

Coping Strategies in Mothers of Children with Special Needs : A Systematic Literature Review

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Abstract. The challenges and intensity of raising children with special needs can lead to various negative psychological conditions in mothers. This study aims to understand and identify the stress that arises in caregiving and the coping strategies used by mothers of children with special needs. This research employs a systematic literature review method. A total of 6946 articles were found and 7 articles met the criteria for review. Various obstacles and challenges that arise at certain moments in caring for these children can lead to increased levels of stress, depression, anxiety, and a decline in optimism and marital quality. It can be concluded that several coping strategies play an important role in addressing these challenges. Active coping strategies such as seeking social support, learning about the child's health condition, and looking for family support. Other strategies include self-management coping strategies, religious/spiritual coping strategies, and socio-cultural coping strategies.

Keywords: children with special needs, coping, mothers

1 Introduction

Presence of a child is highly significant within the family in Indonesia. Indonesia is considered as a pro-natalist country, meaning that most couples support for childbirth. Tanaka & Johnson explaining that Indonesia is classified as pro-natalist with a Total Fertility Rate of 2.26, and 93% of Indonesian society believes that having children is crucial within marriage¹. Children are individuals who complete the perfection of a family. However, not all children are born or grow up normally.

The Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection of the Republic of Indonesia in 2013 defines children with special needs as those who experience limitations or differences, whether physical, mental, intellectual, social, or emotional, significantly affecting their growth and development compared to their peers. The nearness of children with uncommon needs poses special challenges for moms, fathers, and families. There is a stigma associated with children with special needs, perceiving their unique conditions as barriers to achieving what is desired². These children have disabilities that affect their mental, emotional, or physical

¹ Safitri, A. D., Shalsabila, N., Yuliandari, B., Safitri, N., & Adidama, A. K. P.: Fenomena Childfree di Era Gen-Z Menurut Pandangan Agama. *Moderasi: Jurnal Kajian Islam Kontemporer*, Vol.1(01). (2022)

² Baiquni, A. N., Thalsa Adeeva.: *Jika Salah Mengasuh dan Mendidik Anak*. Sabil, Yogyakarta (2016)

characteristics, making them different from other children³. Based on Ministry of Human Development and Culture Coordination of the Republic of Indonesia in June 2022, there are approximately 2.197.833 children with special needs⁴.

Parents should not overlook the nearness of children with uncommon needs⁵. They must manage the difficulties and stress that arise when caring for and raising these children. However, some parents still struggle with patience and emotional regulation when dealing with their children's special needs⁶. The challenges of raising children with special needs can lead to various negative psychological conditions such as stress, depression, and anxiety. Parents of children with physical and mental health issues tend to experience higher stress levels.

Stress generally arises from stressors that individuals respond to, threatening and burdening their coping abilities⁷. Condition where guardians encounter uneasiness or pressure, especially related to their part in raising children and their interaction with them is parenting stress⁸. Stress on parenting is linked to reduce of the quality and effectiveness of parenting behaviors, warmth and affection, also parenting consistency. It is also enlarge harsh disciplinary methods and feeling of malignity towards children⁹. This indicates that parenting stress can impair a mother's ability to care for children with extraordinary needs. Parents of children with extraordinary needs have the same responsibilities with typically developing children parents¹⁰. However, mom of children with extraordinary needs report higher stress levels and feel greater demands in caring for their children. Lassenbery & Rehfeldt comparing parenting by mothers and fathers of children with special needs, found that moms display exceptionally tall level of stress and tend to resond adversely towards their children, incompletely since moms are more than twice as involved in caregiving compared to fathers¹¹.

