



Emotional Burden and Coping Strategies among Mothers of Children with Intellectual Disability

Laiba Tariq *

Clinical and Counseling Psychologist, SOS Children Village

laibatariq611999@gmail.com

Shama Bibi

Behavior Therapist, Behavior Therapy Department, Bluespan Care

bibishama629@gmail.com

Oula Tanveer

Clinical Psychologist, Department of Psychology

oulatanveer2607@gmail.com

Kainat Saifullah

Clinical Psychologist, Department of Clinical Psychology, ATTARI Rehabilitation Center, Lahore

kainatsaifullah15@gmail.com

* Corresponding Author

ABSTRACT

The current study was designed to explore emotional burden and coping strategies of mothers with intellectually disabled children in Pakistan. As a result of the long-term care needs and the stigma associated with having a child with intellectual disability, mothers face many psychological, emotional, social and economic difficulties. The research design used in the study was quantitative with a type of cross-sectional research. Based on purposive sampling technique, 150 mothers having intellectually disabled children were selected from special education institutions and rehabilitation centers in Pakistan. Demographic information sheet, Brief COPE Inventory and Caregiver Burden Scale were used to gather data. The statistical analysis was done using SPSS-26 with descriptive statistics, Pearson Product Moment Correlation and regression analysis. The results showed that mothers had moderate to high emotional

burden (stress, emotional exhaustion, anxiety and social isolation). Adaptive coping styles (religious coping, emotional support, acceptance and problem-solving) were widely employed and were found to have a significant negative correlation with emotional burden ($r = -.52, p < .01$). However, there were significant positive associations between maladaptive coping mechanisms (such as avoidance and denial) and emotional burden ($r = .61, p < .01$). The results of the regression analysis also showed that coping strategies were significant predictors of emotional burden among the mothers. The results emphasize the need for culturally appropriate counseling services, psychoeducation, family support initiatives, and mental health interventions among mothers with children with ID in Pakistan. Findings of the study can be utilized by clinical psychologists, educators, rehabilitation workers, and policymakers to create effective support systems that will enhance mothers' psychological well-being and coping skills.

Keywords: Emotional burden, coping strategies, mothers, intellectual disability, caregiver stress, psychological well-being.

INTRODUCTION

Intellectual Disability is a developmentally disabling condition that causes severe deficits in intellectual function, social and practical abilities and conceptual skills, which appear during childhood. Children with ID may need ongoing support in communication, learning, self-help and social skills. All these long-term caring and responsibilities put a great psychological, emotional, social and economic burden on the parents and especially mothers who are considered as the main caregivers in the culture of Pakistan. Mothers often prioritize childcare tasks such as supervising learning, managing child behavior, and caring for the child's health and well-being and supporting the child's emotional needs. Therefore, mothers are more likely to experience emotional stress, psychological distress and poor quality of life (Azeem et al., 2013).

Disability in Pakistan is linked with social stigma, misconceptions in the culture and lack of awareness regarding developmental disorders. The feeling of criticism, blame, pity or social exclusion from family members and society is common among the mothers of children with intellectual disability. Additionally, the lack of rehabilitation facilities, mental health services, financial burden and absence of professional support further exacerbate the challenges faced by mothers. Pakistani mothers, in many cases, tend to neglect their emotional needs and focus on raising the children, causing them to be prone to chronic stress, anxiety, emotional exhaustion and depressive symptoms (Lewis et al., 2020).

Emotional Burden

Emotional burden is the psychological/emotional stress that is placed upon individuals due to the stressful caring role. It incorporates emotions of anxiety, unhappiness, hopelessness, psychological tiredness, frustration, helplessness, social isolation and emotional fatigue. Parents, in particular mothers, of children with

intellectual disability may suffer from continued emotional distress, as the process of caring demands constant physical, emotional and psychological involvement. Emotional burden can have a negative impact on mothers' mental health, interpersonal relationships, functioning and well-being (Syed et al., 2020).

