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# THE IMPACT OF PEER SUPPORT PROGRAMS ON PSYCHOLOGICAL, CULTURAL WELL-BEING, AND QUALITY OF LIFE FOR MOTHERS OF CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

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## ABSTRACT

This study examines the impact of peer support programmes on the psychosocial and cultural well-being and quality of life (QL) of mothers raising children with disabilities, as well as the mediating role of psychosocial well-being in this relationship. Employing a quantitative design, 357 mothers from Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, participated in a structured intervention, with survey questionnaires used for data collection. Smart-PLS assessed variable associations. Findings reveal that peer networks enhance psychosocial and cultural well-being and QL, with psychosocial well-being significantly mediating this relationship. The study underscores the interplay of mental health, cultural expectations, and social support, advocating for policy integration of peer support into national caregiving frameworks.

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**KEYWORDS:** Peer Support Programmes, Quality of Life, Well-Being, Mothers of Children with Disabilities.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Peer support programmes connect individuals with shared experiences to provide social, emotional, and practical assistance. Found in workplaces, schools, healthcare, and community settings, these initiatives enhance mothers' well-being and QL while caring for children with disabilities. Quantitative analyses (2011–2020) confirm peer support reduces stress and enhances life quality (Sartore et al., 2021). The Healthy Women Healthy Families programme demonstrated significant improvements in maternal mental health, health-promoting habits, and overall well-being, positively influencing children's QL. These findings highlight the necessity of peer support in improving caregiving experiences for parents of disabled children.

Families with disabled children face psychological and social challenges, exacerbated when the child has multiple impairments, impacting mothers negatively. As primary caregivers, mothers endure stigma, stress, depression, sleep disorders, and social isolation (Rodríguez-Vélez et al., 2024). Parents, relatives, and service providers must address caregivers' emotional and physical needs while managing disability-related demands. Parental stress and children's depressive symptoms significantly affect psychological well-being, while restricted social engagement increases stress (Cejalvo et al., 2021). Given these challenges, caregiving effectiveness depends on personality, skills, financial stability, and health. While further research is needed, peer support programmes for parents of children with disabilities or chronic illnesses show promise in improving well-being and QL. These interventions enhance sleep, life satisfaction, and mental health while reducing anxiety, depression, and pain. Participation in MBSR and PAD programmes provided mindfulness training, benefiting 250 disabled children and improving parental cognitive and emotional resilience (Sartore et al., 2021). Furthermore, peer support led to a 62% improvement in mental health, 71% in social health, and 67% in attitude (Lancaster et al., 2024). A meta-analysis of 22 studies revealed that, within six months, peer support participation reduced maternal stress and anxiety by 40% (Sartore et al., 2021).

Peer support enhances mental health and QL for both caregivers and individuals with disabilities (Lancaster et al., 2024). These initiatives provide individual or group support, in-person or online. While parents appreciate emotional aid, systematic reviews indicate limited evidence of clear benefits or drawbacks (Sartore et al., 2021). Nonetheless, peer support fosters social connections, reduces stigma, and combats isolation, contributing to improved caregiving experiences (Wong & Shorey, 2022). Support groups offer resources, knowledge, emotional assistance, and social belonging, benefiting both parents and children (McConnell et al., 2014). They enhance caregiving skills, reduce social stigma, and foster resilience (Dembo et al., 2022). Parental

stress correlates with caregiving challenges, with insufficient knowledge lowering confidence. Without professional guidance, frustration and ineffectiveness increase. The study highlights stress, lack of support, and inadequate information as key barriers to effective caregiving. Expanding professional guidance and instructional resources is crucial. Support groups, family therapy, and community networks mitigate isolation, improving both parental well-being and child development.

