

Research Paper



Shocked Parents: Examining the Challenges of Parents With Children At-risk of Specific Learning Disabilities

Bahar Rashidi¹, Salar Faramarzi^{1*}, Ahmad Abedi¹, Joachim Schroeder²

1. Department of Psychology and Education of Children with Special Needs, Faculty of Education and Psychology, University of Isfahan, Isfahan, Iran.
2. Department of Primary and Secondary Education, Social Pedagogy as well as Special Needs Education, Faculty of Education, University of Hamburg, Hamburg, Germany.



Citation Rashidi, B., Faramarzi, S., Abedi, A., & Schroeder, J. (2025). Shocked Parents: Examining the Challenges of Parents With Children At-risk of Specific Learning Disabilities. *Journal of Practice in Clinical Psychology*, 13(3), 275-286. <https://doi.org/10.32598/jcp.13.3.1023.1>

doi <https://doi.org/10.32598/jcp.13.3.1023.1>

Article info:

Received: 02 Feb 2025

Accepted: 15 May 2025

Available Online: 01 Jul 2025

ABSTRACT

Objective: Neurodevelopmental or cognitive disorders in children pose significant challenges to family functioning. The present study investigates the challenges faced by parents of children at risk of specific learning disabilities (SLD).

Methods: This study, based on qualitative research and a phenomenological approach, explored and deeply recognized the lived experiences of parents facing challenges related to children referred for specialized testing. Parents' perspectives were examined using a purposeful sampling method and semi-structured interviews. Data saturation was reached after 23 interviews, ensuring comprehensive data collection. The data were organized and analyzed based on the Colaizzi (1987) method. Qualitative research criteria, such as participant validation, independent coding, and evaluator reliability, were applied to ensure data validity.

Results: The findings highlighted six fundamental challenges as follows: "Feeling helpless," "neglect of individual needs," "fear of the future," "feeling defenseless," "feeling guilty," and "lack of competence." Meanwhile, the two following themes emerged: "Weakness in parenting skills" and "emotional dysregulation," which are considered potential underlying factors contributing to these challenges.

Conclusion: The challenges faced by the participating parents are largely due to contextual factors. Many parents feel overwhelmed and isolated due to their lack of awareness of parenting strategies and emotional management during critical situations. These underlying factors, functioning as a vicious cycle, lead to negative consequences and additional psychological issues within the family, contributing to the development of disorders in children. Therefore, the development of structured and specialized training for parents of children at risk of neurodevelopmental disorders appears to be essential.

Keywords:

Neurodevelopmental disorders,
Specific learning disorders
(SLD), Parenting, Qualitative
research

* Corresponding Author:

Salar Faramarzi, Professor:

Address: Department of Psychology and Education of Children with Special Needs, Faculty of Education and Psychology, University of Isfahan, Isfahan, Iran.

Tel: +98 (313) 7935448

E-mail: b.rashidi@edu.ui.ac.ir



Copyright © 2025 The Author(s);

This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (CC-BY-NC: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/legalcode.en>), which permits use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited and is not used for commercial purposes.

Highlights

- Neurodevelopmental disorders, such as SLD in children, create complex challenges in the functioning and natural interactions of the family.
- Parents of children with neurodevelopmental disorders, such as children at-risk of SLD, report higher levels of parental stress, feeling helpless, feeling guilty, psychological imbalance, and depression, which disrupts family dynamics.
- Deficiencies in parenting skills and a lack of emotional regulation awareness significantly exacerbate the psychological challenges in parents of children at-risk of SLD.
- Supporting families of children at-risk of SLD requires a complex therapeutic process, timely parent education, and early diagnosis of the child's disorder.

Plain Language Summary

Specific learning disabilities (SLD) in children are neurodevelopmental disorders that significantly impact family dynamics. Given the high prevalence and the negative consequences associated with these disorders, parents of children at risk for learning disabilities face challenges, such as feelings of helplessness, fear of their children's future failure, loneliness, guilt, and a sense of inadequacy. Moreover, additional factors contribute to these challenges for parents, including deficiencies in parenting skills and difficulties in emotional regulation. These underlying factors create a vicious cycle, leading to further negative outcomes for the family. Furthermore, the psychological issues and challenges faced by parents contribute to the exacerbation of these disorders in children. Therefore, focusing on the prevention of issues affecting both children and parents provides an opportunity for implementing effective interventions and mitigating their adverse consequences. Given the limited research on children at risk for learning disabilities in Iran, this represents a significant research challenge for specialists and researchers.

Introduction

Neurodevelopmental disorders, such as specific learning disabilities (SLD) in children, encompass a diverse range of disorders. The presence of various disorders in these children creates a complex clinical presentation (Rameckers et al., 2023). SLD is characterized by significant, unexpected, specific, and lifelong difficulties in acquiring reading, writing, or math skills. The combined type of SLD, combined with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), is the most common (Bandla et al., 2017). According to the diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders, fifth edition (DSM-5), boys are two to three times more likely to have learning disabilities compared to girls. Studies by Chordia et al. (2020) and Rutter et al. (2004) support the finding that SLD is more prevalent in boys due to genetic, physiological, and chromosomal differences. A study by Chordia et al. (2020) shows that SLDs have a high prevalence, and many of these children are not diagnosed due to the lack of knowledge among teachers and parents. Additionally, those who have a lower socioeconomic status are more at risk of learning disabilities

(Chordia et al., 2020). Furthermore, a study by Bandla et al. (2017) reported a higher prevalence of SLD in the middle socioeconomic class.

