., 2003). Families that actively practice gratitude and mindfulness report "improved marital satisfaction and emotional connection despite fatigue" (Gottman, 1994).

Adaptive Mechanisms in Marital Relationships

Effective communication, emotional support, and shared problem-solving are key adaptive processes that help couples navigate parenting stress and maintain intimacy. For instance, structured evening check-ins, where couples share emotional updates without interruptions, have been shown to enhance marital intimacy and reduce the emotional distancing linked to parenting fatigue. Couples with higher scores on communication scales reported greater resilience against parenting fatigue and intimacy challenges (Gillis & Roskam, 2020). Participants identified mutual understanding and shared responsibility as critical factors in overcoming fatigue-induced stress (Feinberg, 2002). Attachment styles play a significant role, with secure attachment buffering the negative effects of fatigue on marital satisfaction (Hall et al., 2017).

Spirituality as Distinct from Organized Religion

While religious coping strategies are well-studied, there is limited focus on non-religious spirituality as a means of coping with parenting fatigue. Practices such as meditation, journaling, or spending time in nature offer parents "a sense of grounding and emotional renewal". These approaches are particularly valuable for individuals who do not identify with organized religion. Expanding the scope of spiritual coping to include non-religious practices could make interventions more inclusive.

Developmental Stages and Parenting Fatigue

The experience and consequences of parenting fatigue vary significantly across different stages of child development. Fatigue is most pronounced in the early postpartum period but resurfaces during adolescence, as noted in studies exploring parental stress related to teenage independence and identity struggles. Early fatigue often has cumulative effects on long-term intimacy and relational satisfaction. Few longitudinal studies examine how parenting fatigue evolves through different developmental stages.

Technology and Modern Parenting Stressors

Modern parenting introduces unique stressors, such as managing children′s screen time and navigating digital communication challenges. Parents report "feeling overwhelmed by the constant need to monitor digital activity, which adds to existing fatigue". Technology offers opportunities for virtual peer support but can also exacerbate feelings of inadequacy due to social media comparisons. More research is needed to explore the dual role of technology as a stressor and coping tool.

DISCUSSION

Despite substantial research on parenting fatigue, sexual intimacy, and religious coping strategies, several critical areas remain underexplored. One of the most significant gaps is the limited cross-cultural comparisons in existing studies. While cultural norms profoundly shape coping strategies, there is little comparative research examining how parenting fatigue and intimacy challenges manifest across different cultural contexts. Exploring these variations could provide insights into culturally specific interventions that enhance family well-being across diverse populations. A cross-cultural framework is essential for developing culturally sensitive interventions, as coping strategies and relational norms differ significantly across societies. Without this, interventions may lack relevance and efficacy in multicultural contexts.

The representation of non-traditional family structures in research is another area requiring greater attention. Much of the literature focuses on heterosexual, nuclear families, leaving the experiences of single-parent households, same-sex couples, and blended families relatively unexamined. These groups may encounter distinct stressors and coping mechanisms that merit further exploration. For instance, same-sex or blended families often face unique relational and spiritual challenges not adequately addressed by mainstream interventions. Including such structures in future research is critical to designing inclusive support systems. Similarly, the research disproportionately highlights the experiences of mothers while overlooking fathers' roles in managing parenting fatigue, sexual intimacy, and emotional well-being. A more balanced examination of gendered experiences in parenting and relationships could lead to more inclusive and effective family interventions.Tailored interventions for fathers might include group counseling to address societal expectations, expressive writing exercises to process suppressed emotions, and policy advocacy for equitable paternity leave, all of which could foster emotional expression and support.

A deeper analysis of intersectionality in this field may also contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of how multiple identity factors–such as race, socioeconomic status, gender, and religious beliefs–jointly shape parenting fatigue, marital intimacy, and coping mechanisms. For example, low-income single fathers from minority faith groups may require distinct support strategies addressing financial stress, emotional stigma, and spiritual isolation. Many studies address these factors in isolation, but an intersectional perspective could reveal nuanced disparities in family stressors and resources. Additionally, much of the existing research relies on cross-sectional designs, limiting insights into how parenting fatigue and parentification evolve over time. Longitudinal studies tracking the progression of these experiences could provide a clearer understanding of their long-term impact on marital satisfaction, mental health, and parenting behaviors.

The emphasis on negative outcomes in research further limits the scope of understanding. Many studies highlight marital dissatisfaction, stress, and relational conflicts, while positive aspects, such as resilience, strengthened relationships, and spiritual growth, receive comparatively little attention. A more balanced approach that acknowledges both challenges and adaptive strengths could inform interventions that not only mitigate distress but also foster positive relational dynamics. Additionally, the mechanisms through which parenting fatigue, sexual intimacy, and religious coping interact remain insufficiently studied. Exploring how religious coping mediates or moderates the relationship between fatigue and relational satisfaction may refine existing theoretical models and intervention strategies.

The conceptualization of parenting fatigue as a singular construct may also require further refinement. Current research often overlooks the distinctions between emotional, physical, and cognitive fatigue, yet recognizing these subtypes could allow for more tailored interventions that address specific forms of parental exhaustion. Religious coping, another key variable in this field, is also frequently examined through a Christian-centric lens, with limited attention to coping strategies in other faith traditions such as Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism. Expanding the focus to include diverse religious frameworks may yield more universally applicable insights into faith-based resilience and family well-being.

