#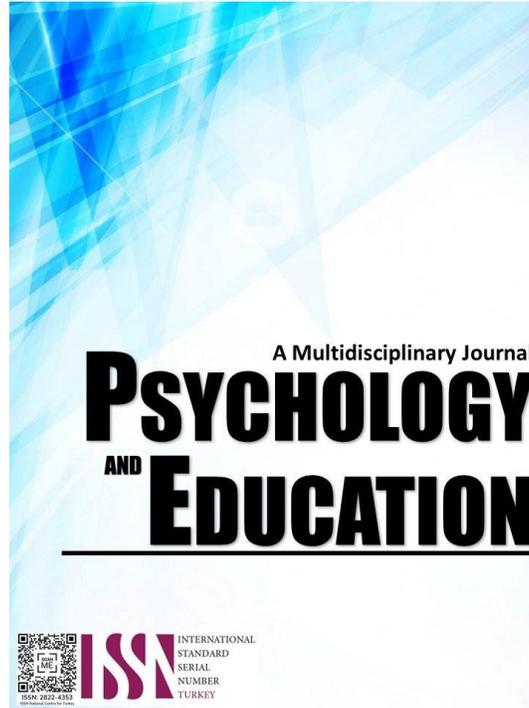 NAVIGATING PARENTHOOD: THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL SUPPORT AND SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS ON THE MENTAL WELL-BEING OF PARENTS RAISING CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

Navigating Parenthood: The Impact of Social Support and Socioeconomic Status on the Mental Well-Being of Parents Raising Children with Special Needs

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Abstract

This study explores the significant mental health challenges encountered by parents raising children with special needs in Region XI during the school year 2023-2024. It investigates the influence of social support and socioeconomic status on these challenges, emphasizing how these factors shape the parents' overall mental well-being. Despite receiving substantial social support, parents continue to report notable mental health difficulties, suggesting that caregiving demands and financial strain play pivotal roles in their psychological distress. Parents of children with special needs often experience heightened stress due to their caregiving responsibilities, limited access to essential resources, and the financial burdens associated with their children's care. These adversities contribute to poor mental health, characterized by anxiety, stress, and feelings of burden. The study examines the quality of social support—encompassing the strength of relationships and cultural alignment—and its role in mitigating mental health challenges. Additionally, it evaluates how socioeconomic status, particularly financial stress, affects parents' capacity to cope with these demands. The findings reveal a moderate level of mental health challenges among parents, with an overall mean score of 3.09. Although the parents report high social support (mean = 3.97), this protective factor is insufficient to fully alleviate their mental health struggles. Anxiety and stress (mean = 2.68) and parenting-specific stress (mean = 3.50) emerge as significant contributors to low mental health. Furthermore, the moderate score for "Access to Resources and Financial Stress" (mean = 2.78) highlights the economic pressures that exacerbate the parents' psychological distress. This study underscores the need for comprehensive support systems that address both emotional and financial needs to improve the mental health of parents raising children with special needs.

Keywords: *mental health, socioeconomic status, social support, anxiety, stress, parenting challenges*

Introduction

Raising a child with special needs significantly impacts parents' mental health, often leading to chronic stress, anxiety, depression, and reduced well-being. These challenges arise from caregiving demands, financial strain, and societal stigma. This study examines the mental health struggles of parents of children with special needs, focusing on how socioeconomic status and social support influence their well-being. Left unaddressed, these issues can hinder effective caregiving, negatively affecting both parents and their families.

Globally, research highlights that, parents of children with special needs experience chronic stress due to caregiving demands and concerns about their children's future. Social isolation and limited access to mental health services are major contributing factors (Weiss, 2002). Similarly, in the Philippines, parents report heightened stress, anxiety, and depression due to caregiving responsibilities, aggravated by inadequate healthcare, educational services, and social stigma (Magpantay, Ignacio, & Camacho, 2014).

In the Philippines, the mental health of parents raising children with special needs is becoming an increasingly recognized concern. Filipino parents, similar to those in other parts of the world, report heightened levels of stress, anxiety, and depression due to caregiving responsibilities. These challenges are aggravated by limited access to specialized healthcare, educational services, and mental health support.