Therefore, effective coping strategies are necessary for parents, especially mothers, who have the primary responsibility for caring for their children and minimizing emerging stressors. According to Lazarus & Folkman, coping involves managing the gap between demands

³ Setiawati, F. A.: Mengenal Konsep-Konsep Anak Berkebutuhan Khusus dalam PAUD. SELING: Jurnal Program Studi PGRA, Vol.6, Issue.2, pp. 193–208 (2020)

⁴ Rahayu, W. E., & Ramadhanty, R. D.: Penerimaan Ibu Sebagai Kunci Penting Interaksi Ibu Anak Pada Anak Berkebutuhan Khusus. JKPP (Jurnal Kesejahteraan), Vol.9, pp. 164–176 (2022)

⁵ Susanto, S. E.: Penerimaan Orang tua terhadap Kondisi Anaknya yang Menyandang Autisme di Rumah Terapis Little Star. Psikosains: Jurnal Penelitian Dan Pemikiran Psikologi, Vol. 9, Issue.2, pp. 140–152 (2018)

⁶ Hendriani, W.: Resiliensi psikologi sebuah pengantar. Prenada Media, Jakarta (2022)

⁷ Husnar, A. Z., Saniah, S., Nashori, F.: Harapan, Tawakal, dan Stres Akademik. Psikohumaniora: Jurnal Penelitian Psikologi, Vol 2, No.1, pp. 94–110 (2017)

⁸ Papatungan, N. A., & Ninin, R. H.: Gambaran Parenting Stress dan Coping Stress Pada saat Pertama Kali Orangtua Mengetahui Anaknya merupakan Anak Berkebutuhan Khusus. Jurnal Psikologi Konseling Vol. 15 No. 2 (2023)

⁹ Kurniawan & Uyun.: Penurunan Stres Pengasuhan Orang Tua Dan Disfungsi Interaksi Orang Tua-Anak Melalui Pendidikan Pengasuhan Versi Pendekatan Spiritual (Pp-Vps). Jurnal Intervensi Psikologi, pp.111-130 (2013)

¹⁰ Case-Smith, J.: Parenting a child with a chronic medical condition. American Journal of Occupational Therapy, Vol.58 No.5, pp. 551-560 (2004)

¹¹ Lassenberry, B. M., Rehfeldt, R. A.: Evaluating stress levels of parents of children with dissabilities. Sage Journals, Vol.70, No.2, pp. 231-244 (2004)

(whether from oneself or the environment) and the resources one uses to confront stressful situations. They identify two types of coping strategies that can reduce stress: problem-focused adapting, which overcome the source of the problem directly, and emotion-focused adapting, which oversees passionate reaction to stress¹².

Research on coping strategies for mothers of children with special needs is both urgent and important. Identifying and evaluating effective coping strategies expected can help mothers of children with extraordinary needs can manage stress, improve mental health, and enhance the quality of parenting. With a better understanding of coping strategies and the development of appropriate support programs, it is trusted that the burden among mom of children with extraordinary needs (ABK) can be reduced and the overall well-being of families can be supported. The outcome of the study also gained a positive contribution to the scientific knowledge and used as a reference by future researchers.

2 Method

2.1 Study Design

This study was conducted based on PRISMA-ScR. It seeks to help systematic reviewers clearly explain why they conducted the review, describe the methods used by the authors, and report the findings they uncovered. Afterwards, the approach for documented searching was held based on three orderly stages: identification, screening, and eligibility. This study have a vital quality assesment that held build upon the selected criteria¹³. Before being integrated and discussed, the standard of each choosen paper was settled. Last step involved processing the choosen articles through with some process, including data extraction and analysis.

2.2 Research Question

The study literature review incorporates three main components: mothers (Population), coping strategies (Interest), and mom of children with special needs (Context). The research question for this study is what are the most effective coping strategies employed by mothers of children with special needs to manage stress and psychological challenges?