Although cognitive processes are necessary for children's academic progress, numerous studies indicate that family interactions have a significant impact on the improvement and development of learning processes (Rhoades et al., 2011). The Association of Children with Disabilities also emphasizes the importance of the family in ensuring children's health and well-being, and experts believe that promoting children's cognitive and meta-cognitive skills, as well as involving and educating parents, is meaningful and effective (Kimber et al., 2019). The optimal growth of a child is closely intertwined with the family situation, as the increasing needs of children can contribute to elevated parental stress levels (Vashi et al., 2023). Research on children with neurodevelopmental disorders, including SLDs and ADHD, has found that the quality of family relationships is influential in communication challenges and social interactions (Vashi et al., 2023). Additionally, parents of children with neurodevelopmental disorders report higher levels of parental stress (Craig et al., 2016). Disabilities or poor cogni-

tive performance in a child can disrupt family dynamics and lead to emotional distress for parents (Manning et al., 2018). This emotional distress is also evident in the analysis of psychological situations within families with children with disabilities (Banducci et al., 2016). Furthermore, studies have shown that parenting stress is significantly higher among parents of children with SLD compared to parents of typically developing children (Moideen & Mathai, 2018). The various aspects of learning disabilities can have detrimental effects on the adaptation and psychological well-being of families, often resulting in feelings of loneliness, psychological imbalance, aggression, and depression among SLD parents (Mohammadi & Mottaqi, 2022).

According to some research, mothers, compared to fathers, experience more parental stress in the context of parenting. Additionally, in Eastern societies, mothers are primarily responsible for supporting their children's physical, emotional, and social needs, while fathers have less involvement with children and are more focused on disciplinary roles (Hashemi & Einy, 2021). Preston and Stultz (2018) emphasize the need for researchers in the fields of education and mental health to take a comprehensive and detailed approach to better understand and address the needs of children with SLD. They highlight the importance of educational strategies and services in providing support for these children and their families. Although education and making positive changes in the family are among the most complex therapeutic processes faced by professionals (Sexton, 2019), professionals emphasize the importance of professionals understanding the situations and needs of parents, as well as the dynamics within the family and cultural awareness (Connor & Cavendish, 2018). They argue that professionals require more support to address the challenges faced by parents of children with SLD and to empower parents. Therefore, it is crucial to examine the concept of SLD extensively from the perspective of individuals, such as parents and teachers who have direct contact with affected students (Ögülmüş & Okur, 2021). By identifying factors directly and indirectly related to learning disabilities in children, early support and corrective interventions can be implemented to prevent further issues in both children and their parents (Bandla et al., 2017).

Many children are being identified as late learners and referred to exceptional schools due to a lack of knowledge among educators, parents, and health center staff, which presents a significant challenge for families (Hashemi & Einy, 2021). There is currently no research specifically analyzed the perspectives of parents of children at-risk of SLD in Iran. Therefore, the present study investigates the

topic of at-risk children and the related issues concerning their parents in Iranian society. Therefore, the findings of this study can contribute to identifying challenges related to these children and their parents. Furthermore, this study could assist professionals in designing appropriate educational and intervention programs. Accordingly, this study explores the lived experiences of mothers who have encountered challenges related to their child's poor performance on pre-primary school screening tests and subsequently received a diagnosis of being at risk for learning disabilities. The research seeks to answer the following questions: 1) What are the problems and needs of parents with children who have learning disabilities? and 2) Do parental challenges contribute to predicting or increasing learning disabilities?

Materials and Methods

This study employed the qualitative and phenomenological approach, aimed at deeply exploring a specific phenomenon. Phenomenology centers on understanding a phenomenon in detail through the lived experiences of participants. The essence of phenomenology is to illuminate the participants' perception of the phenomenon. Descriptive phenomenology uncovers the meanings of a concept or phenomenon from the perspectives of individuals who have experienced it. Phenomenology highlights the individual context, emphasizing that phenomena can carry different meanings depending on the specific context in which they are experienced (Eatough & Smith, 2017). Phenomenological research does not follow a fixed data collection method; instead, it adapts based on the research topic and context. The researchers focused on the mental experiences, perceptions, and meanings that participants attributed to this event.

