

ROLE OF PARENTS IN UPBRINGING SPECIAL CHILDREN IN INDIA – A SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Parents play a crucial role in the education of children with disabilities, particularly in special education settings. As chief proponents for their kids, they ensure that the education system acknowledges and upholds their rights. Parents can influence their child's education by attending school events and meetings for Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). They tackle the difficulties of special education by supplying their children with essential tools and adaptations. Regardless, numerous parents remain engaged in their children's educational institutions, motivating their kids to complete homework and collaborating with teachers and staff. Exploring how parents with disabilities influence their children's social growth and educational prospects is the primary motivation for this research. Parents of children with disabilities often encounter restricted access to emotional, financial, and critical services, along with other challenges. Information was gathered via a semi-structured interview at Arunodaya Special Children School, located in Mysore District.

INTRODUCTION

The educational progress of every child relies heavily on parental involvement. For CWSN, parents' roles extend beyond conventional support to encompass emotional assistance and educational direction. These extra responsibilities can impose significant challenges on the child, impacting their social and educational growth (Cheng and Lai, 2023; Li et al., 2022; and Liu et al., 2024).

Parents face a lack of resources for engagement and the specific challenges affecting their involvement in their children's overall development, despite research indicating that parental participation is essential. Parents of children with disabilities encounter various challenges that hinder their full involvement in their education, in contrast to the parents of typically developing children. These challenges might encompass financial limitations linked to emotional strain, health concerns, anxiety, medical care, and the challenge of locating precise educational resources (Shahali et al., 2024; Matambanadzo and Rhoda, 2024). Most importantly, social stigma regarding disabilities often sets these families apart, amplifying the pressure and stress of adequately supporting their children (Vadivelan et al., 2020; Kshetri and Marak, 2024). In spite of these difficulties, numerous parents constantly seek new methods to aid their child's growth. They show exceptional adaptability, frequently exceeding the requirements of their intricate educational frameworks, engaging in support groups, seeking assistance, and working alongside educators and specialists. Often, these parents emerge as the most steadfast and reliable advocates for their child's growth, despite encountering social stigma, emotional exhaustion, or insufficient institutional assistance (Rusu et al., 2023; Abdat et al., 2023; Rakap et al., 2022). Their efforts reflect not only the

necessity but also a profound manifestation of love, determination, and optimism, demonstrating that the influence of committed parents can significantly transform the educational experience of children with disabilities (The Guardian, 2021).

The increasing number of studies has seen the value of parents' participation in special education, saying how much it affects the general confidence, social skills and academic performance of children. Studies by researchers such as *Guo and Keles, (2024)* and *Hyassatet al., (2024)* suggest that parents' participation can significantly increase the learning achievement of disabled children. Nevertheless, other studies have ignored the unique obstacles faced by parents of disabled children and various types of support effects including supporting family members, educational institutions, communities and government initiatives. Educational policies and processes involving all students and their families have recently come into vogue in decision making.

Family-centered approaches are becoming more prevalent in special education as a whole, since parents are increasingly viewed as instructive in creating and carrying out Individualised Education Programs (IEPs) that meet their child's specific requirements (*Freeman and Kirksey, 2023*). With the rapid adoption of online learning and support systems during the COVID-19 epidemic, digital tools and assistive technologies have greatly improved parental surveillance and therapeutic assistance for children. Digital platforms and community-oriented support systems have significantly assisted parents by providing avenues for experience sharing, resource accessibility, and systematic reforms in disability education (*Sankohet al., 2023*).