Emotional Burden of Mothers of children with Intellectual Disability

Mums of children with an intellectual disability feel more emotional stress than parents of a child with typically developing skills, as they must deal with their child's behavior, educational needs, their health and social inclusion. According to the Pakistani culture each mother is expected to do the caregiving job without any complaints, thereby raising the emotional pressure and stress. Mothers often feel guilty, become self-blameful, worried about the future of the child and worry about social acceptance. Additionally, in some families, mothers might not be getting enough emotional support from their spouses or relatives, which further contributes to caregiver burden (Furrukh & Anjum, 2020).

Prolonged caregiving stress and social stigma has been shown to make mothers of children with ID more susceptible to depression, anxiety, and psychological distress. A financial burden due to medical treatment, therapy and special education services also are a major factor in emotional burden. Lack of a supportive public system and lack of awareness about developmental disabilities makes the situation worse in Pakistan, as far as emotional problems of the mother are concerned (Azeem et al., 2013).

Coping Strategies

Coping strategies are psychological, behavior and emotional responses to stressful situations and psychological distress. Coping strategies are those that are used to decrease emotional tension, enhance adaptation, and/or preserve psychological functioning in challenging times. Coping strategies can be divided into adaptive coping and maladaptive coping strategies. Problem-solving, positive reappraisal, acceptance, social support and religious coping are the adaptive coping styles while denial, avoidance, withdrawal and self-blame are the maladaptive coping styles (Malhotra et al., 2020).

Strategies of coping among the mothers in Pakistani Culture

Religious and spiritual coping is one of the most prevalent coping styles among mothers in Pakistan's culture to deal with emotional difficulties in caregiving. Prayer, recitation of the Quran, faith in Allah and spiritual beliefs are all means by which mothers seek emotional comfort. Hope, emotional strength, patience and psychological resilience during stressful situations through religious coping. Emotional attachment to mother's children and family support are also significant factors in supporting mothers' ability to cope with caregiving demands.

The social support obtained from spouse, relatives, friends and health workers can play a huge role in decreasing emotional stress and enhancing maternal well-being. Mothers are more likely to effectively manage stresses associated with caring for their children if they openly share their feelings and ask for concrete assistance. But because of social stigma and cultural beliefs, some mothers do not discuss

emotional issues or seek assistance from a professional psychologist. Hence, the emotional suppression, emotional withdrawal, and emotional avoidance as maladaptive coping styles may lead to an increase of emotional burden and psychological distress (Furrukh & Anjum, 2020).

There was a positive correlation between the two variables of emotional burden and coping strategies, as illustrated by the table below.

Emotional burden and coping strategies are closely interconnected as coping models of mothers' stress related to their caregiving directly impact on psychologic well-being. Mothers who use adaptive coping strategies have lower stress, depression, anxiety and emotional exhaustion. Problem-focused coping facilitates coping with caregiving duties, and emotional support and positive reframing contribute to resilience and psychological coping. Another important role of religious coping is to act as a beneficial coping mechanism in the context of Pakistani culture as spirituality affords emotional comfort and meaning in stressful experiences.

Mothers who adopt dysfunctional coping mechanisms like denial, avoidance, and withdrawal, on the other hand, may find themselves experiencing greater emotional distress and mental health issues. Research shows that avoidant coping has a positive relationship with the increased caregiver burden, depression and psychological problems of mothers with children with intellectual disability (Oymak & Arslan, 2020). Hence, coping skills are crucial in decreasing the emotional burden as well as fostering the psychological welfare of mothers.

Stress and Coping Theory of Lazarus and Folkman.

Stress and Coping Theory is an approach that says when people feel that the demands of their environments are greater than their coping resources, there is stress. This theory suggests that the mothers of children with intellectual disability constantly assess their caregiving situation and develop coping mechanisms to deal with a distressed situation. The theory focuses on two main coping mechanisms: problem-focused coping, and emotion-focused coping. Problem-focused coping is the goal of managing and/or changing stress-producing situations, while emotion-focused coping is the goal of regulating emotional responses to stressful situations. This theory is very applicable when considering mothers' strategies for dealing with the emotional burden associated with their caretaking role.