A study by Magpantay, Ignacio, and Camacho (2014) found that Filipino parents of children with developmental disabilities, such as autism, often experience high levels of psychological distress, which are further compounded by the lack of appropriate healthcare services and social stigma surrounding disabilities.

In Region XI, the situation is more concerning due to economic constraints and limited mental health services. Parents struggle with financial difficulties, insufficient support networks, and a lack of intervention programs. While government agencies such as the Department of Health (DOH) and Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) have initiatives in place, these efforts remain inadequate to meet the growing mental health needs of these parents.

Despite existing research, a significant gap remains in studies focusing on the well-being of caregivers rather than the conditions of children (Magpantay, Ignacio, & Camacho, 2014). If left unaddressed, poor parental mental health may lead to increased anxiety and depression, further impacting caregiving capacity and potentially harming children's development (De Guzman & Maximiano, 2019).

This study seeks to bridge this gap by highlighting the mental health challenges of parents of children with special needs. The findings aim to raise awareness, inform policy development, and propose culturally relevant interventions to enhance caregiver well-being. Improving parental mental health support will not only benefit parents but also improve outcomes for their children and families.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to determine the impact of social support and socioeconomic status on the mental well-being of parents raising children with special needs. Specifically, it aims to address the following objectives:

1. To assess the level of social support among parents of children with special needs in terms of:
    1.1. Quality of relationships
    1.2. Cultural and social norms
2. To evaluate the level of socioeconomic status in terms of:
    2.1. Access to resources
    2.2. Financial stress
3. To determine the level of mental well-being in terms of:
    3.1. Depression
    3.2. Anxiety
4. To examine the significant relationship between:
    4.1. Social support and mental well-being
    4.2. Socioeconomic status and mental well-being
5. To determine the significant influence of social support and socioeconomic status on the mental well-being of parents raising children with special needs.
6. To propose practical recommendations for alleviating mental health challenges associated with caregiving responsibilities.

Methodology

Research Design

This study will employ quantitative method research, specifically quantitative survey. The survey is a common strategy of inquiry associated with the quantitative approach (Creswell, 2014). Surveys collect data after the fact and do not involve any manipulation of participants or their circumstances in advance" (Gunter, 2013). Upon using this approach, the study can validate the quantitative results, providing deeper explanation into the contexts in which social support and socioeconomic status can affect mental well-being of parents raising children with special needs. In this study, a descriptive correlational design will be utilized. It is commonly used in research to illustrate static representations of situations and explore the relationships between various variables (McBurney & White, 2009, as cited in Yıldız, 2023).

Respondents

In this study, the quantitative phase will involve selecting 75 participants based on specific criteria focusing on parents of children with special needs in elementary and secondary education levels using purposive sampling techniques. This technique moves away from any form of random sampling and is designed to ensure that specific types of cases are included in the final sample of the research study (Campbell et al., 2020).

Instrument

The researchers utilized a self-constructed questionnaire to collect data for the independent variables, which represent the level and quality of social support that parents receive. Respondents rated their agreement with the statements using a five-point Likert scale.

To gather results for the second independent variable, Socioeconomic Status (SES), the researchers utilized a self-constructed questionnaire to collect data on the independent variables. The respondents answered the questionnaire using the following scale: 5 – Strongly Agree, 4 – Agree, 3 – Neutral, 2 – Disagree, and 1 – Strongly Disagree.

For the dependent variable, mental well-being or mental health, the researchers utilized a self-constructed questionnaire to collect data on the dependent variables. This tool helps assess various dimensions of parents' depression and anxiety levels. The respondents answered the questionnaire using the following scale: 5 – Strongly Agree, 4 – Agree, 3 – Neutral, 2 – Disagree, and 1 – Strongly Disagree.

In summary, the research instrument has a total of 45 items. Part 1 for the first independent variable has 15 items, Part 2 for the second independent variable has 15 items and Part 3 for the dependent variable has another 15 items. A panel of specialists validated the questionnaire. It was pilot-tested to determine its reliability, and its Cronbach's alpha was 0.950 with excellent equivalent internal consistency.

