

Parent-to-Parent support perception and Parent-Child relationship in parents of children with special Needs: The mediating role of quality of life

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: This study aimed to determine the relationships between parent-to-parent support perception, quality of life, and parent-child relationship levels among Turkish parents of children with special needs.

Methods: Data were collected from 235 parents of children with intellectual disabilities and autism spectrum disorder using the Parent-to-Parent Support Perception Scale, WHOQOL-BREF quality of life scale, and Parent-Child Relationship Questionnaire. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was used to test the mediating role of quality of life.

Results: The findings indicate that quality of life partially mediates the relationship between the perception of parent-to-parent support and the parent-child relationship. The partial mediation model showed acceptable goodness-of-fit indices and significant path coefficients.

Conclusions: The study concluded that higher perceived parent-to-parent support enhances the quality of life, improving the parent-child relationship. This suggests that interventions aimed at increasing parent-to-parent support can positively impact the quality of life and strengthen parent-child relationships among parents of children with special needs.

1. Introduction

The family is 'the most basic universal and social institution that establishes the bond between the individual and society and ensures the continuation of community life' (Al-shahrani & Hammad, 2020). Multiple factors determine the relationship between parents and children, and the parent-child relationship dramatically affects the lives of children. Having a child with a disability in the family affects the social lives of parents for various reasons (Islam et al., 2022). One of the critical issues in parents' lives since they learn that their children have special needs is the increase in their need for social support. The social burdens of families increase due to reasons such as families' anxiety about their children being affected by environmental factors, isolation from social life due to trying to protect them from adverse reactions, and high responsibility for childcare (Islam et al., 2022). The stress level that develops due to these social burdens also affects family relationships. Other factors affecting the parent-child relationship are families' social support systems and perceived quality of life. In this context, this article aims to examine the mediating role of quality of life in the effect of parent to parent support perceptions of parents with disabled children

on parent-child relationships.

1.1. Perception of Parent-Child relationship and Parent-to-Parent support perception

Understanding parents with children with disabilities' perceptions of the parent-child relationship and parent to parent support is crucial for improving family well-being and support systems. Research shows that parents of children with disabilities often face challenges related to accepting their child's disabilities, feeling competent about parenting a child with disabilities, and coping with stress and coping mechanisms (Kadi & Çetin, 2018; Kyrkou, 2018; Mandleco et al., 2003; Smith et al., 2014; Schuirringa et al., 2015; Thompson et al., 2013). The lack of social support networks may exacerbate these difficulties, as parents often struggle to navigate professional and social organizations to help their children (Lebert-Charron et al., 2022). Moreover, disability-related stigma can lead to unsatisfactory relationships within extended family and social circles, limiting the overall support available to these families (Wang et al., 2020). Despite existing research on parent support, there is a lack of studies examining the mediating role of quality of life in the

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parent–child relationship among parents of children with special needs.

Research has demonstrated that social support networks can have a profound impact on the lives of parents of children with disabilities. Unsatisfactory relationships may be linked to difficulties in accessing help, lack of marital support, rejection from friends and family, limited social opportunities, and financial constraints (Mandlaco et al., 2003; Thompson et al., 2013). The feeling of not being alone and the shared responsibilities can significantly reduce parental anxiety and positively influence the parent–child relationship by fostering the development of healthy strategies (Polattimur, 2019). Studies show that an increase in family social support is associated with a decrease in communication problems between parent and child (Ha et al., 2011). Consequently, understanding the perceptions of parents with children with disabilities regarding parent–child relationships and parent-to-parent support perception is essential for developing interventions and support systems that meet the needs of these families. Addressing factors such as social support and quality of life can increase the parent–child relationship.

1.2. Quality of life as a mediating variable

Shin and Johnson (1978) explained that quality of life is an individual's evaluation of their quality of life according to their criteria. There are many factors affecting the life satisfaction of parents. One of them is the relationship with families with children with special needs, who have a great place in the social support system. In a study conducted by Araújo (2016), several people reported that receiving support from other families made them feel good, increased their quality of life, and, as a result, the quality of their relationships with their children and other family members increased. In the literature, there is evidence of the relationship between the perception of social support and quality of life of families with children with special needs (Balcells-Balcells et al., 2019; Davis & Gavidia-Payne, 2009; Hu et al., 2012; Schippers & van Boheemen, 2009), and that the supports provided are predictive of quality of life (Epley et al., 2011; Meral et al., 2013). A study conducted by White-Koning et al. (2007) determined that as the quality of life increased, the interaction between the parent–child relationship increased, and the relationships progressed more positively.