Family support for disabled individuals is shaped by cultural beliefs, influencing societal perceptions and assistance availability. Western societies prioritise individual rights, inclusive policies, and financial support for disability care (Pressman et al., 2020). In contrast, Middle Eastern and South Asian cultures rely on families, particularly mothers, for caregiving, with limited public assistance due to traditional gender norms (Fleming et al., 2019). Social support structures influence caregivers' mental health and access to peer-based assistance. Culturally informed peer support models are essential to address diverse caregiving needs. Mothers of disabled children frequently experience discrimination, social blame, and stigma, exacerbating psychological distress. They face community criticism, limited marriage prospects for their other children, and estrangement from extended family (Alkiviadou, 2019). This stigma fosters embarrassment and reluctance to seek care. Peer support networks offer emotional validation, reducing loneliness and enhancing self-esteem. These networks empower mothers to advocate for better healthcare and education for their children, strengthening their adaptive capacities and coping mechanisms (Perry-Jenkins & Gerstel, 2020).

In many cultural settings, mothers bear full childcare responsibilities at the expense of personal aspirations, careers, and social lives. This expectation results in burnout, depression, and stress, exacerbated in patriarchal societies where fathers rarely share caregiving duties (Pressman et al., 2020). Social norms dictate that mothers remain patient and avoid seeking psychological support. Persistent caregiving demands lead to excessive stress, self-doubt, and mental exhaustion (Fleming et al., 2019). Parental support groups provide emotional relief, practical childcare knowledge, and collective caregiving strategies. By challenging traditional caregiving norms, peer support fosters greater gender equity in family caregiving, protecting maternal mental health and enhancing family QL. While peer support effectively addresses caregiving challenges, research on its role in supporting parents of neurodivergent children remains limited (Wong & Shorey, 2022).

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Research indicates that individuals with disabilities face substantial challenges in maintaining psychological well-being, experiencing greater psychological distress

than mothers of typically developing children. The severity and type of a child's disability correlate with maternal well-being (Chiracu et al., 2023). Emotional, psychological, and social well-being involve the absence of negative emotions, life satisfaction, and effective daily functioning. Contentment, happiness, a sense of purpose, and strong relationships help individuals navigate life's challenges and contribute to society (Park et al., 2023). Additionally, mothers of disabled children face significant difficulties, experiencing higher stress, anxiety, and dissatisfaction than those raising non-disabled children, which negatively impacts their mental health (Becker-Haimes et al., 2020). Their mental well-being is influenced by emotional stress, coping mechanisms, social support, and parenting approaches (Chukwuemeka & Obioha, 2024).

Theories of well-being include pleasure-based, desire-based, and objective-based perspectives. Pleasure-based theories consider the mental states of pleasure and suffering, prioritising well-being as the satisfaction of desires. A person's well-being depends on fundamental goals, subjective experiences such as pleasure-pain balance and satisfaction, and objective factors like friendships, values, and resilience (Symons & VanderWeele, 2024; Tiberius, 2023). Mental well-being is connected to emotional, psychological, and social competencies, influencing performance and emotional experiences. Gender differences exist, with females scoring higher in positive relationships and males in environmental mastery. Marital status also affects self-acceptance, with married individuals exhibiting higher levels (Bansal, 2022). These findings highlight the significance of mental well-being across life domains, contributing to improved physical health, workplace productivity, learning, creativity, and social behaviour. Additionally, mental well-being serves as a predictor of future well-being in adulthood.

H1: Peer Support Programmes has a positive association with Improving the Psychology Well-being.

Research indicates that parents of children with disabilities experience lower QL and greater caregiving burdens. Factors such as the child's age, type, and severity of impairment, financial constraints, parenting stress, and social support influence their QL. Mothers of children with ASD report significantly lower QL than those of children with other disabilities. The WHOQOL-BREF is commonly used to assess QL in such studies. Given their heightened psychological distress, mothers should participate in interventions that alleviate parenting stress and promote healthier lifestyles, potentially enhancing their overall well-being (Tarigan et al., 2024). For families of individuals with disabilities, QL reflects overall well-being and is a multidimensional concept incorporating psychological, personal, and family aspects. It is widely used to assess the well-being and burdens of families raising children with neurodevelopmental conditions (Bertelli