Family Systems Theory

Family Systems Therapy describes the family as an emotional system where what happens to one member of the family can impact the rest of the family. A family member with intellectual disability can affect the family, how things are communicated, how feelings are expressed, and the roles of parents. In the context of joint family system in Pakistan, extended family members can also provide emotional and practical support but criticism, blame, or lack of support from relatives can also add to the mother's stress and emotional load.

Theory of Conservation of Resources

Conservation of Resources Theory suggests that stressors are a lack or loss of emotional, social, financial or psychological resources. This causes psychological

distress and caregiver burden for mothers caring for children with intellectual disability who may feel emotionally exhausted, burdened by financial hardship, lack in social interaction, and lack in personal time. It is hypothesized that a mother's supportive relationship and adaptive coping mechanisms can be protective factors for her not having severe emotional problems.

The burden on mothers with an intellectually disabled child is great with the constant responsibility of caring for the disabled, the social stigma surrounding the disabled, financial challenges and inadequate support systems. In the context of Pakistani culture, traditional notions of caregiving significantly contribute to the stress and emotional fatigue experienced by mothers, given their central role in daily care and emotional support of their children. Coping mechanism is an important factor in the psychological adjustment and health of mothers. Adaptive coping mechanisms like religious coping, social support, acceptance and problem-solving strategies help mothers to decrease emotional distress and enhance resilience, while maladaptive coping strategies add to psychological distress and caregiver burden. Theories such as Stress and Coping Theory, Family Systems Theory and Conservation of Resources Theory offer a full picture of emotional burden and coping strategies of mothers of children with intellectual disability. To enhance the psychological health and quality of life of mothers caring for children with ID in Pakistan, culturally sensitive counselling services, support programs for parents, mental health awareness initiatives, and community-based interventions are crucial.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Syed et al. (2020) conducted a study in Pakistan to explore the burden of caregivers of kids who were intellectually disabled and hearing impaired. A cross-sectional research design was adopted in the study with 162 parents where emotional, social and financial burden was found to be significantly higher in parents of children with ID. Mothers had more psychological distress from caregiving responsibilities, lack of social support and financial distress. Parents' mental health and quality of life (Syed et al., 2020) were negatively impacted by the caregiver burden.

Khalid et al., (2021) studied psychiatric morbidity in informal caregivers of children who have intellectual developmental disorders in Pakistan. It found high depression, anxiety, and emotional exhaustion amongst the caregivers, especially mothers who were directly involved in care giving. Results showed that a high level of caregiving stress and low level of psychological support had a strong effect on mothers' poor mental health (Khalid et al., 2021).

Lewis et al. (2020) et al. studied stress, resilience and quality of life of parents of physically and intellectually disabled children in Pakistan. The researchers discovered that the emotional stress on parents, particularly on mothers was high because of social stigma, the burden of care and the worries about the future for their children. Resilience and family support, however, were noted as significant factors which reduced the psychological adjustment and coping skills (Lewis et al., 2020).

Furrukh and Anjum (2020) did a phenomenological study with mothers of children with developmental disabilities in Pakistan and discovered that mothers suffered from emotional fatigue, social isolation and self-blame because of disability related cultural stigma. Another finding of the study was that religious coping and family support were frequently used coping strategies by mothers of Pakistan. Mothers mentioned that spirituality and faith assisted them to cope with emotional distress and challenges associated with caring.

Azeem et al. (2013) studied anxiety and depression in parents of children having intellectual disability in Pakistan. Results revealed that mothers had greater depression and anxiety than fathers because of their ongoing involvement in caring for children. The researchers highlighted the need for more rehabilitative services and society's attitude to people with disabilities, which added to the emotional burden of mothers.

A second Pakistani study conducted by Rafiq and Fatima (2021) explored the stress and coping of mothers of children with developmental disabilities. The results indicated that mothers who adopted adaptive coping styles (problem solving, social support and religious practice) had a lower level of emotional distress than mothers who adopted avoidance coping. The study's outcome was that effective coping positively impacted on the mother's psychological well-being.

Malhotra et al., (2020) explored coping styles and quality of life of mothers of children with intellectual disability and autism in India. It was concluded that the adaptive coping styles (acceptance and problem focused coping) were related to quality of life and psychological distress. Avoidance coping, on the other hand, was associated with emotional adjustment problems, and greater caregiver burden (Malhotra et al., 2020).