When parents first learn that their child has special educational needs, they often feel a weight of responsibility and may experience stress and anger. However, the potential for increased social support to alleviate these negative emotions and improve parent–child relationships can be a source of relief and encouragement. Social support has effectively contributed to the family's quality of life (Feng et al., 2022; Balcells-Balcells et al., 2019), giving parents more time and energy to devote to parenting and fostering better parent–child relationships.

Considering all this information, it can be said that the perception of parent to parent social support of parents with disabled children can increase the level of quality of life, and quality of life can increase the level of parent–child relationship. In this study, the mediating role of quality of life in the relationship between the perception of social support from parent to parent and the parent–child relationship of parents with disabled children was evaluated. In other words, the quality of life of parents who receive social support from other families may increase, strengthening the relationship between parents and their children.

2. Methods

2.1. Participant and procedure

In this study, 235 parents with disabled children participated. One hundred sixty-two of the parents were female, and 73 were male. There are 23 people between the ages of 18–24, 148 people between the ages of 25–44, and 64 people between the ages of 45–59. One hundred thirty-three of the parents stated that they were employed, and 102 stated that they were not. Eighty-five parents stated that their income is less than their expenses, 112 parents stated that their income is the same, and 38

parents stated that their income is more than their expenses. Participants had children with intellectual disabilities ($n = 129$, 55 %) and autism spectrum disorder ($n = 106$, 45 %).

The snowball sampling method was used to include the participants. Participants were recruited using a snowball sampling method, where initial participants referred other potential participants. The study scales were created in Google Forms and distributed by the authors to participants known to have children with disabilities. In line with Goodman's (1961) recommendations regarding snowball sampling, each individual participating in the study included another individual with a disabled child in the study. We informed the participants that they could withdraw from the study anytime.

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. Parent-to-Parent support perception Scale

The scale for families with children with disability was developed by Kürtüncü and Arslan (2022). The Parent-to-Parent support perception scale was chosen for its validated use in similar populations. The scale was designed to measure the perceptions of family functioning and social support of families with children with disabilities and includes 24 items in total (appreciation, knowledge, emotional, and cooperative). The items were scored on a 4-point likert scale (e.g. Families of children with disabilities like us can support me when i have difficulties). The higher the scale score, the higher the perceived support perception

2.2.2. WHOQOL-BREF quality of life

The scale consists of 26 questions and aims to evaluate physical, psychological, social, and environmental subdimensions (Skevington et al., 2004). WHOQOL-BREF is a widely used measure of quality of life, and the Parent-Child relationship Questionnaire has been shown to have strong reliability and validity in previous research. Scale items are scored using likert-type scoring, ranging from 1 to 5. The higher the score obtained from the scale, the higher the quality of life

2.2.3. Parent-child relationship questionnaire

The scale developed by Hetherington and Clingempeel (1992), is used to assess the relationships of families with their children. This scale, adapted into Turkish by Aytaç et al. (2018), measures the level of relationship quality the mother perceives in her mutual relationship with the child. The scale consists of 15 items and two subscales. The first subscale, positive parent–child relationship, covers the relationship's warmth, interest, and sensitivity (e.g., 'how much do you enjoy spending time alone with your child?'). The second subscale, the negative parent–child relationship, includes characteristics such as conflict, punishment and negative emotions (e.g. 'How much do you criticise your child?'). The scale is a 5-point likert scale, from 1 (not at all) to 5 (significantly); the respondent is asked to tick how much the given item reflects his/her relationship with his/her child.

2.3. Data analysis

Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) was used to test whether the quality of life mediates the relationship between parents' perception of parent to parent support and the parent–child relationship. Before proceeding to SEM analyses, descriptive statistics and correlation analysis of the variables were examined. In the first step of SEM, the measurement model was tested. Then, the hypothetical structural model was tested. In order to thoroughly test the mediating role of quality of life, both the full and partial mediation models were tested. Some goodness of fit indices were taken into consideration in order to decide whether the tested models were validated or not. These indices are the ratio of chi-square to degrees of freedom (χ^2/sd), CFI, IFI, GFI, NFI, RMSEA and SRMR values. In the evaluation of the models, generally accepted values of $\chi^2/sd < 5$; CFI, IFI, GFI and AGFI $> .90$; RMSEA and SRMR $< .08$ were accepted as critical values (Hu & Bentler, 1999; Tabachnick & Fidell,

2001). The chi-square difference test was used to compare total and partial models.