et al., 2020). Global studies highlight commonalities in family responses to QL measures, emphasising the role of relationships, service satisfaction, health, finances, and community inclusion (Harriman & Oyefeso, 2022). Children's disabilities negatively impact parental mental and physical well-being, requiring substantial financial, emotional, and physical resources for ongoing care (Sulaimani et al., 2023). Since QL includes both subjective and objective dimensions, seven key domains are identified: material conditions, health, productivity, intimacy, safety, community engagement, and emotional well-being (Moore & Kornblet, 2011). Material well-being encompasses financial security, housing, privacy, food, transport, neighbourhood safety, and social welfare, including relationships and community participation (Perry & Felce, 2003). For mothers of children with disabilities, key QL indicators include mental health, social interactions, environmental concerns, physical well-being, and resilience (Al Awaji et al., 2021; Christodoulou et al., 2020; Fereidouni et al., 2021; Yuen Shan Leung & Wai Ping Li-Tsang, 2003). Extensive research explores the benefits of peer support programs in enhancing the QL and well-being of parents of children with disabilities or chronic illnesses. Wakimizu et al. (2022) assessed an online peer-based intervention by dividing 59 participants into experimental (N=29) and control (N=30) groups. The intervention, aimed at empowering families, reduced caregiving burdens and improved self-compassion by fostering family support networks and strengthening connections with service systems, particularly in mitigating isolation and over-identification.

H2: Peer Support Programmes has a positive association with QL of mothers.

Psychological well-being is the core for the enhancement of the QL of mothers with disabled children because caregiving leads to heightened stress, anxiety, and emotional exhaustion. Agbaria and Mokh (2022) observe that mothers with good psychological well-being can manage stress and are resilient and stable with high life satisfaction. Alternatively, Kim-Godwin et al. (2020) observe that emotional support, care for oneself, and psychological interventions are essential in reducing stress and enhancing mental well-being. Higher psychological well-being is associated with better physical well-being, better social relationships, and higher community engagement, all essential for better QL. Social support networks including family members, peers, and professional counselling relieve psychological distress and enhance life satisfaction. Additionally, Li et al. (2024) also indicates the improvement of emotional well-being for these mothers through mindfulness-based interventions, cognitive behavior therapy, and stress management interventions. Research calls for the identification and treatment of psychological issues directly related to their overall well-being and life

experience. Therefore, we say that,

H3: Improving the psychology well-being improves QL of mothers.

Psychological well-being is identified by research as a mediator between peer support programmes and the QL of mothers with children with disabilities. The programmes give emotional, social, and informational support, which decrease stress and enhance psychological resilience for caregiving. Sulimani-Aidan and Tayri-Schwartz (2021) propose that participation with peer support programmes strengthens emotional coping strategies, minimizes social isolation, and creates a sense of belonging, all leading towards better psychological well-being. Better psychological well-being is associated with better life satisfaction, better mental and physical well-being, and overall better QL. Empirical results suggest peer interaction and shared experiences reduce psychological distress and enhance emotional stability and increased engagement with daily activities (Van Ryzin & Roseth, 2021). Furthermore, Battulga et al. (2021) assert that psychological well-being influences the effectiveness of peer support programmes, as mothers' emotional and social support processing shapes their perception of QL. Therefore, we make a hypothesis that,

H4: Improving the psychology well-being mediates the relation between peer support programmes and QL of mothers.

### 3. METHODS

This study examines the impact of peer support programmes on psychosocial and cultural well-being and QL while also exploring the mediating role of psychosocial well-being in the relationship between peer support programmes and QL among mothers raising children with disabilities. A quantitative research design was employed, involving 357 mothers from Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, who participated in a structured intervention. Data were collected through survey questionnaires from mothers attending a centre supporting individuals with disabilities. Following random selection, study instruments were distributed to all mothers visiting the clinic for psychological and counselling support. Of the 410 mothers who attended the centre in the previous month, 357 voluntarily participated in the study. Inclusion criteria required that participants be mothers of a child with a disability, be actively involved in caregiving, and freely consent to participate. The study measured variables using established scales: peer support programmes with five items (Conner et al., 2021), improving psychosocial well-being with six items (Schick et al., 2022), and QL with five items (Bibeau et al., 2022). Smart-PLS was employed to analyse associations among variables, as it effectively processes primary data and large datasets (Hair et al., 2020). The study included one predictor variable (peer support programmes), one mediating

variable (improving psychosocial well-being), and one outcome variable (QL). These are given in Figure 1.