Study procedure

In this study, the necessary permissions and coordination were obtained from the University of Isfahan and the Department of Education. The primary objective of this research was to describe and gain a deeper insight into the experiences of mothers whose children faced challenges in the pre-primary screening test upon entering first grade, later diagnosed with learning disabilities. In this study, the perspectives of parents were conducted using a purposeful sampling method and semi-structured and in-depth interviews to gather detailed insights into the participants' experiences. Interviews were held in secure settings to ensure comfort, lasting 25 min to 40 min, and parents voluntarily agreed to participate by signing consent forms. Key questions explored participants' feelings, concerns, and actions regarding their children's learning challenges. Emotional

responses and tone were also recorded to provide a deeper understanding of their experiences. The data were transcribed and analyzed to identify emerging themes. Data collection ceased when theoretical saturation was reached after 23 interviews. The participants varied in age, occupation, and education to ensure a broad perspective. A summary of the demographic information of the participants is given in [Table 1](#).

Data analysis

The present study followed a phenomenological approach, and data were organized based on [Colaizzi's \(1987\)](#) method. The 7-step method includes the following items: collection of descriptions, highlighting and description, understanding the meaning, extraction of themes, formulation, categorization based on similarity, and clustering. The analysis must be conducted in a way that, while preserving the life experiences of the participants, facilitates an understanding of the phenomenon under study. Therefore, the entire interview text was initially examined in detail, and preliminary themes were extracted. Then, through deeper analysis, the themes that were conceptually and meaningfully more related to each other were categorized as sub-themes. In the third stage of the analysis, a specific title was assigned to each cluster of sub-themes, covering all associated sub-themes. These clusters of themes were then labeled as main themes. Qualitative research criteria were used to validate coding. To evaluate the research findings, the member checks and external auditor reviews methods were used according to [Lincoln and Guba \(1985\)](#) criteria, including the following items: 1) Credibility, 2) Transferability, 3) Confirmability, and 4) Dependability ([Creswell & Poth, 2016](#)). For this purpose, based on the self-review method of the researcher and independent coders, all four researchers examined and coded the primary data part by part. Additionally, after the analysis, the findings were provided to 3 participants to verify the accuracy. Another criterion was following the reliability criteria of the evaluators and external auditor; the opinions of 2 experts in the field of qualitative research were used. In this research, a total of 6 experts provided their opinions for coding the components. Similarities and differences of opinion were evaluated, and finally, the recommended changes were implemented. The resulting themes were presented in tables as conceptual categories.

Results

To analyze the data and text of the interviews, 94 topics were extracted in the first stage. After analyzing, summarizing, and removing duplicate themes in the initial coding phase, a total of 69 codes were generated. These themes represent the basic problems faced by parents of children

who have been diagnosed as at risk for learning problems in the elementary school entrance exam. Moving on to the secondary themes stage, a total of 61 themes resulted from the analysis and were emphasized by the parents. These themes were categorized into classes based on their conceptual and semantic proximity. Finally, in the main coding stage, 6 themes were identified as a result of the analysis. Two main themes are also considered the underlying factors in these problems.

Based on [Table 2](#), these themes were categorized into classes based on their conceptual and semantic proximity. Finally, in the main coding stage, 6 themes were identified as a result of the analysis. Six fundamental challenges included the following items: "Feeling helpless," "neglect of individual needs," "fear of the future," "feeling of defenselessness," "feeling guilty," and "lack of feeling competent." Two main themes also including "weakness in parenting skills" and "emotional dysregulation," can be the underlying factors in these problems. [Figure 1](#) shows the main challenges of parents and underlying factors in the form of a diagram.

As illustrated in [Figure 1](#), in qualitative research, underlying factors refer to fundamental elements that influence the phenomenon being studied, often emerging through in-depth analysis. These factors can include social, cultural, and economic contexts, psychological influences, and structural or systemic issues, which are typically identified through methods such as interviews and thematic analysis. Understanding these underlying factors in this research was essential, as they provide deeper insights into the complexities of the subject matter and contribute to more nuanced and comprehensive findings.

Discussion

In this research, we explore the lived experiences of mothers who faced the challenge of their child's poor performance in the pre-primary screening test. These mothers learned that their children were suspected of having learning difficulties, a situation that posed a significant challenge for the parents. It affected their children's admission to regular schools and created difficulties for the parents in accepting this diagnosis. To answer the first question of this research—"What are the problems and needs of parents with children with learning disabilities?"—Parents of children who perform poorly on preschool screening and are diagnosed as at risk for learning disabilities face specific challenges. Therefore, 6 components describe these parents, which include the following items: Feeling helpless; neglecting individual needs; fear of the future; feeling of

Table 1. Participatory parents' demographic information

Age (y)	No.	Work	No.	Education	No.
28-30	2	Doctor	1	Diploma	5
31-40	9	Employee	4	Associate's degree	2
41-50	11	Cultural job	6	Bachelor's degree	10
51-54	1	Free job	3	Master's degree	5
		Housekeeper	9	Doctor	1

PRACTICE in
CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGY

defenselessness; feeling guilty; lack of feeling competent. In the following, the components are described in detail.

Feeling helpless

Parents of children with learning disabilities often face a significant gap between their expectations as parents and their child's abilities. This can lead to a psychological crisis, causing parents to desperately search for solutions and try various options to address the problem. Unfortunately, some parents may not have the necessary coping skills, which can negatively impact their mental health and well-being.