In addition to structural equation modelling, the bootstrapping process, which has recently started to be used frequently (e.g., Satici, 2016), was also carried out with SEM to provide additional evidence for the mediation of quality of life. With the bootstrapping process (Preacher & Hayes, 2008), coefficients and confidence intervals are created by resampling (5000 samples) based on the data collected in the research. If the confidence intervals do not include zero, it is understood that the result obtained is significant. Age and income were used as control variables in mediation analyses. The analyses of this study were conducted using IBM SPSS® Amos 22.00 and IBM SPSS® Statistics 21.00.

3. Results

This section presents descriptive statistics consisting of mean, standard deviation, skewness, kurtosis coefficients and correlation coefficients showing the relationships between variables. Secondly, the measurement model for structural equation modelling and the findings related to the structural model are presented. Finally, the results of the bootstrapping process for the preferred model are presented.

3.1. Descriptive statistics and correlation

The descriptive statistics of the variables of perception of support from family to family, quality of life and parent-child relationship, and the correlation analysis results of these variables are presented in Table 1.

Since these results were within the normality criteria of ± 2 for skewness and ± 7 for kurtosis, as stated by Finney and DiStefano (2006), it was interpreted that the data related to the variables were normally distributed. When Table 1 is analysed in terms of relationships between variables, it is seen that all variables in the study have significant relationships. It was found that there was a positive relationship between the perception of support from family to family and the parent-child relationship of parents with children with special needs. Similarly, perception of support from parent to parent is positively correlated with quality of life. In addition, it can be stated that there is a positive relationship between parent-child relationship and quality of life.

3.2. Structural equation modelling

The measurement model includes three latent variables: perception of parent to parent support, quality of life and parent-child relationship, and 10 observed variables that make up these latent variables. The results of the analysis showed that the measurement model had acceptable goodness-of-fit indices: $\chi^2/sd = 2.39$, CFI=.96, IFI=.97, GFI=.94, NFI=.94, RMSEA=.077 and SRMR=.03. The factor loadings of the measurement model ranged between 0.70 and 0.92 and all factor loadings were found to be significant. Considering these findings, it can be said that the measurement model is validated and the observed variables can represent the latent variables in a meaningful way.

Firstly, the partial mediating structural model was tested. This framework tested the model for the full mediating role of quality of life in the relationship between the perception of parent to parent support

and the parent-child relationship. When the goodness of fit indices of the full mediation model was examined [$\chi^2/sd = 3.34$, CFI=.91, IFI=.91, GFI=.90, NFI=.88, RMSEA=.100 and SRMR=.095], it was seen that these indices were not among the acceptable values. Secondly, the partial mediation model tested whether the perception of parent to parent support predicts the parent-child relationship directly and through quality of life. When the goodness of fit indices of the model in which quality of life is a partial mediator are examined, it is seen that all values are within acceptable values: $\chi^2/sd = 2.77$, CFI=.94, IFI=.94, GFI=.97, NFI=.90, RMSEA=.05 and SRMR=.068. In addition, it was found that all path coefficients were significant ($p < 0.05$) in the partial mediation model and path coefficients ranged between 0.27 and 0.92. In line with these findings, it was decided that the model in which quality of life is a partial mediator in the relationship between perception of support from parent to parent and parent-child relationship is a preferable model. The path coefficients of the preferred model are presented in Fig. 1.

We used a bootstrapping procedure (MacKinnon, 2008) to test the indirect path from the perception of parent to parent support to the parent-child relationship. Bootstrapped CIs are reported in Table 2. The indirect effect of perceived parent to parent support on parent-child relationship through quality of life was significant (bootstrap estimate = 0.038, 95 % CI=.003, 0.091). The empirical 95 % confidence interval is not different from zero, indicating an indirect effect. In line with the findings of all analyses conducted within the scope of the research, it can be said that the quality of life levels of parents with disabled children play a partial mediating role between their perception of parent to parent support and parent-child relationship.

