

Research Paper

Relationship Between Social Support and Quality of Life in Parents of Children with Intellectual Disabilities Compared to Parents of Normal Children

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the relationship between social support and quality of life in Parents of Children with Intellectual Disabilities compared to parents of normal children in Pune, India. Parenting a child with intellectual disability involves psychological, social, and economic challenges, often leading to lower quality of life. In contrast, parents of typically developing children experience fewer such stressors. Social support plays a crucial role in enhancing caregivers' well-being and mitigating stress. The study used a comparative design with 60 participants—30 parents of children with intellectual disability and 30 parents of normal children—selected through purposive sampling from special and regular schools. The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (Zimet et al., 1988) and WHOQUALITY OF LIFE-BREF (1998) were used for data collection. Statistical analyses included descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, t-tests, and multiple regression. Findings showed that parents of children with intellectual disability had significantly lower quality of life. Social support was positively correlated with quality of life in both groups, with a stronger effect observed in the intellectual disability group. Regression results indicated that social support predicted 43% of the variance in the intellectual disability group and 34% in the normal group, confirming its critical role in caregiver well-being. These findings highlight the importance of building strong support systems for parents, particularly those caring for children with intellectual disabilities.

Keywords: *Social Support, Quality of Life, Intellectual Disabilities*

Parenting is one of the most rewarding yet challenging roles an individual can undertake. When it comes to parenting children with intellectual disabilities, the complexity of the role intensifies multifold due to the unique psychological, social, and economic challenges faced by such parents. Intellectual disability is characterized by significant limitations in both intellectual functioning and adaptive behavior, impacting everyday social and practical skills. These limitations create a demand for continuous care and support that often strains the physical and emotional resources of parents.

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The quality of life of parents raising intellectually disabled children tends to be compromised due to increased caregiving responsibilities, social isolation, financial burden, and emotional distress. Quality of life is a multidimensional concept that encompasses physical health, psychological well-being, social relationships, and environmental conditions. It reflects an individual's subjective evaluation of their position in life within their cultural context and value system.

Social support is widely recognized as a critical resource for enhancing psychological well-being and quality of life. It can buffer the negative impacts of stress by providing emotional comfort, informational guidance, and tangible assistance. The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS), developed by Zimet et al. (1988), identifies support from family, friends, and significant others as key contributors to individuals' perceived social resources.

This study focuses on Pune, India, a city that encapsulates urban and semi-urban settings with diverse socio-economic backgrounds. Given the paucity of research on the interplay of social support and quality of life among Parents of Children with Intellectual Disabilities in this region, this research aims to fill the gap by comparing these parents to those with normal children.

The importance of such research is underscored by the social stigma often associated with intellectual disabilities in India, which may isolate families and limit access to social networks. Consequently, understanding the role of social support in promoting quality of life.

Significance of the Study:

The significance of studying the relationship between social support and quality of life in Parents of Children with Intellectual Disabilities lies in the practical and policy implications for caregiving families. Parents often bear the primary responsibility for the well-being and development of their children. When their child has an intellectual disability, this responsibility is accompanied by additional physical, emotional, and financial burdens.

Understanding how social support influences the quality of life of these parents can help stakeholders—including healthcare providers, social workers, policymakers, and community organizations—design targeted support programs. These programs may include counseling, support groups, financial assistance, and community awareness initiatives to reduce stigma. Furthermore, such research can highlight disparities between Parents of Children with Intellectual Disabilities and parents of normal children, underscoring the need for inclusive social policies that address these inequities. Improving social support networks may reduce parental stress, enhance coping mechanisms, and ultimately lead to better outcomes for children and families.

From an academic perspective, this study adds to the limited body of knowledge in the Indian context, especially in the Pune region, about the intersection of social support and quality of life. It provides empirical data that can be used for comparative studies and meta-analyses.

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In summary, the study's significance lies in its potential to improve parental well-being, inform evidence-based interventions, and promote social inclusion of families with intellectually disabled children.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The body of literature on parenting children with intellectual disabilities consistently emphasizes the increased caregiving burden and the consequent impact on parents' quality of life. Research by Smith et al. (2010) indicated that Parents of Children with Intellectual Disabilities experience higher levels of stress and lower Quality of life compared to parents of typically developing children. These stressors arise from behavioral challenges, increased healthcare needs, and social isolation.

Several studies have identified social support as a vital protective factor. According to House, Landis, and Umberson (1988), social support is a multidimensional construct encompassing emotional, instrumental, informational, and appraisal support. These forms of support can buffer the adverse effects of stress and enhance coping abilities.