Procedure

The following steps were undertaken by the researcher in the gathering of data for this study:

Asking permission to conduct the study. To proceed in the gathering of the necessary quantitative data, the researcher will request authorization directly from the school principal (MPIES), informing the school principal of the involved parents to children with special

needs.

Administration and Retrieval of Questionnaires. The researchers thoroughly explained the process of answering the questionnaires to the designated respondents, with the approval and full support of the school principal. To ensure clarity and accuracy in responses, the researchers translated each question into Cebuano, the respondents' vernacular language, during the administration of the paper-and-pencil surveys. This approach aimed to help respondents fully understand the questions and provide valid and reliable responses.

Gathering and Tabulation of Data. The data compiled and calculated following the successful administration and retrieval of the survey questionnaires. Subsequently, using SPSS/JAMOVI and the aid of a statistician, relevant statistical method used to collect the necessary data for interpretation and further analysis. Interpretation of data – Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) and JAMOVI was used by the statistician for complex statistical data analysis of data of this study.

Data Analysis

To analyze the quantitative data, statistical tools will be utilized to examine the levels of social support, socioeconomic status, and mental well-being of parents raising children with special needs, as well as the relationships between these variables.

The mean values and standard deviations were calculated for each primary indicator—socioeconomic status, social support, and mental health—to assess overall levels and variations in participants' responses. These descriptive statistics provided insights into the challenges faced by parents raising children with special needs.

Pearson's r will be used to measure the strength and direction of the linear relationships between socioeconomic status, social support, and mental well-being.

Lastly, a multiple linear regression analysis will be utilized to determine the potential influence of socioeconomic status and social support on the mental well-being of parents raising children with special needs.

Results and Discussion

This section presents a comprehensive analysis of the findings, thoroughly examining the data collected to address the issues outlined. The discussion follows the sequence of the problem statement, ensuring a structured approach. Quantitative methods are employed to interpret the data effectively. Additionally, relevant literature directly related to the research is incorporated to support and contextualize the findings.

By verifying and addressing these assumptions, the linear regression analysis results can be interpreted with greater confidence, accurately representing the relationships between social support, SES, and low mental health outcomes. The assumptions were tested using SPSS/JAMOVI, and appropriate corrective measures were taken when violations were detected, ensuring the robustness and validity of the statistical model.

This study focuses on identifying and understanding the key factors that influence the mental health of parents with children who have special needs. Specifically, it examines three main indicators: social support, socioeconomic status, and parenting stress. Each of these indicators is further broken down into sub-indicators, including access to resources, financial stress, quality of relationships, cultural and social norms, anxiety and stress, and parenting-specific stress. The mean values and descriptive levels for these factors are presented in the following table.

The following tables offer a detailed analysis of each indicator and its corresponding items, with findings supported by relevant literature and studies. Within each sub-indicator, the highest and lowest scoring items are examined to provide a clear representation of respondents' survey responses. Additionally, these items are analyzed for their broader implications, offering valuable insights for readers and stakeholders. Furthermore, references to global literature and studies help validate the findings or present contrasting perspectives, enriching the discussion.

Table 1. *Summary of the Level of Socio- Economic Status of Parents with Children Having Special Needs*

Indicators	Mean	Description
Access to Resources and Financial Stress	2.78	Moderate

The data in Table 1 presents the socioeconomic status of parents with children with special needs. The indicator "Access to Resources and Financial Stress" has a mean value of 2.78, indicating a moderate level. This suggests that while these parents may have some access to resources, they still experience financial strain in managing their children's needs. These findings underscore the necessity of enhanced support systems and resource accessibility to ease the financial burden on these families.

The data in Table 2 highlights the level of social support available to parents of children with special needs. The indicators "Quality Relationship" and "Cultural and Social Norms" have mean values of 3.92 and 4.02, respectively, resulting in an overall mean of 3.97, all of which indicate a high level of social support. These findings suggest that parents benefit from strong relationships and a supportive cultural and social environment, reinforcing the crucial role of social networks in helping them navigate the challenges of raising

children with special needs.