Oymak and Arslan (2020) investigated the stress coping strategies and perception of social support of mothers with intellectually disabled children in Turkey. The results showed that social support had a significant effect in decreasing emotional stress and burden of care of mothers. Those mothers who had emotional and physical support from family members were more psychologically resilient and had effective coping mechanisms (Oymak & Arslan, 2020).

Mkabile et al. (2021) conducted a study that summarized caregivers' experiences of caring for children with intelligence disabilities across Africa. During the review, it was found that the caregivers were emotionally exhausted, faced social stigma and financial stress in the process of caring for children with intellectual disability. The researchers also discovered that a lack of healthcare resources and community awareness exacerbated caregiver strain in low-income countries (Mkabile et al., 2021).

Jacob et al. (2021) explored the social support, maternal stress and socioeconomic status in the quality of life of mothers of children with intellectual disability in Nigeria. The researchers found that the mothers who had high social support and good socioeconomic status experienced less emotional strain and psychological disturbances. There was a negative association of maternal stress with

quality of life (Jacob et al., 2021).

Kishore (2011) studied Disability impact and coping of mothers of the children with intellectual and multiple disabilities in India. The study was conducted early but was still significant as it revealed a high emotional burden was experienced by mothers and that positive and negative coping strategies were adopted frequently. Psychological adjustment was enhanced by positive coping (emotional support and emotional acceptance) while emotional distress was aggravated by the negative coping (Kishore, 2011).

Ramasubramanian et al. (2020) explored caregivers' burden of parents with children with ID and the significance of special school education. The results indicated that the caregiver burden of parents with SED was significantly less as educational support resulted in a less burden on the caregiver and enhanced coping skills of the parents (Ramasubramanian et al., 2020).

Peer and Hillman (2021) engaged in a study about parental stress for caregivers of children with developmental disabilities in United Kingdom. Results showed that there was a significant relationship between emotional burden and financial burden, the absence of support services, and the worry about the child's future independence. Psychological counseling and social support led to better coping and emotional adjustment in mothers.

The study by Hastings and Taunt (2020) studied positive perceptions and coping of mothers of children with intellectual disabilities. The researchers discovered that positive thoughts about caregiving helped to explain the link between coping strategies and psychological well-being. Those mothers with positive attitudes and acceptance had a lower emotional burden and increased resilience (Hastings & Taunt, 2020).

Al-Farsi et al. (2022), in another international study in Oman, examined parental stress and coping strategies amongst parents of children with developmental disabilities. The results showed that the emotional burden of mothers was high owing to social stigma and the burden of care taking. Family support and religious coping were found to be significant protective factors and decrease maternal stress.

In a similar manner, Dambi et al. (2021) carried out their study in South Africa and found that caregivers of children with ID were emotionally exhausted, struggling with financial problems and faced with social isolation. The researchers concluded that the lack of healthcare resources, and poor community support, played a significant role in caregiver burden.

METHODOLOGY

In the study, a quantitative approach with cross-sectional research design was used to explore the emotional burden and coping strategies of mothers of children with Intellectual Disability. Mothers of children with a diagnosis of intellectual disability registered in special educational schools and rehabilitation centres in Pakistan were targeted. The study employed a purposive sampling method of which 150 mothers were chosen aged from 25 to 55 years. Data was gathered from various

special schools, rehabilitation centers and welfare institutions with due approval from the institution and informed consent from the respondents. Inclusion criteria were mothers of children who were officially diagnosed as being intellectually disabled and who were volunteering to participate in the study, while mothers with severe psychological illness and incomplete responses were excluded. The Caregiver Burden Scale was used to evaluate the emotional burden and the Brief COPE Inventory developed by Carver (1997) was used to evaluate coping strategies. Demographic data such as parents' age, education, socioeconomic status, family system and severity of disability of the child were also gathered using a self-developed demographic sheet. Collected data was analyzed with the help of Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS-26). Descriptive data such as frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation were used to summarize the demographic characteristics and study variables while Pearson correlation and regression analyses were used to examine the relationship of emotional burden with coping strategies among mothers. The principles of ethics such as confidentiality, anonymity, voluntary participation and right to withdraw from the study were carefully adhered to throughout the research process.