Neglecting individual needs

Feelings of helplessness and an inability to solve the problem, coupled with their child's challenges, may result in depressive states, causing parents to neglect their needs and overall health. The shock of their child's difficulties can push these parents to prioritize finding a solution over other aspects of their lives. The worry about future problems and the fear of their child's educational failure can be incredibly overwhelming. Various factors, such as spending excessive time and energy on the child with a disability, while feeling guilty of the other parent for the child's disorder, can ignite family tensions and exacerbate the overall problem.

Fear of the future

The challenges faced by parents of children with learning disabilities and their relentless efforts to improve their child's condition often become their main focus in life. This can lead to sacrificing personal goals and giving all attention to the child, ultimately causing strain and conflicts within the parental relationship. As the needs of these children increase, so does the level of stress experienced by the parents. The parents of children with learning disabilities face challenges, such as societal expectations, concerns about their child's future, and the influence of teachers, as

well as economic problems and a lack of support from relevant institutions.

Feeling of defenseless

Learning disabilities can cause problems and consequences, such as a drop in children's academic performance, psychological tensions in the family, and the emergence of unpleasant feelings. These issues lead to a decline in interactions, a lack of emotional support, and a feeling of hopelessness and helplessness among family members.

Feeling guilty

Parents often lack enough time and energy for effective social interactions, and establishing social relationships with their children can lead to social and academic comparisons. Some parents try to control their negative emotions by avoiding social interactions and hiding their child's problems.

Lack of feeling competent

Weakening of parents' social relations can result in feelings of failure, being limited due to their child's differences, isolation, decreased self-respect, and feelings of self-deprecation and worthlessness.

The results of this study align with previous research conducted by [Moideen and Mathai \(2018\)](#), which revealed that parents of children with learning disabilities experience significantly higher levels of stress compared to parents of typically developing children. In addition, the finding of this study aligns with current research by [Mohammadi and Mottaqi \(2022\)](#), which shows that parents of children with learning disabilities experience loneliness, psychological imbalance, aggression, frustration, and depression. [Heiman and Berger \(2008\)](#) also found that mothers of children with learning disabilities express their feelings less and have less friendship and social support. In addition to their child's

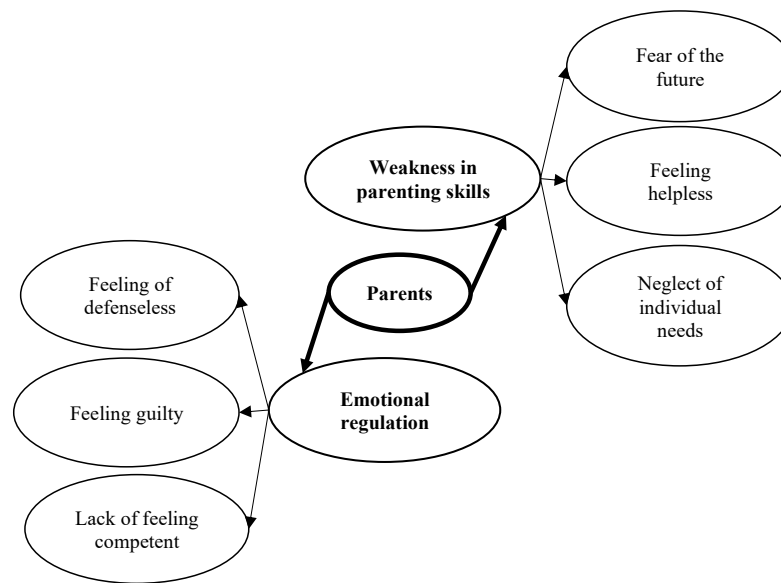
PRACTICE in
CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGY

Figure 1. The main themes related to challenges of parents with children at risk of specific learning disability and underlying factors

problem, parents may experience personality crises and other mood disorders, such as self-blame and feelings of worthlessness (Banducci et al., 2016; Manning et al., 2018). Connor and Cavendish (2018) emphasize the responsibility of professionals to understand the situations and needs of parents, family interactions, and cultural awareness. Through investigating the problems of parents of children with SLD, professionals can improve the situation and empower parents to actively participate and support their children.

The second question of this research was whether parental challenges contribute to predicting or increasing learning disabilities. To answer this question, the findings of this study point to underlying factors. Two main themes refer to underlying factors was the underlying factors identified in this study were the themes of “weakness in parenting skills” and “emotional dysregulation.”