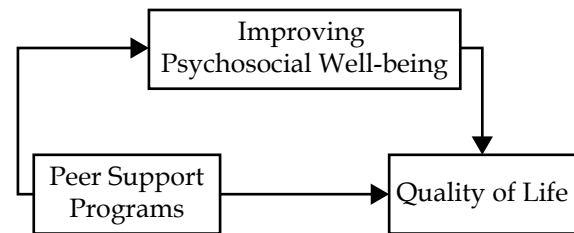


Figure 1: Research Model.

### 4. RESULTS

The results demonstrate convergent validity, revealing the correlation between the items. Both the alpha and composite reliability (CR) values were above 0.70. Additionally, the average variance extracted (AVE) and factor loadings exceeded 0.50. These values indicate a strong correlation between the items. The details are presented in Table 1 and Figure 2. Moreover, the results demonstrate discriminant validity, highlighting the correlation between the variables. The Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio was employed, with values not exceeding 0.90. These values indicate a low correlation between the variables. The findings are presented in Table 2. Furthermore, the path analysis illustrates the relationships between the variables. The findings suggest that peer networks enhance the psychosocial and cultural well-being and QL of mothers, thereby supporting H1, H2, and H3. The study also reveals that psychosocial and cultural well-being significantly mediates the relationship between peer networks and the QL of mothers, supporting H4. These associations are presented in Table 3 and Figure 3.

Table 1: Convergent Validity.

Variables	Items	Loadings	Alpha	CR	AVE
Improving the Psychology Well-Being	IPW1	0.865	0.857	0.898	0.641
	IPW2	0.798			
	IPW3	0.865			
	IPW4	0.806			
	IPW5	0.650			
Peer Support Programmes	PSP1	0.882	0.922	0.939	0.720
	PSP2	0.865			
	PSP3	0.799			
	PSP4	0.806			
	PSP5	0.875			
	PSP6	0.861			
Quality of Life	QL1	0.762	0.809	0.866	0.566
	QL2	0.782			
	QL3	0.777			
	QL4	0.778			
	QL5	0.653			

Table 2: Discriminant Validity.

	IPW	PSP	QL
IPW			
PSP	0.502		
QL	0.759	0.697	

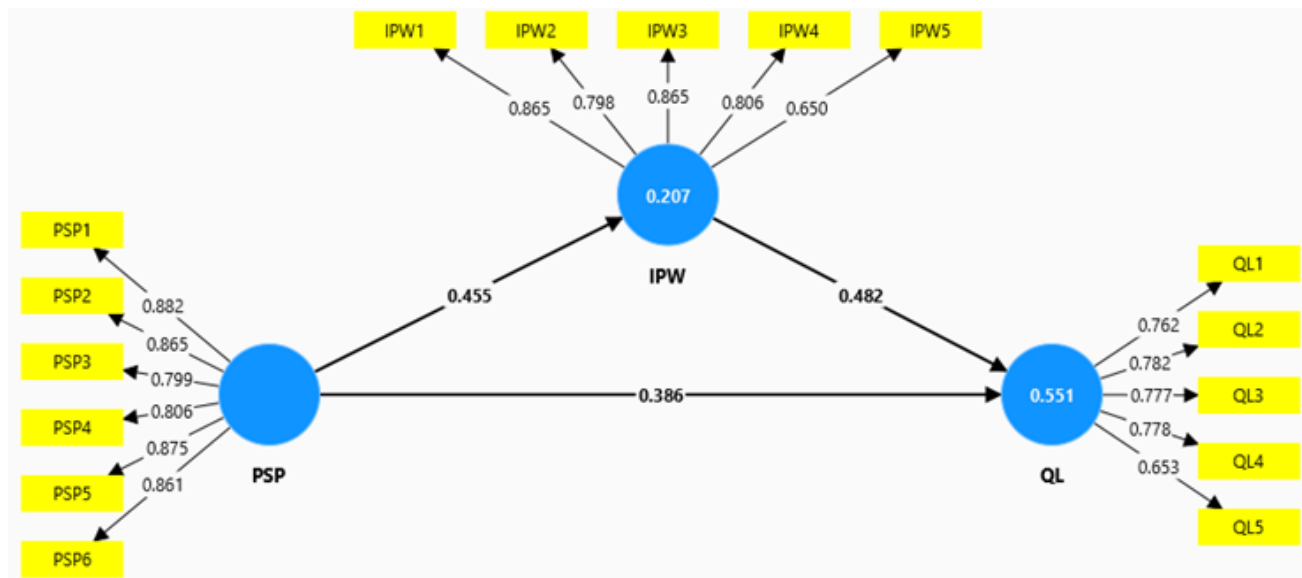


Figure 2: Measurement Assessment Model.