¹² Sarafino, E.P.: Health Psychology Biopsychosocial Interactions (5th ed). John Willey & Sons Inc (2006)

¹³ Jamaluddin, A., Isa, N. J. M., Zaidi, M. H. A., Midan, A. R., & Zulkifli, M. N.: Parents' Coping Strategies for their School Children's Issues: A Systematic Literature Review. International Journal of Academic Research in Progressive Education and Development, Vol.13, No.1. (2024)

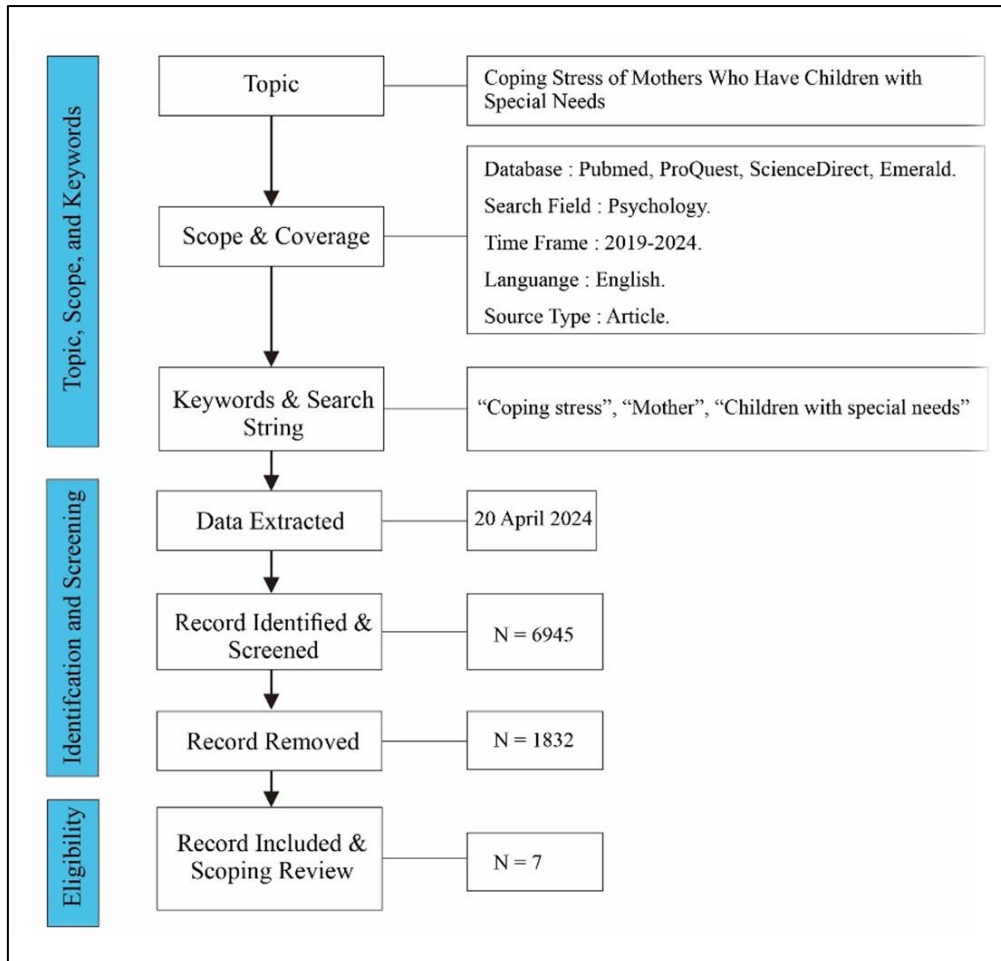


Figure 1. Systematic search strategy flow diagram

2.3 Systematic Searching Strategies

According to Shaffril et al, the systematic search strategy of this review to obtain related papers, including identification, filtering, and eligibility¹³. These steps are taken to assure a comprehensive review (Figure 1) to meet the main objective. Furthermore, it allowed the authors to comprehensively search and synthesize ideas into a simple and well-organized SLR.

2.4 Identification

This is the initial step of systematic search, which involve selection the keywords that will be used in the research process. The selection of the most effective keyword combination must take into account the insertion and exception standard of the analysis¹³. It is important to assure that the search includes relevant studies while excluding those that are not. The search focused on three primary keywords: coping stress, mothers, and children with special needs, aligning with the formulated research question (Table 2). The article was evaluated four prominent indexing

databases: Pubmed, Proquest, ScienceDirect, and Emerald. This comprehensive search process identified 6945 potential articles across the chosen databases.