Weakness in parenting skills

Research conducted states that factors such as the type of parental participation during crises and differences in parents’ interpretation and understanding of the problem can affect the development of the problem in children. Therefore, participating in special service and educational programs can be a major concern for parents of children with learning disabilities. Kimber et al. (2019) conducted a study emphasizing the prevention of the spread of disabilities in children and the reduction of negative consequences. The general purpose is to promote social and cognitive development as well as physical health in children. Vashi et al. (2023) found that the parent-child relationship is closely

linked to the development of SLDs. Additionally, some factors such as inadequate education, delayed diagnosis, lack of monitoring, and poor parental involvement may contribute to the development of learning disabilities in children. Considering that the SLD group is the most common group of children with special needs, researchers in the field of education and mental health must strive to understand and identify the issues related to these children and provide new educational strategies and services (Ögülmüs & Okur, 2021). Research also suggests that parents of children with learning disabilities may unintentionally neglect these children due to the numerous challenges they face. It is crucial to provide tailored support and resources to these parents to minimize problems and ensure the successful upbringing of their children. Without proper support, there is a higher risk of parental rejection and separation from the family home. The English national survey found that 48% of interviewed parents did not adequately care for their children (Emerson et al., 2005; Ward & Tarleton, 2007). Therefore, it is crucial to establish constructive and useful interactions, build positive relationships, and provide continuous emotional support to gain parents’ trust and achieve positive outcomes (Ward & Tarleton, 2007). Chordia et al. (2020) highlight the importance of awareness among parents and teachers regarding SLD. Ignorance can exacerbate the problem in children; thus, universal screening should be mandatory, and cost-effective educational and support centers should be available to all parents. Furthermore, Chordia et al. (2020) demonstrated that SLD has increased due to a lack of awareness among teachers and parents, resulting in increased family problems.

Table 2. Data analysis and coding

Underlying Factors	Main Themes	Secondary Themes	Initial Codes
Weakness in parenting skills	Feeling helpless	Not being able to confront the situation; disengagement, confusion, and distress; lack of awareness of stress management strategies; the ineffectiveness of solutions and efforts; continuing the unhappy process of coaches; spend a lot of time and money; failure to deal with other matters of life.	Since I have noticed my child's problem, I am restless.
			I am crying; I am just greedy for useless things.
			I am nervous, but I cannot get anywhere.
			During this time, all my efforts remained fruitless and did not result.
			In preschool, I tried hard to learn more, but I could not.
			No one could help, and even several counseling sessions were useless.
			I attended classes but did not have many results.
			I do not know what to do because I took different classes and worked hard.
			I used all the methods and educational games, and books, but the preschool coach was still dissatisfied.
			The more time I spend and work with him, the better the learning—this child will not be.
	Neglecting individual needs	Lack of attention to their physical health; disregard for your psychological health; neglecting individual needs and personal growth; not having fun; housekeeping or long work; not having social interactions; regret the use of your abilities.	All my time is for my child, and I do not know what to do.
			I also have other children who are less concerned; with them, I do not know if I am working right or not.
			I have a little child (three years old), but I am involved in teaching this child.
			Since I am involved with the problem of my child, I do not deal with myself at all.
			I have no time for myself, and I do not pay attention to myself.
			I forgot myself, and I do not even have enough sleep.
			I became sick myself, but I did not even have time to go to the doctor.
			I cancel my dental appointment every week because I do not have time.
			I do not have any fun or entertainment. I only deal with my children and their lessons because I do not want my child to be referred to a special school.
			My friends always protest why I do not have a relationship with them, and I say I have a job, and I have to take the baby to a private intensive class.
	Fear of the future	Concerns about the future; disaster of thought; zoom in on the problem; negative prediction; fear of failure in the whole life; generalizing the problem to other opportunities in life; browse negative thoughts;	I do not go anywhere to deal with the problem of my child, and sometimes I only meet my sister or talk on the phone.
			My friends always travel, but I do not even have time to go, and I regret it.
			Sometimes I want to study, read a book, or go to a sports class, but I do not have enough time.
			I am afraid that my child is having trouble at school and cannot study.
			I have severe stress if the child's problem is not solved, because every year the volume of lessons becomes heavier, and he cannot progress anymore.
			I am worried that this will be a serious problem, and if it continues the same way, how hard our lives will be.
			I am afraid because he is weak and he might drop out.
			My stress is that if he does not study, he cannot find a good job in the future.
			I am always worried that, like my brother, he will drop out and not progress.