Table 2. *Summary of the Level of Social Support of Parents with Children Having Special Needs*

Indicators	Mean	Description
Quality Relationship Cultural and Social Norms	3.92	High
	4.02	High
Overall	3.97	High

The data in Table 3 presents the mental health levels of parents with children with special needs. The indicator "Anxiety and Stress" has a mean value of 2.68, indicating a moderate level, while "Parenting-Specific Stress" is rated higher, with a mean of 3.50, reflecting a high level of stress specific to parenting demands. The overall mean for mental health stands at 3.09, signifying a moderate level of mental health challenges. These findings suggest that while parents experience general stress and anxiety, the pressures associated with parenting responsibilities have a more pronounced impact. This underscores the need for targeted mental health support and interventions tailored to address the unique challenges faced by these parents.

Table 3. *Summary of the Level of Mental Health of Parents with Children Having Special Needs*

Indicators	Mean	Description
Anxiety and Stress	2.68	Moderate
Parenting-Specific Stress	3.50	High
Overall	3.09	Moderate

The data in Table 4 highlights the relationship between socioeconomic status and the mental health of parents with children with special needs. The correlation coefficient ($r = 0.35$) indicates a moderate positive relationship, suggesting that as socioeconomic status improves, mental health outcomes also tend to improve. Furthermore, the p-value of .00 confirms that this relationship is statistically significant. These findings emphasize the critical role of socioeconomic factors in shaping parents' mental well-being, reinforcing the need for policies and interventions that address financial and resource-related challenges to support their mental health.

Table 4. *Significance of the Relationship of Socio- Economic Status and Mental Health of Parents with Children Having Special Needs*

	Mental Health		
	R	p-value	Remarks
Socio-Economic Status	0.35	.00	Significant

Table 5 demonstrates a strong and statistically significant positive correlation between social support and the mental health of parents with children with special needs. The correlation coefficient ($r = 0.568$) indicates a substantial positive relationship, suggesting that higher levels of social support are associated with better mental health outcomes. Additionally, the p-value of .00 confirms that this relationship is highly significant, meaning it is unlikely to have occurred by chance. These findings highlight the vital role of a strong support system in promoting the well-being of parents facing the unique challenges of raising children with special needs.

Table 5. *Significance of the Relationship of Social Support and Mental Health of Parents with Children Having Special Needs*

	Mental Health		
	R	p-value	Remarks
Social Support	0.568	.00	Significant

This finding is consistent with existing research, including Plumb's (2011) study, which found that families with greater resilience experienced lower levels of parental stress. The study highlights the need for interventions aimed at strengthening family resilience to help reduce stress among parents of children with special needs. Parenting is a multifaceted and demanding yet fulfilling responsibility. This is especially the case for parents raising children with special needs. In many instances, receiving such a diagnosis brings significant emotional, financial, and physical challenges, necessitating considerable adjustments to a newly altered way of life (Hodapp et al., 2019).

The study by Boyden et al. (2020), findings indicated that higher levels of perceived social support were associated with lower anxiety levels over time. These results underscore the importance of enhancing social support systems to mitigate anxiety among parents caring for children with special needs. Parents of children with disabilities who had access to greater social support experienced lower levels of depression and anxiety. which concluded that objective support for parents of children with special needs positively predicts their mental health. Social support offers practical assistance, emotional validation, and a sense of belonging, all of which contribute to improved mental well-being.

These studies align with the current findings, further reinforcing the idea that social support plays a crucial role in improving the mental health of parents managing the challenges associated with caring for children with special needs. The strong positive correlation in this

study reinforces the critical role of social support in shaping the mental health of these parents. This highlights the need for robust support systems, including support groups, community resources, and access to mental health professionals, to help parents effectively manage the challenges of raising children with special needs.