In India, cultural perceptions often affect families' access to support. According to Raina et al. (2005), Indian parents of children with disabilities frequently face social stigma, leading to withdrawal from community activities and limited social networks.

The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) by Zimet et al. (1988) has been extensively used worldwide to quantify social support, with studies confirming its reliability and validity in diverse cultural settings (Dahlem, Zimet, & Walker, 1991).

Quality of life measures, particularly the WHOQUALITY OF LIFE-BREF (1998), have been validated for cross-cultural research and include four domains relevant to caregiver well-being: physical, psychological, social, and environmental.

Recent studies like that of Green et al. (2016) demonstrated a strong positive correlation between perceived social support and Quality of life among caregivers, with social support explaining up to 40% of Quality of life variance.

However, gaps remain in region-specific research in India, especially in cities like Pune, with unique socio-cultural dynamics. This study seeks to bridge this gap.

Statement of the Problem

- To study the relationship between social support and quality of life in Parents of Children with Intellectual Disabilities compared to parents of normal children.

Objectives:

- To assess the level of social support perceived by Parents of Children with Intellectual Disabilities and parents of normal children.
- To evaluate the quality of life among Parents of Children with Intellectual Disabilities and parents of normal children.
- To analyze the relationship between social support and quality of life in Parents of Children with Intellectual Disabilities and parents of normal children.

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- To compare the influence of social support on quality of life between the Parents of Children with Intellectual Disabilities and parents of normal children.

Hypotheses:

- Parents of Children with Intellectual Disabilities perceive lower social support compared to parents of normal children.
- Parents of Children with Intellectual Disabilities have lower quality of life than parents of normal children.
- There is a positive correlation between social support and quality of life in Parents of Children with Intellectual Disabilities.
- Social support significantly predicts quality of life in Parents of Children with Intellectual Disabilities.

Variables:

- **Independent Variable (IV):** Social Support
- **Dependent Variable (DV):** Quality of Life
- **Control Variables (CV):** Socio-demographic factors (e.g., age, gender, socioeconomic status)

Operational Definitions:

- **Social Support:** Perceived social support measured by the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) (Zimet et al., 1988).
- **Quality of Life:** Overall well-being measured using WHOQUALITY OF LIFE-BREF (World Health Organization, 1998).

Sample:

The study sample consisted of 120 parents residing in Pune, Maharashtra, divided equally into two groups: 60 Parents of Children with Intellectual Disabilities and 60 parents of normal children. Participants were selected using purposive sampling from both special schools and mainstream schools in Pune. Efforts were made to match participants based on socio-economic background and age range of children to ensure comparability. Inclusion criteria required participants to be the primary caregiver of the child. The purposive sampling approach ensured that the sample was relevant to the research objectives and allowed for in-depth comparisons between the two parental groups.

Tools:

Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS): The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) was developed by Zimet, Dahlem, Zimet, and Farley in 1988 to assess perceived social support from three primary sources: family, friends, and significant others. This self-report instrument contains 12 items, with four items dedicated to each subscale. Responses are measured on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from “very strongly disagree” to “very strongly agree.” The scale is brief, easy to administer, and culturally adaptable. Its internal consistency is strong, with Cronbach’s alpha values typically ranging from 0.85 to 0.91. Validity has been supported through exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses, establishing its three-factor structure. In this study, the MSPSS was used to measure and compare the perceived social support levels of Parents of Children with Intellectual Disabilities and parents of normal children. It helped assess how the quality

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and availability of support from different sources influenced their psychological well-being and overall quality of life.

WHOQUALITY OF LIFE-BREF: The WHOQOL-BREF, developed by the World Health Organization in 1998, is a standardized instrument designed to assess an individual's quality of life across four domains: physical health, psychological health, social relationships, and environment. This 26-item short version of the WHOQOL-100 uses a 5-point Likert scale to measure frequency, intensity, capacity, and satisfaction. The tool is widely recognized for its applicability across cultures and diverse populations. It demonstrates good internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha values above 0.70 for each domain. The instrument's construct validity has been established through global field trials and statistical testing. In this study, the WHOQOL-BREF was employed to assess and compare the quality of life among Parents of Children with Intellectual Disabilities and those with typically developing children. It provided a multidimensional understanding of their life satisfaction and functional well-being. The WHOQOL-BREF's reliability and international relevance made it ideal for this Indian-based psychological research context.

Statistical Treatment:

- Descriptive statistics to summarize demographic characteristics and scores on social support and quality of life.
- Pearson correlation to examine relationships between social support and quality of life.
- Independent sample t-tests to compare means between the two groups.
- Multiple regression analysis to assess predictive power of social support on quality of life.