4. Discussion

The findings of this study showed that quality of life is a partial mediator in the relationship between the perception of support from family to family and the parent-child relationship of parents with disabled children. In this framework, individuals with a high perception of support from family to family have high quality of life levels, and thus, parent-child relationship levels also increase. In other words, the perception of support from family to family increases the level of the parent-child relationship and quality of life mediates this increase.

There are no studies that address the relationships between the perception of parent to parent support, quality of life and parent-child relationship of parents with disabled children within the framework of a model. However, the relationships between these variables have been examined in different studies. As the first finding, the perception of support from family to family positively predicts quality of life. Savari et al. (2021) found a positive significant relationship between the perceived social support of parents with disabled children and their quality of life. In other words, they stated that parents' quality of life changed materially and morally thanks to the support they perceived from other families, and this situation reflected positively on their relationships with their children. Leung and Li-Tsang (2003) found that parents' quality of life is related to their social relationships. Robeson et al. (2024) explained that having a higher quality social support system increases parents' quality of life by reducing their stress levels. When the studies mentioned in the literature are evaluated holistically (Leung & Li-Tasang, 2003; Robeson et al., 2024; Safari et al., 2021), it is

Table 1
Descriptive statistics.

Variables	Descriptive Statistics and Reliabilities				Correlations					
	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis	α	ω	λ_6	1	2	3
1. PCR	52.14	8.10	-0.32	2.27	0.79	0.88	0.89	-		
2. PPS	78.43	15.11	-1.15	1.84	0.96	0.91	0.91	0.38**	-	
3. QOL	78.75	11.86	-0.33	0.65	0.88	0.90	0.91	0.28**	0.24**	-

Note. ** $p < 0.01$; PPS=Parent-to-Parent Support Perception; QOL=Quality of Life; PCR=Parent-Child Relationship.

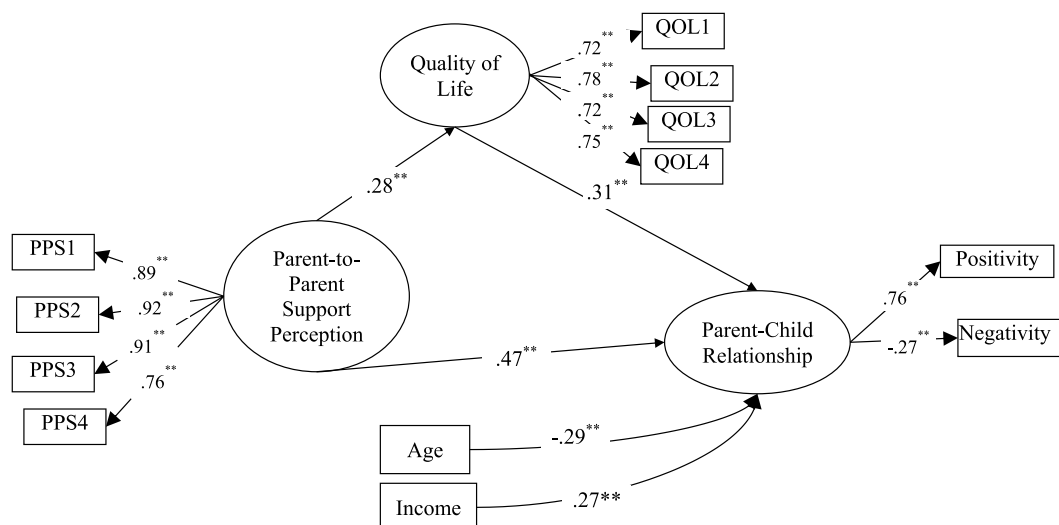


Fig. 1. Standardized factor loading for the partially mediated structural model. Note. $N=235$; ** $p < 0.01$; PPS1 = appreciation; PPS2 = knowledge; PPS3 = emotional; PPS4 = cooperative; QOL1 = physical; QOL2 = psychological; QOL3 = social, QOL4 = environment.

Table 2
Parameters and 95 % CIs for the paths of the Model III.

Path	Estimate	SE	Lower 95 % CI	Upper 95 % CI
Direct				
PPS → QOL	0.278	0.083	0.116	0.440
QOL → PCR	0.205	0.096	0.006	0.383
PPS → PCR	0.398	0.074	0.255	0.553
Indirect effect				
PPS → QOL → PCR	0.038	0.022	0.003	0.091

Note. PPS=Parent-to-Parent Support Perception; QOL=Quality of Life; PCR=Parent-Child Relationship.

thought that the finding that parents’ perception of parent to parent support positively predicts the quality of life is consistent and plausible.