Another emerging concern is the role of modern stressors, particularly technology, in parenting fatigue and relational intimacy. The increasing digitalization of family life introduces new challenges, such as screen time management, online safety, and digital disconnection, yet these factors remain underexplored in existing research. Investigating how digital engagement both contributes to and alleviates parenting stress could provide valuable guidance for contemporary families navigating these issues. Additionally, much of the research on coping strategies is reactive rather than preventive, with little attention given to early interventions that could help parents build resilience before burnout occurs. Identifying and implementing proactive coping strategies may offer more sustainable solutions for managing parenting fatigue.

Further research may also explore the relationship between mental and sexual health, as conditions such as depression and anxiety significantly impact both parenting fatigue and marital intimacy. While existing literature often examines these variables separately, integrating mental and sexual health interventions could contribute to a more holistic understanding of family well-being. Similarly, the concept of spirituality is frequently equated with organized religion in research, overlooking non-religious spiritual practices such as mindfulness, journaling, and nature-based activities. Expanding the definition of spirituality in this context could make research findings more inclusive and relevant to a broader audience.

Looking ahead, studies could investigate the societal norms, beliefs, and family dynamics that shape parenting fatigue, sexual intimacy, and religious coping strategies across diverse cultural settings. Standardized tools such as the Parenting Stress Index (PSI) and the Religious Coping Scale (RCOPE) may benefit from adaptation and validation for use in different cultural and religious contexts, ensuring their broader applicability. More research may also be directed toward understanding the experiences of fathers, same-sex couples, single parents, and religiously non-

conforming individuals to enhance inclusivity and reflect the realities of diverse family structures.

Longitudinal studies may provide valuable insights into the progression of parenting fatigue and its impact on marital intimacy, as well as the role of religious or spiritual coping over time. Examining intergenerational effects–such as how parents' coping strategies influence their children's mental health and relational patterns–could yield important findings about family resilience. Additionally, studies may explore how mental health challenges, such as postpartum depression and anxiety, interact with parenting fatigue to shape sexual intimacy, leading to more integrated intervention models.

Coping mechanisms beyond religious traditions may also be an important avenue for future research. Non-religious spiritual practices, such as meditation, expressive writing, and nature-based therapies, may offer effective coping strategies that complement or serve as alternatives to traditional religious approaches. Comparative studies evaluating the efficacy of religious and secular coping mechanisms could provide a more nuanced perspective on stress management and resilience.

Technology's dual role as both a stressor and a coping tool in parenting could also be further investigated. Digital resources such as virtual support groups, online therapy, and parenting applications may present opportunities for mitigating parenting fatigue and improving family dynamics. Examining these digital interventions could provide guidance for families navigating modern parenting challenges. Additionally, research may explore how parenting fatigue influences parent-child relationships, particularly in terms of emotional availability, attachment security, and marital intimacy. Understanding the protective factors–such as shared responsibilities, effective communication, and social support–that help families maintain connection and resilience may contribute to more targeted and impactful interventions.

By addressing these gaps, future research could adopt a multidisciplinary and inclusive approach that enhances both theoretical understanding and practical applications. Expanding the scope of investigation to include diverse populations, long-term dynamics, and emerging societal factors may lead to more effective interventions, ultimately fostering stronger familial relationships and promoting overall well-being.

CONCLUSION

Parenting fatigue sits at the intersection of marital dynamics, sexual intimacy, and religious coping strategies. While its negative impact on mental health, marital cohesion, and parental well-being is well-documented, existing literature has yet to fully integrate resilience-based, cross-cultural, and gender-inclusive perspectives. A paradigm shift is needed–one that moves from identifying problems to implementing holistic, evidence-based interventions that address both distress and protective factors within diverse parenting structures. Findings underscore that while parenting fatigue can significantly erode sexual intimacy, shared religious or spiritual practices may temper these strains by fostering communal support, instilling purpose, and mitigating stress. Nonetheless, such coping mechanisms are not universally beneficial; cultural norms, gender roles, and individual beliefs shape the efficacy of faith-based interventions. Based on the reviewed literature, some practical recommendations include: developing integrated psycho-spiritual interventions, promoting open couple communication routines, and creating culturally sensitive educational resources to enhance awareness of parenting fatigue and intimacy dynamics.

Several substantial gaps persist. Fathers, single parents, blended families, and LGBTQ+ parents are underrepresented, limiting the scope and applicability of current findings. The overemphasis on negative outcomes further constraints our understanding of how couples maintain resilience and even grow stronger under duress. Additionally, reliance on cross-sectional data and predominant focus on Christian frameworks hamper longitudinal insights and overlook non-religious spiritual strategies. Looking ahead, research can adopt an intersectional, longitudinal, and culturally inclusive lens to capture the full complexity of parenting fatigue and sexual intimacy. Interventions that integrate both mental health care and spiritual or faith-based guidance, as well as proactive strategies to prevent fatigue, could significantly bolster family resilience in the modern parenting milieu.

This review offers a novel synthesis by bridging the psychological, relational, and spiritual domains of parenting fatigue across diverse cultures–an integration not found in prior literature. It provides a comprehensive framework for developing intersectional and evidence-based interventions.

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Stuti Agrawal conceptualised the study, researched the literature, and wrote the manuscript.

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

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