International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Development
www.allsubjectjournal.com
ISSN Online: 2349-4182
Received: 31-01-2026, Accepted: 03-03-2026, Published: 18-03-2026
Volume 13, Issue 1, 2026, Page No. 547-550

Quality of life of caregivers of children with learning disabilities

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Abstract

Children with learning disabilities require sustained academic and emotional support, and the responsibility for this support often rests largely on family caregivers, particularly parents. Continuous caregiving responsibilities may significantly influence caregivers' physical, psychological, and social well-being. The present study systematically reviews empirical research examining the quality of life of caregivers of children with learning disabilities and related developmental disabilities. A systematic review was conducted for this purpose. Literature searches were carried out across major electronic databases including PubMed, Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, PsycINFO, and Google Scholar. Studies published between 2000 and 2025 that examined the quality of life or well-being of caregivers of children with learning or developmental disabilities were considered. The reviewed studies were conducted across diverse countries including India, Saudi Arabia, Malaysia, Japan, Turkey, Iran, Oman, Croatia, Jordan, Italy, and the United States. Most studies employed cross-sectional research designs and convenience or purposive sampling methods. The findings consistently indicate that caregivers experience reduced quality of life across psychological, social, and environmental domains. Major factors influencing caregiver well-being include caregiving burden, financial stress, limited social support, and societal stigma associated with disability. However, supportive family networks, access to professional services, and effective coping strategies were found to improve caregiver outcomes. The review highlights the importance of developing structured intervention programs and supportive policies aimed at improving the quality of life of caregivers of children with learning disabilities.

Keywords: Learning disabilities, caregivers, parents, quality of life, systematic review

Introduction

Learning disabilities represent a heterogeneous group of disorders characterized by difficulties in acquiring and using skills related to reading, writing, reasoning, or mathematical abilities. Children with learning disabilities often require continuous academic guidance, emotional support, and specialized educational interventions. In most cases, parents and family members assume the primary caregiving role, managing not only the child's educational needs but also emotional, social, and behavioural challenges.

The caregiving process can significantly influence the overall well-being of caregivers. Numerous studies have reported that caregivers of children with learning or developmental disabilities experience higher levels of stress, anxiety, and emotional exhaustion compared to parents of typically developing children. These challenges may affect multiple domains of life, including physical health, psychological well-being, social participation, and financial stability.

Quality of life (QoL) has emerged as an important construct in understanding caregiver well-being. According to the World Health Organization, quality of life refers to an individual's perception of their position in life within the context of culture, value systems, personal goals, expectations, and concerns. For caregivers of children with learning disabilities, quality of life may be influenced by multiple factors such as caregiving demands, access to educational resources, social support systems, and societal attitudes toward disability.

Although several empirical studies have examined caregiver well-being in different cultural contexts, the findings are dispersed across disciplines and geographic regions. Therefore, a systematic synthesis of this literature is necessary to identify common patterns and gaps in research. The present review aims to systematically examine studies investigating the quality of life of caregivers of children with learning disabilities using the PRISMA methodological framework.

Method

Research Design

The present study employed a systematic review design with the aim to identify and synthesize empirical studies examining the quality of life of caregivers of children with learning disabilities and related developmental disorders.

Search Strategy

A comprehensive literature search was conducted across several electronic databases including PubMed, Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, PsycINFO, and Google Scholar. The search covered studies published between 2000 and 2025.

The search used combinations of the following keywords:

- learning disability
- learning disorder
- developmental disability
- caregiver or parent
- quality of life
- well-being
- health-related quality of life

Boolean operators such as AND and OR were used to refine the search strategy. Additionally, reference lists of relevant studies were manually screened to identify further eligible articles.

Inclusion Criteria

Studies were included in the review if they:

1. Examined caregivers or parents of children with learning or developmental disabilities
2. Measured quality of life, well-being, or caregiver burden
3. Used quantitative, qualitative, or mixed research designs
4. Were published in peer-reviewed journals between 2000 and 2025
5. Were published in English

Exclusion Criteria

Studies were excluded if they:

- Focused only on the quality of life of children rather than caregivers
- Examined caregivers of elderly individuals
- Were conference abstracts or non-peer-reviewed reports
- Did not provide sufficient methodological information

Study Selection Process

The study selection process followed the four stages recommended in the PRISMA framework: identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion.

Initially, 1,240 records were identified through database searches, and 35 additional records were identified through manual searches. After removing duplicates, 1,065 studies remained for title and abstract screening. Following the screening process, 72 full-text articles were assessed for eligibility. Finally, 20 studies met the inclusion criteria and were included in the qualitative synthesis

Sulaimani *et al.* (2023) [18] conducted a cross-sectional study to assess the quality of life of family caregivers of children with disabilities in Saudi Arabia. The study included 391 caregivers selected through convenience sampling from healthcare facilities. Using the WHOQOL-BREF scale, the researchers found that caregivers experienced lower scores in psychological and environmental domains of quality of life, particularly among mothers and those with limited social support. The study concluded that caregiving demands significantly influence caregivers' well-being and recommended structured support programs for families (Sulaimani *et al.*, 2023) [18].