Table 1. *Inclusion and exclusion criteria*

Criterion	Inclusion	Exclusion
Timeline	2019-2024	2018 and earlier
Types	Articles	Review articles, books, proceedings etc.
Language	English	Non-English
Subject Area	Psychology	Non-Psychology
Availability	Open access or free access	Paid

Table 2. *Search string utilized within chosen database*

Database	String
Pubmed	((coping stress) AND (mothers)) AND (children with special needs)
Proquest	Title:"coping stress in mothers of children with special needs"
Science Direct	("mothers" OR "mother") AND ("coping stress") AND ("children with special needs")
Emerald	Title:"coping stress in mothers of children with special needs"

2.5 Screening

The screening phase, which is the second step in the process, aims to identify suitable articles for the SLR by applying specific criteria to distinguish them from unsuitable ones (Table 1). According to Kitchenham and Charters, the criteria for the selection throughout it adjust with the objective and facilitates the right indication and categorization of the articles¹³. Articles published between 2019 and 2024 were chosen build upon of the maturity of the research field¹⁴. This time allotment was chosen since a adequate number of distributed papers were accessible for thorough review. Another basis was that the articles must be experimental investigate papers, giving essential information instead of proposition or thesis reports, survey papers, or pamphlets.

Given that the SLR focuses on mothers with children with extraordinary needs, selecting subject areas such as psychology was expected to increase the likelihood of finding relevant articles connected with the research objective. Linares-Espinos et al. emphasized only English-language articles were included to avoid confusion and streamline the review process¹³. Thus, this SLR exclusively considered English-language and also open access articles. The next stage of the choice process conducted with 1832 articles after excluding the articles that did not meet the specified criteria.

2.6 Eligibility

The eligibility step represented third phase in systematic search strategies, involving a re-evaluation of the 1832 initially selected articles to ensure they met the specified criteria. According to Durach et al. conducting a thorough systematic review requires moving beyond the study's title and abstract to fully grasp its significance¹³. They stress the importance of

¹⁴ Kraus, S., Breier, M., & Dasí-Rodríguez, S.: The art of crafting a systematic literature review in entrepreneurship research. *International Entrepreneurship and Management Journal*, Vol.16, No.3, pp. 1023-1042. (2020)

delving into each article's content to accurately evaluate its relevance and contribution to the review. The creators physically scrutinized the remaining papers to decide on the off chance that they adjusted with the set up consideration criteria, which included looking into the title, unique, or full content. Amid the title screening stage, numerous articles were considered ineligible, taken after by the prohibition of the other articles amid the theoretical and full paper screening stage. Thus, 7 articles were eventually chosen for the SLR (refer to Figure 1).

2.7 Quality Appraisal

The objective of this, an essential step in research, is to carefully examine and assess the way and analysis used in the selected studies, ensuring they meet or exceed expected standards. This study follows various stages outlined with PRISMA-ScR guidelines, which recommend preferred reporting items for systematic reviews and meta-analyses extensions for scoping reviews. These stages include: (1) defining each question; (2) searching the literature to be reviewed; (3) screening and selecting research articles; (4) analyzing articles by reviewing titles and abstracts and subsequently examining them thoroughly; (5) preparing the report.

3 Result

After reviewing 7 selected international journals, the summary was created down below. This summary aims to show readers with a comprehensive overview the content of the research journals reviewed. Subsequently, a discussion will be conducted on the trends observed in the research findings.

Author and Year	Title	Subject and Area	Methods and Results
Tiberio et al. (2023)	Impact of Covid-19 on Mothers Raising Children with Special Needs: Insights from a Survey Study	Both 68 mothers of children with special needs and mothers of typically developing children in Italy (N = 136)	Quantitative research Isolating oneself at home during the Covid-19 pandemic has negative psychological effects like anxiety, sadness, and also stress. Research results indicate that coping mechanisms include working from home (WFH), which can reduce symptoms of depression and stress.