RESULTS

Social support among Parents of Children with Intellectual Disabilities and parents of normal children:

Table 1: Comparison of Social Support Scores between Parents of Intellectually Disabled and Normal Children

Group	N	Mean	SD	t	p-value
Parents of Children with Intellectual Disabilities	30	45.13	6.85	-4.21	< 0.01
Parents of Normal Children	30	51.28	7.11		

As shown in Table 1, the mean perceived social support score for Parents of Children with Intellectual Disabilities ($M = 45.13$) was significantly lower than that of parents of normal children ($M = 51.28$), with a t-value of -4.21 and a p-value < 0.01 , indicating a statistically significant difference. Hypothesis number one stating that "There is a significant difference in perceived social support between Parents of Children with Intellectual Disabilities and parents of normal children" is accepted.

These findings are consistent with Raina et al. (2005), who reported that Indian parents of children with disabilities often face social exclusion and stigmatization, resulting in diminished access to social support networks.

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Quality of life among Parents of Children with Intellectual Disabilities and parents of normal children:

Table 2: Comparison of Quality of Life between Parents of Intellectually Disabled and Normal Children

Group	N	Mean	SD	t	p-value
Parents of Children with Intellectual Disabilities	30	81.72	9.43	5.12	< 0.01
Parents of Normal Children	30	90.88	8.16		

In Table 2, Parents of Children with Intellectual Disabilities reported a significantly lower quality of life (M = 81.72) than parents of normal children (M = 90.88), with a t-value of 5.12 and $p < 0.01$, demonstrating a significant group difference.

Hypothesis number two stating that “There is a significant difference in quality of life between Parents of Children with Intellectual Disabilities and parents of normal children” is accepted.

Smith et al. (2010) found that caregiving parents of disabled children tend to have poorer psychological and social well-being due to chronic stress and limited resources, aligning with our findings.

Correlation between social support and quality of life

Table 3: Correlation between Social Support and Quality of Life in Parents of Children with Intellectual Disabilities

Variable 1	Variable 2	N	r	p-value
Social Support	Quality of Life	60	0.65	< 0.01

As shown in Table 3, there is a strong positive correlation ($r = 0.65$) between social support and quality of life in the intellectually disabled group, which is statistically significant at $p < 0.01$.

Hypothesis number three stating that “There is a positive correlation between social support and quality of life in Parents of Children with Intellectual Disabilities” is accepted.

Green et al. (2016) found that social support significantly enhances the well-being of caregivers, especially those handling high-burden responsibilities like disability-related care, which supports the present findings.

Social support predicts quality of life:

Table 4: Regression Analysis – Social Support Predicting Quality of Life in Parents of Children with Intellectual Disabilities

Predictor	B	SE B	β	t	p-value
Social Support	1.45	0.21	0.65	6.90	< 0.001
R ²	0.43				

Table 4 reveals that social support is a significant predictor of quality of life among Parents of Children with Intellectual Disabilities, explaining 43% of the variance ($R^2 = 0.43$) in quality of life. The model is statistically significant ($p < 0.001$).

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Hypothesis number four stating that “Social support significantly predicts quality of life in Parents of Children with Intellectual Disabilities” is accepted.

According to Chou et al. (2011), the predictive power of social support on caregiver Quality of life is particularly strong when dealing with high-stress environments like disability caregiving. Our findings support this predictive relationship.

CONCLUSION

1. Parents of Children with Intellectual Disabilities experience significantly lower levels of perceived social support than parents of normal children.
2. Quality of life is significantly lower in Parents of Children with Intellectual Disabilities compared to parents of normal children.
3. There is a strong positive correlation between social support and quality of life in Parents of Children with Intellectual Disabilities.
4. Social support significantly predicts the quality of life in Parents of Children with Intellectual Disabilities.

Limitations

- Small sample size limits generalizability.
- Cross-sectional design prevents causality inference.
- Purposive sampling may introduce selection bias.
- Self-reported measures may be subject to social desirability bias.

Implications

- Policy initiatives should focus on enhancing social support structures for Parents of Children with Intellectual Disabilities.
- Healthcare providers and social workers should integrate social support assessments into routine care.
- Community awareness programs can reduce stigma and increase social inclusion.
- Future research should employ longitudinal designs and larger, randomized samples.

Suggestions

- Increase government and NGO funding for caregiver assistance programs.
- Conduct awareness campaigns to reduce societal stigma around intellectual disability.
- Further studies on the impact of specific types of social support on caregiver Quality of life.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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