Ganjiwale *et al.* (2016) [8] examined the quality of life and coping strategies of caregivers of children with disabilities in India. The researchers employed a cross-sectional research design with a sample of 116 caregivers recruited through total enumeration sampling from a special school in Gujarat. Data were collected using the WHOQOL-BREF and the Brief COPE scale. Results indicated that caregivers experienced moderate quality of life but reported significant psychological stress associated with long-term caregiving responsibilities (Ganjiwale *et al.*, 2016) [8].

Wakimizu *et al.* (2017) [20] conducted a cross-sectional correlational study involving 78 parents of children with developmental disabilities in Japan. Participants were recruited through purposive sampling from rehabilitation and community support programs. The study examined the relationship between family empowerment and parental quality of life. Findings indicated that higher levels of family empowerment were significantly associated with improved parental quality of life and psychological well-being (Wakimizu *et al.*, 2017) [20].

Swetha *et al.* (2025) [19] carried out a cross-sectional descriptive study in India to evaluate the quality of life of caregivers of children with disabilities. The study involved 150 caregivers selected through convenience sampling from hospitals in Chennai. Using WHOQOL-BREF, the researchers found that caregivers reported lower scores in psychological and social domains, largely due to caregiving burden and financial strain (Swetha *et al.*, 2025) [19].

Saudin *et al.* (2025) [17] conducted a cross-sectional study examining the quality of life among caregivers of children with autism spectrum disorder in Malaysia. The study included 200 caregivers recruited through convenience sampling from healthcare centers. The results revealed that caregivers experienced high levels of stress and reduced quality of life, especially in the psychological domain, emphasizing the need for community-based support interventions (Saudin *et al.*, 2025) [17].

Isa *et al.* (2013) investigated the health-related quality of life and family functioning of parents of children with disabilities in Malaysia using a cross-sectional research design. The study included 300 parents recruited through systematic sampling from pediatric clinics. The findings showed that parents caring for children with disabilities reported significantly lower health-related quality of life compared to parents of typically developing children (Isa *et al.*, 2013).

Özgür *et al.* (2018) [14] conducted a cross-sectional study in Turkey to examine factors affecting the quality of life of caregivers of children with autism spectrum disorder. The study involved 150 mothers, selected through convenience sampling, and used WHOQOL-BREF. The results revealed that caregiver depression, low income, and limited social support were major predictors of reduced quality of life (Özgür *et al.*, 2018) [14].

Jain *et al.* (2019) [10] performed a cross-sectional study in India involving 150 caregivers of children with autism recruited through convenience sampling from health facilities in Lucknow. The findings indicated that caregivers experienced moderate to poor quality of life in physical and psychological domains due to continuous caregiving responsibilities (Jain *et al.*, 2019) [10].

Salehi *et al.* (2017) [16] conducted a cross-sectional correlational study in Iran with 120 mothers of children with autism spectrum disorder, selected through purposive sampling from rehabilitation centers. The study reported that severity of the child's condition and reduced occupational functioning significantly affected mothers' quality of life (Salehi *et al.*, 2017) [16].

Alenazi *et al.* (2020) [4] carried out a cross-sectional study in Saudi Arabia including 84 parents of children with autism, selected through convenience sampling from hospitals. The findings revealed that caregivers reported lower psychological well-being and social functioning compared with normative populations (Alenazi *et al.*, 2020) [4].

Al-Farsi *et al.* (2016) [2] conducted a case-control study in Oman with 220 parents, including caregivers of children with autism and parents of typically developing children. Participants were selected through hospital-based sampling. The study found significantly higher stress, anxiety, and depression among caregivers, which negatively affected their quality of life (Al-Farsi *et al.*, 2016) [2].

Murphy *et al.* (2017) [13] investigated the health and quality of life of caregivers of children with disabilities in the United States using a cross-sectional survey design. The study included 300 caregivers selected through random sampling from pediatric clinics. Results indicated that caregivers experienced poorer physical and mental health compared to the general population.

Asiri *et al*. (2016) [5] conducted a cross-sectional study in Saudi Arabia involving 120 parents of children with autism spectrum disorder recruited through convenience sampling from educational institutions. Findings suggested that caregivers experienced reduced psychological well-being and social life due to caregiving responsibilities.

Al Awaji *et al*. (2021) [1]. examined the quality of life of mothers of children with disabilities in Saudi Arabia during the COVID-19 pandemic using a cross-sectional survey design. The study included 200 mothers recruited through online purposive sampling. Results showed that social isolation and pandemic-related stress further reduced caregiver quality of life.