Asa et al. (2021)	Psychological, sociocultural and economic coping strategies of mothers or female caregivers of children with a disability in Belu district, Indonesia	Participant are mother or female caregiver in Indonesia (N = 22)	<p>Qualitative Research</p> <p>Positive coping strategies, such as cognitive or awareness techniques. Knowledge of the health status and social-learning development of children with disabilities. Family support and connections</p> <p>Self-reliance coping strategies or religious/spiritual strategies.</p> <p>Sociocultural procedures, such as separation, require proficient and cultured back up.</p> <p>Economics matter methodologies, such as offering family resources.</p>
Bağ (2022)	The Effects of Depression Severity on the Stress Coping Methods of Mothers with Mentally Disabled Children	Mothers of children with intellectual disabilities in Turkey (N = 50)	<p>Quantitative research</p> <p>The results reveal that as the children with special needs grow older, mothers lose their sense of optimism. Additionally, having a child with intellectual disabilities causes anxiety, makes mothers depressed and leads to negative coping. Therefore, the stress coping strategy employed is for mothers</p>

			to seek help and social support.
Brown et al. (2020)	A Dyadic Model of Stress, Coping, and Marital Satisfaction Among Parents of Children with Autism	Married couples in United States (N = 69)	Quantitative Research. Stress arises when grow up and care for children with extraordinary needs. Therefore, this study suggest that marital coping have a urgent side in increasing marital satisfaction and reducing parental stress in raising extraordinary children
Almedar et al. (2023)	The Spiritual and Religious Coping of Mothers with Disabled Children in Turkey: Correlation Between Stress Coping Styles and Self-Efficacy	Mothers from private rehabilitation center in Turkey (N = 227)	Quantitative Research. Mothers' ability in spiritual coping has significant impacts on stress management. By possessing spiritual coping mechanisms, mothers can effectively deal with the difficulties they face. This underscores the importance of support in spiritual and mental health as factors that aid mothers and children in overcoming the challenges they encounter in everyday life.
Gagat-Matula (2022)	Resilience and Coping with Stress and Marital Satisfaction of the Parents of Children with ASD during the COVID-19	50 married couples of children with ASD in Poland (N = 100)	Quantitative Research The coping strategies that emerge are as follows:

	<p>Pandemic in Lezajsk, Poland</p>		<p>Seeking social support: Mothers (wives) seek social contacts as a way to cope with stress and trauma in raising a child with ASD.</p> <p>Engagement in alternative activities: Fathers (husbands) involve themselves in various alternative activities as an effort to deal with the challenging situation.</p> <p>Avoidance coping: Both parents employ avoidance strategies to shield themselves from feelings of hopelessness, fear, exhaustion, and powerlessness that may arise during the caregiving process, particularly amid the COVID-19 widespread.</p>
<p>Wang et al. (2023)</p>	<p>Interplay between Tradition and Modernity: Stress and Coping Experiences among Parents of Children with Autism in Beijing, China</p>	<p>Parents of children with autism in Beijing (N = 12 mothers)</p>	<p>Qualitative research: 12 in-depth interviews</p> <p>The results indicate that there are environmental and cultural values that influence mothers' stress coping, as in modern times, the influence of traditional culture still exists.</p> <p>Coping strategies include: setting boundaries with grandparents, seeking professional or expert to address potential</p>

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networks.

4 Discussion

Based on a systematic literature review conducted by researchers, it is broadly noted that stress level of parents, particularly mom of children with special needs, is higher compared to parents of normal children. The limitations faced by these children can trigger difficulties for mothers in managing negative emotions such as depression, anxiety, worry, feelings of despair, and stress¹⁵. This aligns with findings from studies reviewed by the researcher, indicating that parents' inadequate self-regulation, especially caring for children with extraordinary needs, increases the risk of various obstacles such as decreased optimism, stress, depression, anxiety, and reduced marital quality.