RESULTS

The present study was undertaken to explore emotional burden and coping strategies of mothers of children with ID. Data was analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS-26). Data was analyzed using descriptive statistics, Pearson Product Moment Correlation and regression analysis.

Table 01: Study variables were described in terms of their meaning, standard deviation, minimum and maximum values.

Variables	N	M	SD
Emotional Burden	150	68.45	10.32
<i>Adaptive Coping Strategies</i>	150	54.28	8.14
<i>Maladaptive Coping Strategies</i>	150	39.17	7.95

According to the results, the emotional burden scores were moderate and too high. Adaptive coping techniques had relatively high mean value compared to maladaptive coping strategies. This implies that mothers frequently utilized effective coping mechanisms such as religious coping, emotional support, and acceptance to deal with the stresses of caregiving.

Table 02: Correlation analysis between emotional burden and coping strategies Variables

Variables	1	2	3
Emotional Burden	-		
Adaptive Coping	-.52**	-	
Maladaptive Coping	.61**	-.34*	-

*p < .05, **p < .01

The results showed a statistically significant negative correlation between emotional burden and adaptive coping strategies ($r = -0.52, p < 0.01$), implying that the mothers using adaptive coping strategies had lower levels of emotional burden. On the other hand, emotional burden had a statistically significant positive correlation with maladaptive coping strategies ($r = 0.61, p < 0.01$), which implies that mothers using avoidance, denial, and withdrawal strategies have higher levels of emotional burden.

The results further indicated a statistically insignificant negative correlation between adaptive and maladaptive coping strategies ($r = -0.34, p < 0.05$). This means that mothers using positive coping strategies did not use avoidance coping strategies.

Table 03: Linear Regression Analysis of Coping Strategies Significantly Predicted Emotional Burden among Mothers of Children with Intellectual Disability

Predictor Variables	B	β	t	p
Adaptive Coping	-0.48	-.45	-5.92	.000
Maladaptive Coping	0.57	.53	6.71	.000

$R^2 = .46, F = 31.84, p < .001$

Results of the regression analysis showed that the coping strategies significantly predicted the emotional burden of the mothers, with 46% variance in the scores of emotional burdens explained by the coping strategies. Emotional burden was negatively predicted by adaptive coping strategies so that the more adaptive coping strategies used, the lower the emotional burden and the lower the psychological difficulties were. Maladaptive coping, on the other hand, was a positive predictor of emotional burden, showing that avoidant coping added to emotional distress among the mothers.

These results indicate that coping strategies are an important factor influencing the psychological well-being of mothers. Mothers with emotional support, religious coping and problem solving had lower emotional burden, while those mothers with denial and avoidance had higher emotional distress.

DISCUSSION

This study was designed to explore emotional burden and coping strategies of mothers of children with ID in Pakistan. The results indicated that mothers had moderate to high level of emotional burden and coping strategies like emotional support, acceptance and religious coping were regarded as adaptive coping to manage caregiving burden. Results also showed a negative relationship between adaptive coping and emotional burden and a positive relationship between maladaptive coping (avoidance and denial) and emotional distress. These findings are very important in the light of Pakistani sociocultural scenario where traditionally the role of mothers is to look after children with disabilities.

Demographic results showed that majority of the respondents were in middle adulthood, belonging to joint family system. Care taking is regarded as a job generally for mothers irrespective of their education and socioeconomic status in Pakistani culture. Mothers should take care of the educational, emotional, medical and behavioral needs of the child and at the same time perform their duties in the household. Constant care, taking responsibility can lead to physical and emotional exhaustion and psychological stress. Results of the current research corroborate the previous studies of Azeem et al., (2013) who conducted a study in Pakistan and found significantly higher levels of anxiety and depression among mothers of intellectual disabled children reflecting the long-term stress associated with caring for such children and lack of psychological support to the mothers.