Farajzadeh *et al*. (2020) [7] conducted a cross-sectional study in Iran involving 150 mothers of children with cerebral palsy, recruited through convenience sampling from rehabilitation centers. The findings revealed that financial burden and caregiving stress significantly affected caregivers' quality of life.

Picardi *et al*. (2018) [15] performed a multicenter cross-sectional study in Italy including 260 parents of children with autism selected through clinic-based sampling. The results indicated that caregiver burden was strongly associated with reduced quality of life and increased psychological distress.

Misura and Memisevic (2017) [12] carried out a cross-sectional study in Croatia with 100 parents of children with intellectual disabilities, recruited through purposive sampling from special schools. The findings showed that parents experienced lower quality of life, particularly in social and psychological domains.

Al-Gamal *et al*. (2019) [3] conducted a descriptive cross-sectional study in Jordan including 180 parents of children with chronic illnesses and disabilities, selected through hospital-based sampling. The results suggested that caregiving demands negatively affected parents' health satisfaction and family functioning.

Lone *et al*. (2024) [11] conducted a comparative cross-sectional study in Saudi Arabia examining the quality of life of children with learning disabilities from the perspective of 200 parents and caregivers selected through convenience sampling. The study found that caregivers reported increased stress and caregiving burden, which influenced their overall quality of life (Lone *et al*., 2024) [11].

Biswal and Pathak (2025) [5] investigated caregiver burden and quality of life among 400 parents of children with developmental disabilities in India using a survey research design. Participants were selected through purposive sampling. The study reported that caregivers frequently experienced physical health problems, fatigue, and psychological stress, highlighting the need for institutional support systems for caregivers (Biswal & Pathak, 2025) [5].

Results

The selected studies were conducted across several countries including India, Saudi Arabia, Malaysia, Japan, Turkey, Iran, Oman, Croatia, Italy, Jordan, and the United States. Most studies employed cross-sectional research designs, with sample sizes ranging from approximately 78 to 400 caregivers. Convenience and purposive sampling were the most commonly used sampling methods.

Across studies, several consistent patterns emerged regarding the quality of life of caregivers.

Psychological Well-Being

The majority of studies reported significant psychological distress among caregivers. Caregivers frequently experienced anxiety, depression, emotional exhaustion, and chronic stress associated with the demands of caregiving. Studies conducted in countries such as India and Malaysia reported particularly high psychological burden among mothers serving as primary caregivers.

Social Life and Isolation

Another commonly reported issue was reduced social participation. Caregivers often reported limited opportunities to engage in social activities due to their caregiving responsibilities. In several studies, caregivers indicated that they experienced social isolation and reduced interaction with friends and community members.

Financial and Environmental Challenges

Financial strain was also identified as a major factor affecting caregiver quality of life. Families often incur expenses related to specialized educational programs, therapy services, and medical consultations. In developing countries, limited availability of affordable services further intensifies the economic burden on families.

Role of Social Support

Despite the challenges, several studies reported that strong social support systems significantly improve caregiver well-being. Support from extended family members, healthcare professionals, and community organizations was associated with higher quality of life scores.

Discussion

The present systematic review highlights the multifaceted challenges experienced by caregivers of children with learning disabilities. Across diverse cultural contexts, caregivers consistently report lower quality of life compared with the general population. Psychological stress appears to be one of the most prominent issues, reflecting the emotional demands associated with supporting children who require ongoing educational and developmental assistance.

The review also demonstrates that caregiving responsibilities frequently affect social relationships and community participation. Reduced opportunities for leisure activities and social engagement may contribute to feelings of isolation among caregivers.

Financial strain represents another important factor influencing caregiver well-being. The cost of specialized education, therapy services, and professional support can create significant economic pressure on families, particularly in low- and middle-income countries.

However, the findings also emphasize the protective role of social support systems. Families who receive assistance from extended family members, community organizations, and educational institutions tend to report better psychological outcomes and higher life satisfaction.

Implications

The findings of this review highlight several important implications:

1. Development of caregiver support programs and counseling services
2. Increased awareness and inclusive educational policies
3. Improved access to affordable therapeutic and educational services
4. Community-based initiatives aimed at strengthening social support networks

Such interventions may significantly improve the well-being of caregivers while also enhancing developmental outcomes for children with learning disabilities.

Conclusion

Caregivers of children with learning disabilities face multiple psychological, social, and economic challenges that may significantly affect their quality of life. The findings of this systematic review demonstrate that caregiving burden, limited social support, and financial stress are key factors influencing caregiver well-being. Addressing these challenges through structured intervention programs, inclusive educational policies, and community awareness initiatives may help improve the quality of life of caregivers and promote better outcomes for children with learning disabilities.

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