In the study by Tiberio et al., involving both 68 mom of children with extraordinary needs and mom of normally children in Italy, the research was prompted by Covid-19 pandemic which affecting parents' psychological well-being, particularly those caring for a child with special needs. The study aimed to explore the relationships between emotional conditions including depression, anxiety, stress, and feelings of discomfort. Data were gathered as part of a comprehensive survey established in cooperation with UNICEF Italy from April 21 to May 3, 2020. It found that farther work made a difference diminish stretch among moms that have special needs children, while separate learning contributed to stress reduction among mothers of typically developing children. Hyperarousal symptoms emerged as a major cause of stress among moms of children with extraordinary needs, whereas meddlesome contemplations and shirking of troublesome circumstances were essential stressors for moms of ordinarily creating children. Encourage investigate is required to create procedures supporting families with children with uncommon needs and to get it how work adaptability and social bolster can help maternal mental wellbeing in non-emergency circumstances¹⁶.

Asa et al. study involving 22 mothers or female caregivers, used qualitative methods including in-depth interviews with each participant selected through snowball and purposive selection method. The interview that been filmed, deciphered verbatim, and send into Nvivo 12 for examination. Discoveries demonstrated that positive psychological coping, including cognitive procedures, knowledge of the health status and social learning growth of children with disabilities, and family connection and back up, were concluded by members to address psychological challenges. Religious/spiritual and self-management coping were used. Sosial and culture based methodologies like separation, the require for proficient back, and culturally-

¹⁵ Gazzaz, A. Z., Carpiano, R. M., Laronde, D. M., & Aleksejuniene, J.: Parental psychosocial factors, unmet dental needs and preventive dental care in children and adolescents with special health care needs: A stres process model. *BMC oral health*, Vol.22, No.1, pp. 282 (2022)

¹⁶ Tiberio, L., Massullo, C., Carrus, G., Mastandrea, S., & Fagioli, S.: Impact of COVID-19 on Mothers Raising Children with Special Needs: Insights from a Survey Study. *Journal of Clinical Medicine*, Vol.12, No.16, pp. 5363 (2023)

based support to address social impacts, disgrace, and discrimination were noted. Economical based like providing family resources to overcome the challenges were moreover distinguish. These techniques collectively support members in coping with challenges of caring disability children. Further research involving larger groups of participant also involvement from fathers or male caregivers is needed to good explore the coping experiences associated with the impact of childhood disability on families¹⁷.

Bag's study included 50 moms of children with intellectual disabilities who received outpatient psychiatric care in Turkey, aimed to assess the impact of depression severity on stress management in these mothers. Participants completed a socio-demographic questionnaire. Results indicated an average Beck Depression Scale score of 17.42 ± 6.32 , suggesting that higher depression levels tended to correlate with increased feelings of despair and resignation. Participants experiencing severe depression tended to exhibit higher scores indicating resignation in coping with stress, whereas those with mild depression tended to have higher scores in the self-confidence subscale. Participants with moderate depression also tended to exhibit higher resignation scores in coping with stress. Findings highlighted that as children with mental disorders age, mothers tend to seek more social support as a coping mechanism. Additionally, having a child with mental disorders can cause anxiety about the future and depression in mothers, leading to fatigue and negative stress. The study underscored the importance of assessing the severity of depression in mothers of children with mental disabilities and providing psychiatric support¹⁸.

Brown et al.'s studied 69 couples and utilized statistical analysis to investigate how marital satisfaction influenced the relationship between the coping strategies used by partners and parenting stress. Results indicated that stress management was positively related to marital satisfaction and negatively related to parenting stress. Marital satisfaction was also related to parental stress levels. Findings suggested that partners coping strategies significantly influenced parenting stress level and marital satisfaction in parents of children with ASD¹⁹.