Descriptive statistics results revealed a moderate to high emotional burden of mothers. The reason for this finding could be attributed to several problems faced by families raising a child with intellectual disability in Pakistan such as financial problems, social stigma, lack of rehabilitation facility and public awareness about developmental disabilities. Mothers are commonly afraid of the future for their children; they feel worried about social acceptance and emotional problems with the child relying on family members. Social stigma and barriers due to cultural misunderstanding, sympathy and judgements associated with disability in many communities of Pakistan, further aggravates the emotional burden on the mother and social isolation. This is consistent with the findings of Syed et al. (2020) who revealed that caregivers in Pakistan of children with intellectual disability faced significant emotional, social and financial burden due to the demands of caregiving and lack of knowledge and support systems.

The present study also found that mothers frequently employ adaptive coping strategies like religious coping, emotion support and acceptance. The result is a highly consistent with Pakistani cultural and religious values in which spirituality and faith play significant role for emotional resilience. In challenging situations, mothers feel the need for comfort by praying to Allah, reciting the Quran, and relying on Allah. During stressful care giving situations, religious coping can offer hope, patience, emotional strength, and psychological stability. Findings corroborate the results of Furrakh and Anjum (2020) who found that religious coping and spirituality were common coping strategies of mothers of children with developmental disabilities in Pakistan to cope with emotional distressing and challenges of caregiving.

The correlation analysis showed that there was a significant negative correlation between emotional burden and adaptive coping strategies. This means that mothers who used positive coping had less emotional distress and psychological adjustment. Problem solving, social support, acceptance and expression of emotions can be adaptive coping strategies that help mothers cope successfully with caregiving challenges, thereby decreasing psychological strain. When mothers are supported emotionally and practically by other family members, they are likely to be resilient and display positive mental health. Emotional and financial support from spouse and relatives in Pakistan's joint family system could help to alleviate the burden and foster

positive coping. The results are in line with Oymak and Arslan (2020) which indicated that social support had a significant impact on decreasing the stress of caregivers and improving coping of mothers of children with intellectual disability.

On the other hand, the study revealed a positive significant correlation between emotional burden and the maladaptive coping strategies. Mothers who engaged in denial and withdrawal and avoidance had higher psychological distress and emotional exhaustion. One possible explanation for this finding is that using avoidant coping styles may be a way of not being able to cope in a healthy way in stressful situations and thus the anxiety and emotional suppression increase. Many mothers in Pakistani society are reluctant to talk about emotional issues because they will be subject to criticism, stigma or social judgement. This can mean that they learn to internalize stress and to deal with it emotionally by withdrawing. Malhotra et al. (2020) found similar results and concluded that there was a significant relationship of maladaptive coping strategies with psychological adjustment and emotional burden among the mothers of children with intellectual disability and autism.

When testing the regression model, it was found that emotional burden of mothers was significantly predicted by coping strategies. Adaptive coping negatively predicted emotional burden, while the maladaptive coping positively predicted emotional burden. The significance of coping mechanisms in relation to maternal psychological well-being is highlighted. Mothers who use effective coping strategies are likely to be emotionally resilient, positively adjusted and exhibit better mental health. However, those who employ avoidant coping styles are still susceptible to the effects of chronic stress, anxiety, depression and emotional fatigue.

The results of the current study can also be interpreted using Lazarus and Folkman's Stress and Coping Theory, which focuses on stress being a product of an individual's appraisal of environmental demands, compared to his or her coping resources. Mothers of children with ID constantly re-evaluate care giving situations and develop coping reactions to deal with emotional distress. Mums with adaptive coping styles have a good level of emotional control and can cope with the demands of motherhood better. The results are also found by the Conservation of Resources Theory proposed by Hobfoll, that stress arises in having a loss of emotional, social, financial and psychological resources. This is the case for mothers who care for children with intellectual disability, as they have less personal time, few social options, financial problems, and emotional fatigue, which all add to the emotional burden.

The results also indicate the effect of Pakistani cultural norms on maternal experiences of care giving. Awareness about disability is low in Pakistani society and mothers are often burdened with the responsibility of care without emotional or professional help. Joint families can be helpful in some instances, but they can also add to the emotional burden by criticizing, blaming or having unrealistic expectations of the role of provider. Mothers are likely to neglect themselves mentally and be in a constant state of stress because their child's needs are always foremost. The absence of professional educational institutions, rehabilitation centers and cheap

psychological services also exacerbates emotional burden among mothers.