Another finding is that quality of life positively predicts the parent–child relationship. Research shows that the low quality of life of parents of children with disabilities is associated with poorer parent–child relationships (Alpğan & Alabay, 2021; Puka et al., 2020; Tien et al., 2022). In a study conducted in Turkey, Alpğan and Alabay (2021) found that as parents’ quality of life increased, their relationship with their children also increased. Low quality of life can negatively affect parents’ physical, psychological and social health, which may cause parents to interact less with their children and be less emotionally supportive (Curley & Kotera, 2023). The fact that quality of life is positively related to the parent–child relationship shows that this finding is consistent with the literature.

Another finding was that parents’ perception of social support from other parents with disabled children positively predicted their relationship with their own children. Families may need friendship, feelings of not being alone, emotional support and friendship (Canary, 2008). The support that families receive from other mothers and fathers can positively affect their relationship with their children (Polattimur, 2019). Therefore, the current finding is consistent with the literature (Ballesteros et al., 2024; Diker, 2020; Polattimur, 2019; Sadiki, 2023).

The last finding in the model determined within the scope of this research is that the perception of parent to parent social support can increase the parent–child relationship through quality of life. In other words, this result shows that social support can positively affect parent–child relationships by improving parents’ quality of life. Social support from other parents can enhance parents’ quality of life by addressing their emotional and practical needs. Parents with a high quality of life are more likely to maintain positive and healthy

relationships with their children. Social support directly affects the parent–child relationship and indirectly improves parents’ quality of life. This indirect effect strengthens parents’ relationships with their children by increasing their well-being. This finding indicates that social support can enhance parent–child relationships by improving the quality of life of parents (Dunst et al., 1990; Yan et al., 2024; Wahab et al., 2022).

5. Limitations

It is also important to recognize the limitations of the current study. The data used in this study were collected using self-reported measures. Therefore, different methods can be used to reduce subjectivity. Since this study used a cross-sectional design, it is difficult to make causal inferences. There may be other mediators besides the quality of life in the relationship between the perception of social support of parents with disabled children and parent–child relationship. For this reason, other variables can be added to investigate the relationship between perception of social support and parent–child relationship. Conduct longitudinal studies to track the effects of parent-to-parent support over time. This would provide insights into the long-term benefits of social support on the quality of life and parent–child relationships.

6. Conclusion

When the findings of this study are analysed, it is noteworthy that there is a positive relationship between all variables. Therefore, it can be said that the findings of this study are similar to previous studies examining the bilateral relationships between perception of support from family to family, quality of life and parent–child relationship. In addition to this similarity, the finding that the perception of support from family to family increases the parent–child relationship not directly but through quality of life in this study is thought to make important contributions to the literature in terms of revealing what kind of relationship there is when the variables of parent–child relationship, quality of life and perception of support from family to family are examined together.

Ethics approval and consent to participate

Data collection for this study was conducted with the utmost consideration for ethical standards. The study protocol was reviewed and approved by the appropriate educational authorities, ensuring

adherence to ethical guidelines and safeguarding the well-being of the participants. Participation in the study was entirely voluntary, and every effort was made to create a comfortable and supportive environment for the participants. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants by providing detailed information about the purpose, process, and possible effects of the study. During the consent process, it was clearly stated that participants had the right to withdraw from the study at any stage, and that this decision would not lead to any negative consequences. In addition, all participants were assured that their data would be kept confidential and that the research results would be anonymized. This approach ensures the protection of participants; rights and privacy and guarantees that the research is conducted in accordance with ethical principles.

Ethics statements

This study was approved by the Çankırı Karatekin University Ethics Committee.

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CRedit authorship contribution statement

Halime Miray Sümer Dodur: Conceptualization, Methodology, Formal analysis, Supervision, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. **Büşra Çalişkan:** Conceptualization, Data curation, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Data availability

Data will be made available on request.

Researchers who wish to obtain additional data or conduct further analysis may contact the relevant authors to request supplementary information or materials. We are willing to collaborate and provide the necessary information to support the results presented in the article.

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