Almedar et al.'s objective is to find the relation the style of coping stress and self-efficacy with spiritual and religious coping among mom of disabled children. The study included 227 mothers of disabled children aged 6-18 years registered at private rehabilitation centers in eastern Turkey. Statistical analyses included Pearson correlation and multiple linear regression analyses. Results indicated that mothers' ability to cope spiritually significantly influenced stress management. Spiritual coping mechanisms enabled mothers to effectively cope with their

¹⁷ Asa, G. A., Fauk, N. K., Ward, P. R., Hawke, K., Crutzen, R., & Mwanri, L.: Psychological, sociocultural and economic coping strategies of mothers or female caregivers of children with a disability in Belu district, Indonesia. *PloS one*, Vol.16, No.5. (2021)

¹⁸ Bağ, S.: The Effects of Depression Severity on the Stress Coping Methods of Mothers with Mentally Disabled Children. *Istanbul Medical Journal= Istanbul Tıp Dergisi*, Vol.23, No.1, pp 34 (2022)

¹⁹ Brown, M., Whiting, J., Kahumoku-Fessler, E., Witting, A. B., & Jensen, J. A dyadic model of stress, coping, and marital satisfaction among parents of children with autism. *Family Relations*, Vol.69, No.1, pp. 138-150 (2020)

challenges. This underscored the importance of spiritual and mental health support as factors aiding mothers and their children in overcoming daily life challenges²⁰.

Gagat-Matula's study in Poland aimed to explore the relation resilience, coping strategies of couples, with their marital satisfaction assessment. The study involved 50 married couples, comprising 50 mothers and 50 fathers (N = 100). Findings revealed differences in marital satisfaction between spouses, with higher levels of relationship dissatisfaction observed among wives than husbands. Coping strategies included wives (mothers) seeking social contact as a way to cope with stress and trauma in raising children with ASD, while husbands (fathers) engaged in various alternative activities to deal with difficult situations. Both mothers and fathers utilized their resilience to manage tasks associated with caring for children with ASD. They also employed avoidance strategies to protect themselves from feelings of despair, fear, fatigue, and helplessness that may arise during caregiving, specific when COVID-19 happens. Couples who were more open and diligent tended to fare better in handling hard situations. However, all resilience factors were negatively associated with stress coping and emotions²¹.

Wang et al. (2023) study in China aimed to know about how the culture continues to affect stress and coping of current parents raising children with autism. The qualitative study involved individual interviews to gain in-depth insights from 12 participants, selected through purposive sampling of parents with young children diagnosed with autism. Data analysis included systematic content analysis with deductive, inductive, and synthesis stages. Findings indicated environmental and cultural values influencing mothers' stress coping, with traditional cultural influences persisting in modern times. Coping strategies included setting boundaries with grandparents, seeking professionals or experts to address potential imbalances, and expanding social networks²².

5 Conclusion

In conclusion, this research provides valuable insights into the experiences of parents especially mom about caring for their children with extraordinary needs. Caring for the grow and advancement of children with special needs presents unique challenges and becomes a coping strategy for mothers. The most effective coping strategies can be applied is active coping strategies, such as seeking social support, understanding the child's health conditions, and receiving family support, are crucial in helping mothers confront these psychological challenges. Additionally, strategies involving self-care, religious/spiritual practices, and socio-cultural variables play critical roles in addressing stigma, discrimination, and the social impacts associated with having a child with disabilities. Workplace flexibility and social assistance also

²⁰ Alemdar, D. K., Yilmaz, G., & Günaydin, N.: The spiritual and religious coping of mothers with disabled children in Turkey: correlation between stress coping styles and self-efficacy. *Journal of religion and health*, Vol.62, No.2, pp. 888-905 (2023)

²¹ Gagat-Matula, A.: Resilience and Coping with Stress and Marital Satisfaction of the Parents of Children with ASD during the COVID-19 Pandemic. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, Vol.19, No.19, 12372 (2022)

²² Wang, X., Zhai, F., & Wang, Y.: Interplay between tradition and modernity: Stress and coping experiences among parents of children with autism in Beijing, China. *Behavioral Sciences*, Vol.13, No.10, pp. 814. (2023)

can help reduce maternal stress phase in caring for children with extraordinary needs. Moreover, depression level in mothers with disabled children can influence their coping mechanisms, with higher levels of depression often resulting in poorer behavior from mothers. It is crucial to support married couples especially the mothers in raising children with special needs through adaptive stress management strategies and by providing psychological and spiritual support.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The authors would like to thanks to all the people that help to carry out this research.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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