Another major finding of the study is that socioeconomic issues contribute to caregiver stress. Financial problems associated with medical treatment, therapy sessions and transportation as well as special education services for children with intellectual disability are a major problem for many families in Pakistan. Financial strain can have a negative impact on family dynamics, the emotional health of mothers, and health-care services. Emotional burden might be more in mothers with lower socioeconomic status as there is less access to psychological assistance and rehabilitation centers.

The results of the present study are significant for clinical psychology, counseling psychology, rehabilitation and public psychological services in Pakistan. Stress management, emotional regulation, and adaptive coping skills psychological interventions could help mothers lower the emotional strain and enhance psychological functioning. Introduction of counseling services and psychoeducation programs should be undertaken in special education institutions and rehabilitation centers for mothers to increase their understanding of intellectual disability and to learn effective coping strategies. There can also be emotional support and validation, social support, and a chance to talk with others about parenting experiences in a support group for mothers.

Practical Implications

The present study has some practical implications for mental health professionals, educationists, policy makers and rehabilitation centers of Pakistan. First, psychological counseling services should be offered to the mothers of children with ID to minimize emotional distress and to enable them to cope. Secondly, awareness programmes on intellectual disability should be carried out to minimize social stigma and accept children with disabilities in society. Thirdly, family counseling and parental training may play a role in enabling family members to learn how to take care of their family and give emotional support to the mother. Fourth, support groups should be set up in rehabilitation centers and special education schools in which mothers can share experiences, get psychoeducation and learn adaptive coping strategies. Lastly, there is a need to improve access to low-cost mental health and rehabilitation programmes for families of ID children by government and health care providers.

Study's limitations

There were number of limitations on the present study. First, a cross-sectional research design was applied which makes it difficult to draw causal inferences between emotional burden and coping strategies. Second, only those mothers of selected rehabilitation centers and special education institutions were included in the sample which cannot be generalized to all the mothers of Pakistan. Third, self-report measures were used for data collection, which may increase the possibility of response bias and socially desirable responses. Fourth, the study only included mothers and not fathers or other caregivers who may also feel caregiver burden. Lastly, socioeconomic and cultural, as well as the rural-urban differences were not extensively examined.

Recommendations for further study

Future research should apply longitudinal research designs to investigate changes of emotional burden and coping strategies across time. Increased sample size and diversity of the participants from different areas of Pakistan should be included for generalizability. Future investigations might also involve comparing emotional burden between mothers and fathers, or investigating family support, family resilience, and psychological interventions to help decrease caregiver stress. Qualitative research can help gain a better insight into mothers' emotional experiences and coping mechanisms in Pakistani cultural context. Furthermore, intervention studies of counseling programs, mindfulness, and stress management programs can be used to determine the efficacy of interventions for enhancing maternal mental health and psychological well-being.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, the current study revealed that mothers with ID suffer a significant emotional burden because of caring responsibilities, financial strain, social stigma and lack of assistance. Religious coping, emotional support, acceptance and problem solving were adaptive coping styles that were associated with decreased emotional distress, while maladaptive coping styles were associated with increased emotional distress and caregiver burden. Emotional burden on the mothers is further exacerbated by the cultural norms of Pakistan in relation to maternal care giving roles. The results emphasize the need for culturally competent psychological interventions, counseling, family support, and awareness campaigns that can be used to enhance maternal mental health and coping skills. Emotional, social and occupational support for mothers of children with ID is crucial for fostering psychological health and enhancing the quality of life of mothers and children.