Table 3: Path Analysis.

Relationships	Beta	Standard Deviation	T Statistics	P Values
IPW -> QL	0.482	0.047	10.294	0.000
PSP -> IPW	0.455	0.052	8.813	0.000
PSP -> QL	0.386	0.042	9.110	0.000
PSP -> IPW -> QL	0.219	0.034	6.496	0.000

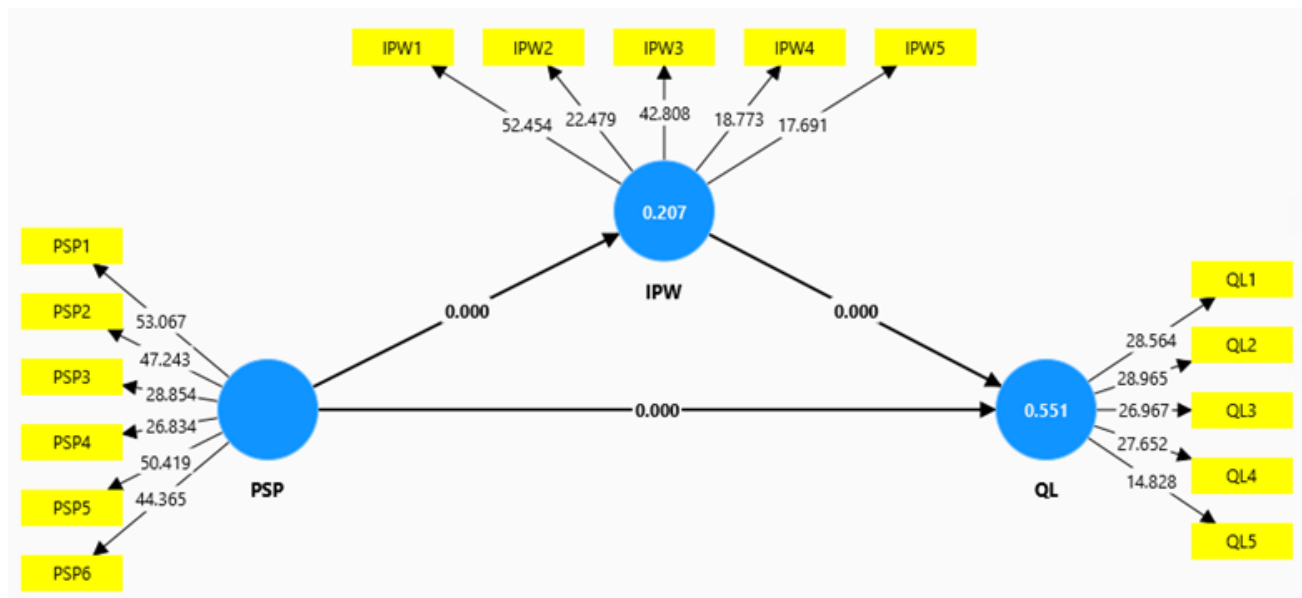


Figure 3: Structural Assessment Model.

## 5. DISCUSSION

The findings indicate no statistically significant differences in psychological well-being or QL between the experimental and control groups, confirming pre-test equivalence. This validates the study design by ensuring all groups began from the same baseline, strengthening internal validity and yielding reliable data. Bourke-Taylor et al. (2024) examined an online peer support programme for mothers, showing that structured e-workshops enhanced

self-care, reduced caregiver burden, and improved empowerment, particularly in alleviating long-term stress and anxiety. The experimental group reported reduced loneliness, with training activities, daily tasks, and session participation contributing to these benefits (Dembo et al., 2022; Fereidouni et al., 2021; Kumar et al., 2024). Similarly, online peer training programmes improved coping strategies and emotional resilience while reducing anxiety (Liu et al., 2021). Waqar et al. (2024)