Underlying Factors	Main Themes	Secondary Themes	Initial Codes
Emotional dysregulation	Fear of the future	Fear of others blaming; compare; fear of humiliating the child; underestimate the child's abilities.	<p>All the people around me want to compare and crush him because their children are in a privileged place.</p> <p>When I compare him with his peers, I see they do things very well.</p> <p>All his preschool classmates learned the exercises well, but my child did not.</p> <p>My wife blames me for all the problems and says that my behavior has caused the child to have the problem.</p> <p>Since my child has participated in the test, my wife does not pay attention to us and says that we have problems and should solve them ourselves.</p> <p>I always have fights with my wife about the problem of my child, so I am afraid that this will make my life more difficult.</p> <p>From the beginning of our marriage, I had problems with my wife's family, which made us unable to provide a happy life for our child.</p> <p>My wife thinks she is not responsible and says that I and my family have this problem and that it is genetically transmitted.</p> <p>I feel that I do not have anyone who understands me.</p>
	Feeling of defenseless	Exclusion from romantic relations; feeling expelled; deprivation and lack of emotional support; lack of a family secure space; disheartened by the family.	<p>Even my wife does not have the patience to talk about our child and does not see my efforts.</p> <p>I do not hurt anyone, and I have not even told my family that my child has a problem because my child would be humiliated, and I do not want anyone to understand.</p> <p>I do not even have an intimate friend who can talk to me and understand me.</p> <p>It is as if nobody understands that I have done my best for my child.</p> <p>When a child finds difficulty in the classroom, it is hard to tolerate the words and behaviors of others, but I cannot tell anyone.</p> <p>Everyone tells me I'm wrong, that I'm too sensitive because it does not work, and that this child has a mental problem.</p> <p>My daughter and son say that I am getting on their nerves because of the learning problem of this child.</p> <p>My eldest son says I waste all my time and do not pay attention to them.</p>
		Not having a companion; feel ignored; deprivation of empathy; feeling not understood; lack of intimacy in relationships; compulsory acceptance of the conditions; hiding emotions	<p>My other kids say I did not do this for them and that I am looking at this child more.</p> <p>The rest of my children are annoyed and say I should leave it and not care so much about it, which is very annoying to me.</p> <p>My oldest daughter said that if she does not want to practice, she should be allowed to go to kindergarten.</p> <p>My older boys say to let her go if she does not want to go to school, and let her go illiterate.</p> <p>My oldest daughter said she should not torment herself so much; she cannot do her exercises.</p> <p>I do preschool activities because this child cannot do them, and if I do not, I feel guilty.</p> <p>My friend would say that my fault is so much that I do not give up and take care too much.</p> <p>My family is blaming me and judging me as a result of my stubbornness.</p> <p>My mother says I always limit the child and do not let him learn and do things on his own.</p>
	Feeling guilty	Feeling a failure; feeling shaken; disregard for people around oneself; underestimating the problem by people around oneself; feeling frustrated; excessive sensitivity; the sense of torment of conscience.	<p>My wife always says that I have a destination I brought and listened to, but now he does not listen to me and do not rely on me.</p> <p>My wife tells me that I have been lazy and did all the work myself; now I cannot do it myself.</p> <p>Once I went to the counselor, and he told me that the child did not want to be independent and that I am at his full service.</p> <p>My sister says I expect too much from my child and want to do everything perfectly.</p>
		Feeling blocked; condemned to failure; perfectionism; feeling notorious; expectations are out of place; be blamed.	

Underlying Factors	Main Themes	Secondary Themes	Initial Codes
Emotional dys-regulation	Lack of sense of competency	Feeling discredit in worthiness; feeling humiliated in the workplace; feeling miserable; concerned about the neglect of your surroundings; fear of being judged; fear of labeling a child.	<p>In the educational environment, everyone knows all about me.</p> <p>I do not focus on my work environment, and I do not think I am doing well.</p> <p>I am afraid that others think I am a bad teacher because I could not help my child.</p> <p>My teacher, who works with us and constantly endures complaints, says that this child is not careful and focused, which is hard for me.</p> <p>Because I am also in training, I have a bad reputation due to the problem with my child.</p> <p>My mother says I was the same and had the same problems, but she did not behave like me and solve the problem.</p>
		Humiliation; suppressed; lack of mental security; feeling insufficient; worthlessness.	<p>My wife always says that this child is like me.</p> <p>My friend says I have the same problems, and I am in a bad state of mind.</p> <p>The kindergarten coach always says that I do not care about my child's work.</p> <p>The teacher says I do not regularly deal with my child's activities and forget about the preschool program.</p>

Emotional dysregulation

The occurrence of any kind of disability or cognitive problems in children causes difficulties in regulating emotions for parents and leads to psychological injuries, affecting family functions, and causing parents to face challenges in regulating their emotions (Banducci et al., 2016; Manning et al., 2018). Emotional regulation plays an important role in controlling stress levels, and parents need to acquire the ability to regulate and manage their emotions to prevent the spread of their child's problem. The emotional regulation of parents is related to the development of children's emotional competence and the ability to build relationships with others, thereby reducing stress (Di Giulio et al., 2014; Hartley et al., 2011). Furthermore, Chordia et al. (2020) demonstrated that SLD has increased due to a lack of awareness among teachers and parents, resulting in increased family problems. The existing literature also highlights the complexity in explaining and defining SLD (Brigham et al., 2011; Ögülmüş & Okur, 2021). Raising awareness about SLD disorder and clarifying its real concept can reduce confusion and misunderstandings within families (Ögülmüş & Okur, 2021). Overall, to reduce the problems faced by parents of children with learning disabilities, it is crucial to increase awareness about SLD disorder and provide a clear understanding of the condition.