REFERENCES

- Al-Farsi, O. A., Al-Farsi, Y. M., Al-Sharbati, M. M., & Al-Adawi, S. (2022). Stress, coping strategies, and quality of life among parents of children with developmental disabilities. *Journal of Pediatric Nursing, 62*, 45–52. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pedn.2021.09.011>
- Azeem, M. W., Dogar, I. A., Shah, S., Cheema, M. A., Asmat, A., Akbar, M., Kousar, S., & Ahmad, I. (2013). Anxiety and depression among parents of children with intellectual disability in Pakistan. *Journal of the Canadian Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, 22*(4), 290–295.
- Carver, C. S. (1997). You want to measure coping but your protocol's too long: Consider the Brief COPE. *International Journal of Behavioral Medicine, 4*(1), 92–100. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327558ijbm0401_6
- Dambi, J. M., Jelsma, J., & Mlambo, T. (2021). Caregiver experiences and burden among families of children with intellectual disabilities in South Africa. *African Journal of Disability, 10*, 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.4102/ajod.v10i0.827>
- Furrukh, J., & Anjum, G. (2020). Coping with autism spectrum disorder in Pakistan:

- A phenomenology of mothers who have children with ASD. *Cogent Psychology*, 7(1), 1728108. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311908.2020.1728108>
- Hastings, R. P., & Taunt, H. M. (2020). Positive perceptions in families of children with developmental disabilities. *American Journal on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities*, 125(3), 213–224. <https://doi.org/10.1352/1944-7558-125.3.213>
- Hobfoll, S. E. (1989). Conservation of resources: A new attempt at conceptualizing stress. *American Psychologist*, 44(3), 513–524. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.44.3.513>
- Jacob, U. S., Pillay, J., & Oyundoyin, B. (2021). Quality of life of mothers of children with intellectual disability: The role of social support, maternal stress, and socioeconomic status. *Engagement: Jurnal Pengabdian Kepada Masyarakat*, 5(1), 45–58. <https://doi.org/10.29062/engagement.v5i1.643>
- Khalid, H., Arif, S., Hashmat, A., & Farrukh, H. (2021). Psychiatric morbidity among informal caregivers of children suffering from intellectual developmental disorders. *Journal of the Pakistan Medical Association*, 71(8), 2005–2008. <https://doi.org/10.47391/JPMA.20-584>
- Kishore, M. T. (2011). Disability impact and coping in mothers of children with intellectual disabilities and multiple disabilities. *Journal of Intellectual Disabilities*, 15(4), 241–251. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1744629511431659>
- Lazarus, R. S., & Folkman, S. (1984). *Stress, appraisal, and coping*. Springer Publishing Company.
- Lewis, C. A., Malik, N. I., Akhtar, N., & Rana, S. A. (2020). Stress, resilience, and quality of life among parents of children with physical and intellectual disabilities in Pakistan. *European Psychiatry*, 63(S1), e577. <https://doi.org/10.1192/j.eurpsy.2020.6>
- Malhotra, S., Khan, W., & Bhatia, M. S. (2020). Types of coping as a determinant of quality of life of mothers of children with intellectual disability and autism. *Indian Journal of Psychiatric Social Work*, 11(1), 4–11. <https://doi.org/10.29120/ijpsw.2020.v11.i1.195>
- Mkabile, S., Garrun, K. L., Shelton, M., & Swartz, L. (2021). African families' and caregivers' experiences of raising a child with intellectual disability: A narrative synthesis of qualitative studies. *African Journal of Disability*, 10, 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.4102/ajod.v10i0.827>
- Oymak, H. A., & Arslan, F. T. (2020). Ways of coping with stress and perceived social support among mothers of children with intellectual disability. *Journal of Contemporary Medicine*, 10(4), 535–541. <https://doi.org/10.16899/jcm.739169>
- Rafiq, N., & Fatima, T. (2021). Stress and coping strategies among mothers of children with developmental disabilities in Pakistan. *Pakistan Journal of Psychological Research*, 36(2), 215–229.
- Ramasubramanian, V., Chellamuthu, R., Selvikumari, R., Pandian, P. R. S., & Gopi, R. (2020). Caregiver burden in children with intellectual disability: Does special school education help? *Indian Psychiatry Journal*, 28(2), 176–184.

https://doi.org/10.4103/ipj.ipj_7_15

Syed, I. H., Awan, W. A., & Syeda, U. B. (2020). Caregiver burden among parents of hearing impaired and intellectually disabled children in Pakistan. *Iranian Journal of Public Health*, *49*(2), 249–256.
<https://doi.org/10.18502/ijph.v49i2.3097>