found the Family Peer Support Buddy Programme in Pakistan, which leveraged technology for structured peer support, significantly improved caregivers' mental health and well-being. Sharifian et al. (2024) demonstrated that training for mothers of children with disabilities fostered resilience, reducing stress and increasing hope. Yang et al. (2022) highlighted peer support's role in enhancing social support perceptions among mothers of chronically ill children, improving QL through emotional relief and practical parenting skills. Chakraborti et al. (2021) found well-structured peer support networks enhance family resilience and well-being.

Prior studies affirm that peer support interventions promote the mental well-being of mothers with children with disabilities by reducing isolation and loneliness (Lancaster et al., 2024; Sulaimani et al., 2023; Wakimizu et al., 2022). The interventions facilitate sharing and promotion of coping mechanisms and sharing of thoughts (Christodoulou et al., 2020; Dembo et al., 2022). There were no differences between follow-up and post-test measures for psychological well-being or QL but mothers continued with engagement for a month following the training through perceived benefits. Peer support provides necessary psychological support, with emotional and social support reducing stress and isolation. Experience sharing enhances coping mechanisms and resilience with social support significantly reducing psychological distress (Peleg & Peleg, 2025). Interventions based on group support further maximize mental wellbeing outcomes (Felstead et al., 2023). Peer support interventions influence QL through psychological well-being as better mental well-being enhances social engagement (Chesak et al., 2019). Peleg and Peleg (2025) also attribute enhanced psychological well-being with enhanced physical well-being, noting the possibility for social support to be transferred into tangible life changes. There is strong support through literature for the merit of peer support training for well-being and QL improvement for mothers with children with disabilities. The interventions facilitate emotional support, coping mechanisms, and community and decrease stress and enhance the ability to cope. Both face-to-face and online interventions have proved valuable with the need for accessible and scalable peer support networks for improving mother mental well-being and family quality.

### 5.1. Recommendations

Maternity care services need to prioritize the improvement of psychological well-being and peer support schemes for mothers with disabled children for addressing psychological and social problems and improving their QL. Peer counselling services need to be extended to a wider population through different settings. Support mechanisms need to be tailored according to the unique needs of the mothers for enhanced mental well-being. Regular sessions and the provision of psychological and advisory services

for the families of the disabled need to be initiated for their coping ability and overall well-being.

## 6. CONCLUSION

This study identifies the potential for peer support programmes promoting the psychological well-being and QL of mothers. The findings indicate the stress and emotional burden are reduced through the promotion of emotional stability and resilience. Psychological well-being is also a key mediator within the process; apart from the direct effect of peer support, better psychological well-being is also linked with enhanced life satisfaction and overall well-being. The findings are supportive of the need for structured support mechanisms for mothers for better coping with the caregiving challenge and ultimately promoting meaningful improvement in their QL. Strengthening peer support programmes and mental well-being interventions will significantly enhance their potential.

### 6.1. Implications

This study's results have policy implications for policymakers, support organizations, and healthcare providers who work with mothers. Peer support can be employed as an intervention towards psychological well-being and thereby towards improving QL. Peer support needs to be integrated by the healthcare providers as part of their plans for improving the mental well-being of such mothers, reducing emotional distress, and promoting resilience. Social organizations can also design programmes based on emotional sharing, coping strategies, and social cohesion. Policymakers must recognize the role of psychological well-being as a core element of caregiving and make provisions for the expansion of such peer support groups. Culturally modified interventions could be the focus for further research for the optimal utilisation of such programmes across diverse communities with the sustainability of such support mechanisms.

### 6.2. Limitations

Some of the study's weaknesses need to be acknowledged. First, the findings cannot be applied to all mothers because their experiences are shaped by social, cultural, and economic factors. Secondly, the findings may be biased through the use of the self-reported data for well-being and QL. The study is focused primarily on the peer support programmes with no consideration for other interventions with the potential to impact well-being. The findings may also be biased by the sample and the number of weeks spent attending the peer support programmes. The weaknesses of the study need to be overcome by future studies.

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