Conclusion

The individuals with disabilities education act emphasizes the importance of examining the needs of families

with children with disabilities, educational programs, and knowledge development. The Association of Children with Disabilities has also shifted towards family-oriented intervention models. Parents of children with learning disabilities face challenges such as societal expectations, concerns about their child's future, and the influence of teachers, as well as economic problems and a lack of support from relevant institutions. Therefore, various forms of support from society are necessary. In addition, education should be comprehensive and consider the broader social context of the family, including the impact of poor environmental conditions, stress, and social isolation on parenting. The findings of this research can be valuable at both theoretical and practical levels. Further investigations are needed to improve the psychological well-being of families and prevent the development of learning disabilities in Iranian children. The results of this research can also guide experts to provide constructive and effective solutions. This study has aimed to provide more detailed and somewhat specific information regarding the topic of children at risk of SLD. Therefore, the findings of this study can contribute to identifying research challenges related to these children and their parents and serve as a guide for future researchers in exploring other related aspects of this topic. Furthermore, children with neurodevelopmental disorders and their parents require special educational and developmental programs, and the results of this study could assist professionals in designing appropriate intervention programs.

Study limitations

While this study provides valuable insights into the lived experiences of parents of children at-risk of SLD, several limitations should be acknowledged. Initially, the use of a qualitative research method limits the generalizability of the findings. The sample size of 23 participants, although suitable for reaching data saturation, may not be representative of all parents in similar situations. Therefore, caution should be exercised when applying the findings to other populations. Secondly, the phenomenological approach utilized in this study focused solely on the subjective experiences of the parents and may have overlooked other objective factors. Future research could explore the interplay between subjective experiences and objective factors. The researchers made efforts to include a diverse range of parents, but it is possible that certain perspectives or experiences were missed. Finally, this study focused solely on the challenges faced by parents in this particular situation. It did not explore potential solutions or interventions to address these challenges. Future research could examine the effectiveness of specialized educational programs or coping skills enhancement initiatives in supporting parents in similar circumstances. However, this information is derived from interviews with parents in the Iranian community, which limits the generalizability of the results. Despite these limitations, the findings of this study provide valuable insights into the challenges faced by parents whose children achieve low standards in the national entrance exam. The identified sub-themes and underlying factors offer a basis for future research and the development of targeted interventions to support parents in such situations.

Ethical Considerations

Compliance with ethical guidelines

This study was approved by the Ethics Committee of the University of Isfahan, Isfahan, Iran (Code: IR.UI.REC.1400.090). All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were following the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and with the 1964 Declaration of Helsinki and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards.

Funding

This study was extracted from the PhD dissertation of Bahar Rashidi, approved by the Department of Psychology and Education of Children With Special Needs, Faculty of Education and Psychology, University of Isfahan, Isfahan, Iran.

Authors' contributions

All authors contributed equally to the conception and design of the study, data collection and analysis, interpretation of the results, and drafting of the manuscript. Each author approved the final version of the manuscript for submission.

Conflict of interest

The authors declared no conflict of interest.

Acknowledgments

The authors sincerely thank every participant who assisted them in conducting this research.

References

- Bandla, S., Mandadi, G. D., & Bhogaraju, A. (2017). Specific learning disabilities and psychiatric comorbidities in school children in South India. *Indian Journal of Psychological Medicine*, 39(1), 76–82. [DOI:10.4103/0253-7176.198950] [PMID]
- Banducci, A. N., Bujarski, S. J., Bonn-Miller, M. O., Patel, A., & Connolly, K. M. (2016). The impact of intolerance of emotional distress and uncertainty on veterans with co-occurring PTSD and substance use disorders. *Journal of Anxiety Disorders*, 41, 73–81. [DOI:10.1016/j.janxdis.2016.03.003] [PMID]
- Brigham, F. J., Scruggs, T. E., & Mastropieri, M. A. (2011). Science education and students with learning disabilities. *Learning Disabilities Research & Practice*, 26(4), 223–232. [DOI:10.1111/j.1540-5826.2011.00343.x]
- Chordia, S. L., Thandapani, K., & Arunagirinathan, A. (2020). Children 'at risk' of developing specific learning disability in primary schools. *Indian Journal of Pediatrics*, 87(2), 94–98. [DOI:10.1007/s12098-019-03130-z] [PMID]
- Connor, D. J., & Cavendish, W. (2018). Sharing power with parents: Improving educational decision making for students with learning disabilities. *Learning Disability Quarterly*, 41(2), 79–84. [DOI:10.1177/0731948717698828]
- Craig, F., Operto, F. F., De Giacomo, A., Margari, L., Froli, A., & Conson, M., et al. (2016). Parenting stress among parents of children with Neurodevelopmental Disorders. *Psychiatry Research*, 242, 121–129. [DOI:10.1016/j.psychres.2016.05.016] [PMID]
- Colaizzi, P. (1987). Psychological research as the phenomenologist views it. In R. S. Valle. & M. King (Eds.), *Existential phenomenological alternatives for psychology* (pp. 6–15). New York: Oxford University Press. [Link]
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2016). Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches. London: Sage Publications. [Link]