Table 6. *Significance of the Relationship of Socio- Economic Status, Social Support and Mental Health of Parents with Children Having Special Needs*

Individual Influence of Predictors	Standardized Coefficient	T	p-value	Remarks
Socio- Economic Status	0.211	2.17	0.034	Significant
Social Support	0.511	5.24	0.00	Significant

Combined Influence of Predictors
R 0.604
R² 0.364
F 20.6
P 0.00 Significant

Table 6 illustrates the relationships between socioeconomic status, social support, and the mental health of parents with children with special needs.

Individually, socioeconomic status has a standardized coefficient of 0.211, a t-value of 2.17, and a p-value of 0.034, indicating a significant yet relatively weaker influence on mental health compared to social support. In contrast, social support exhibits a stronger standardized coefficient of 0.511, a t-value of 5.24, and a p-value of 0.00, reflecting a substantial and statistically significant impact on mental health.

When both predictors are considered together, the combined influence shows an R value of 0.604, signifying a strong positive correlation between socioeconomic status, social support, and mental health. The R² value of 0.364 suggests that 36.4% of the variance in mental health can be explained by these two factors. The F-value of 20.6 and p-value of 0.00 further confirm the statistical significance of the combined influence of these predictors on mental health.

Overall, the results highlight the critical roles that both socioeconomic status and social support play in determining the mental health outcomes of parents with children who have special needs. These findings underscore the need to address socioeconomic disparities and foster supportive social networks to improve the well-being of these parents.

Conclusions

This study underscores the significant impact of socioeconomic factors and social support systems on the mental health of parents raising children with special needs. Findings indicate that these parents experience moderate to high levels of stress, primarily due to caregiving responsibilities, financial pressures, and limited access to essential resources. Despite the presence of relatively strong social support networks, the persistent challenges associated with caregiving and financial strain contribute to heightened anxiety, stress, and parenting-related burdens, resulting in lower overall mental health outcomes. The key factors influencing parental mental health include financial stress and resource limitations, parenting-specific stress, and moderate levels of anxiety and stress. Financial constraints, with a mean score of 2.78, significantly hinder access to necessary resources, exacerbating emotional distress and financial strain. The emotional and physical demands of caregiving remain substantial, with a mean score of 3.50, leading to anxiety, burnout, and difficulty managing daily responsibilities. Although anxiety levels are moderate, with a mean score of 2.68, the ongoing emotional strain negatively impacts overall well-being. Despite these challenges, the study highlights the potential for improving parental mental health through targeted interventions and strengthened support systems.

To enhance the mental well-being of parents raising children with special needs, several strategies should be considered. Expanding access to mental health services is essential. Developing specialized counseling, therapy, and support programs tailored to the needs of these parents can provide significant relief. Accessible mental health resources, including stress management programs and online support networks, should also be made available. Strengthening community support systems can further alleviate parental stress by fostering local and online peer support groups that mitigate isolation and provide practical caregiving strategies. Community events, workshops, and social activities should be organized to facilitate shared experiences and emotional resilience.

Advocating for family-friendly workplace policies is another crucial measure. Implementing flexible work arrangements, paid leave, and financial assistance programs for parents of children with special needs can significantly improve their quality of life. Employers should be encouraged to offer childcare support, work-from-home options, and time off for medical appointments. Additionally, improving access to essential resources and services is necessary to support these families. Ensuring better access to specialized healthcare, educational programs, and social services for children with special needs can help alleviate parental stress. Financial aid initiatives should be established to assist families in affording therapy, medical care, and educational support.

Promoting public awareness and inclusive social support is also vital. Awareness campaigns should be launched to reduce stigma and

foster a more empathetic and supportive society. National or regional programs should be developed to promote social integration and prevent parental isolation.

The findings of this study highlight the critical role of socioeconomic conditions and social support in shaping the mental health of parents raising children with special needs. Implementing targeted interventions—such as expanding access to mental health services, strengthening community networks, advocating for supportive workplace policies, and promoting public awareness—can foster a more inclusive and supportive environment for these families. Enhancing parental mental health not only improves their resilience and well-being but also contributes to better care and developmental outcomes for their children. A concerted effort from policymakers, communities, and support organizations is essential in addressing these challenges, fostering understanding, and ensuring that all parents feel empowered and supported in their caregiving responsibilities.

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