- Di Giulio, P., Philipov, D., & Jaschinski, I. (2014). Families with disabled children in different European countries. *Families and Societies*, 23, 1-44. [Link]
- Eatough, V., & Smith, J. A. (2017). Interpretative phenomenological analysis. In E. Lyons. & A. Coyle (Eds.), *Analysing qualitative data in psychology* (pp. 193-209). London: Sage Publications. [DOI:10.4135/9781446207536.d10]
- Emerson, E., Malam, S., Davies, I., & Spencer, K. (2005). Adults with Learning Difficulties in England 2003/4. *Journal of Policy and Practice in Intellectual Disabilities*, 5(1), 75-76. [Link]
- Hashemi, Z., & Einy, S. (2021). [The effectiveness of parent-child interactive therapy on parenting stress and parenting self-efficacy of mothers of children with learning disabilities (Persian)]. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 10(3), 125-142. [DOI:10.32598/JLD.10.3.7]
- Hartley, S. L., Barker, E. T., Seltzer, M. M., Greenberg, J. S., & Floyd, F. J. (2011). Marital satisfaction and parenting experiences of mothers and fathers of adolescents and adults with autism. *American Journal on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities*, 116(1), 81-95. [DOI:10.1352/1944-7558-116.1.81] [PMID]
- Heiman, T., & Berger, O. (2008). Parents of children with Asperger syndrome or with learning disabilities: Family environment and social support. *Research in Developmental Disabilities*, 29(4), 289-300. [DOI:10.1016/j.ridd.2007.05.005] [PMID]
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). Naturalistic inquiry: Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1985, 416 pp., \$25.00 (Cloth). *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 9(4), 438-439. [DOI:10.1016/0147-1767(85)90062-8]
- Kimber, M., McTavish, J. R., Luo, C., Couturier, J., Dimitropoulos, G., & MacMillan, H. (2019). Mandatory reporting of child maltreatment when delivering family-based treatment for eating disorders: A framework analysis of practitioner experiences. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 88, 118-128. [DOI:10.1016/j.chiabu.2018.11.010] [PMID]
- Manning, K., Rogers, A. H., Bakhshaie, J., Hogan, J. B. D., Buckner, J. D., & Ditte, J. W., et al. (2018). The association between perceived distress tolerance and cannabis use problems, cannabis withdrawal symptoms, and self-efficacy for quitting cannabis: The explanatory role of pain-related affective distress. *Addictive Behaviors*, 85, 1-7. [DOI:10.1016/j.add-beh.2018.05.009] [PMID]
- Mohammadi Armandi, M., & Mottaqi, M. (2022). Experiences of parents of students with learning disabilities in elementary schools in Lordegan, Iran, in 2020. *Avicenna Journal of Nursing and Midwifery Care*, 30(3), 221-230. [DOI:10.32592/ajnm.30.3.221]
- Moideen, N., & Mathai, S. (2018). Parental stress of mothers of children with learning disabilities. *Researchers World*, 9(2), 1-5. [DOI:10.18843/rwjasc/v9i2/01]
- Ögülmüş, K., & Okur, M. (2021). Metaphoric perceptions of teachers and parents regarding the concept of specific learning difficulty (SLD). *International Journal of Progressive Education*, 17(5), 377-392. [DOI:10.29329/ijpe.2021.375.24]
- Preston, S., & Stultz, S. (2018). *Best practices for teaching reading to secondary students with a specific learning disability: A review of the literature*. Morehead: Morehead State University Digital Archives. [DOI:10.1177/0014402915585478]
- Rameckers, E. A. A., Crafford, R., Ferguson, G., & Smits Engelman, B. C. M. (2023). Efficacy of a task-oriented intervention for children with a dual diagnosis of specific learning disabilities and developmental coordination disorder: A pilot study. *Children*, 10(3), 415. [DOI:10.3390/children10030415] [PMID]
- Rhoades, B. L., Greenberg, M. T., Lanza, S. T., & Blair, C. (2011). Demographic and familial predictors of early executive function development: Contribution of a person-centered perspective. *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology*, 108(3), 638-662. [DOI:10.1016/j.jecp.2010.08.004] [PMID]
- Rutter, M., Caspi, A., Fergusson, D., Horwood, L. J., Goodman, R., & Maughan, B., et al. (2004). Sex differences in developmental reading disability: New findings from 4 epidemiological studies. *JAMA*, 291(16), 2007-2012. [DOI:10.1001/jama.291.16.2007] [PMID]
- Sexton, T. L. (2019). Functional family therapy: An evidence-based, family-focused, and systemic approach for working with adolescents and their families. In B. H. Fiese, M. Celano, K. Deater-Deckard, E. N. Jouriles, & M. A. Whisman (Eds.), *APA handbook of contemporary family psychology: Family therapy and training* (pp. 171-188). Washington: American Psychological Association. [DOI:10.1037/0000101-011]
- Vashi, N., Bohr, Y., & Weiss, J. A. (2023). Transdiagnostic Symptoms in Children with Neurodevelopmental Disabilities and perceived parent-child relationship quality: A pilot study. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 32, 3472-3481. [DOI:10.1007/s10826-023-02570-8]
- Ward, L., & Tarleton, B. (2007). Sinking or swimming? Supporting parents with learning disabilities and their children. *Tizard Learning Disability Review*, 12(2), 22-32. [DOI:10.4103/0253-7176.198]

This Page Intentionally Left Blank