IEPs are a component of India's initiative to assist students with disabilities, and inclusive education policies have recently garnered heightened attention in the nation. The US is among the countries with the highest rate of IEPs. The parents, specialists, and educators of a kid with disabilities work together to create these individualized programs. The primary objectives of India's National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPWD) Act 2016 were inclusive education and individualized learning programs for students with disabilities. Despite the recent adoption of official IEPs recently, Indian educational institutions are required to guarantee individual learning strategies that students require their assistance. The government has established various measures and policies to address these intervals. NEP 2020 assessed the requirement of inclusive education professional training for teachers and advocated cooperation between schools and parents in curriculum development along with the RPWD Act. By providing funds for the recruitment of special teachers, the construction of accessible infrastructure, and the acquisition of assistant technology, Samagra Shikha Yojana promotes inclusive education. Although rural schools may lack the resources and skilled personnel that urban schools have, it doesn't mean that programs aren't implemented uniformly. The educational development and potential of children from economically deprived or rural regions are limited because parents in these areas do not get enough help and resources to implement or benefit from IEPs.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The study's significance rests in the fact that it examines the difficulties parents have when trying to meet the unique needs of their children (CWSN), which impacts the child's overall well-being. In India, where inclusive education is still in its infancy, a greater understanding of these obstacles and existing support structures is crucial for enhancing educational outcomes for students with disabilities. By demonstrating the efficacy of policies that fortify

parents, their support networks, and educational strategies, this research emphasises the significance of family involvement in education.

The findings of this research can help community, organizations, teachers and identify systemic deficiencies, including Individualised Education Programs (IEPs) along with lack of awareness with insufficient parents' participation.

Objectives of the Study

The goal of this research is to better understand the difficulties faced by parents of disabled children, the support structures that these families rely on, and the extent to which parental involvement in their children's schooling influences these results. The following are specific objectives -

1. To identify the obstacles encountered by parents of Children with Special Needs (CWSN) in facilitating their education.
2. To identify the types of support networks available to parents of children with special needs.
3. To investigate the perspectives of parents of Children with Special Needs (CWSN) regarding the efficacy of the support systems.
4. To ascertain the impact of parental engagement on the academic and social development of children with disabilities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section offers an overview of pivotal papers that underpin the current research. Even though there is limited literature focusing specifically on semi-urban settings, this review seeks to establish an insight into the different factors that affect how special education is provided.

Lekholetova et al.,(2020) in the study focuses on the challenges faced by parents raising children with disabilities in Ukraine, highlighting the urgent need for integrated social services. Based on in-depth interviews with 60 parents across two regions, the research identified common issues such as discrimination, limited medical and psychological support, inadequate regulations, lack of information, financial stress, and poor access to early intervention. These findings offer valuable insights for improving social work practices and support systems. The authors emphasize the importance of structural reforms and enhanced educational resources to better support families and empower parents in caring for their children with disabilities.

Tavva et al.,(2021) in its study looked at how parents feel about inclusive education for children with intellectual disabilities (ID) in Greek mainstream schools. Eighty-three parents took part by filling out a questionnaire that asked about their preferred type of classroom setting, their satisfaction with inclusion, how well they work with teachers, the benefits they've seen, and how the system could improve. Most parents preferred a co-teaching model in regular classrooms, mainly because it helps their children build social skills. However, many also raised concerns about poor communication with teachers, lack of personal support, and problems within the school system.

Osuaforet et al.,(2022) study qualitative literature review looks at the reasons why parents don't involve themselves in the schooling of their children with intellectual disabilities. It uses Paulo Freire's theory to show how important parents are in this process. The study identifies

key challenges such as low parental education, negative teacher attitudes, stigma, financial hardship, stress, lack of support and skills, poor communication with schools, and inadequate legal frameworks. It emphasizes that the severity of a child's disability also affects parental engagement. To address these issues, the study suggests parent education, teacher training, supportive policies, improved home-school collaboration, and greater awareness of disability rights.

Nanda's, (2024) study, indicated that epidemics had a tremendous impact on global school education, especially serious consequences for intellectual handicapped children. The quick switch for remote learning transferred most of the educational responsibility on the parents, forcing them to fill the duties conducted earlier by teachers, doctors and carers. It also focuses on how the parents responded to new expectations through community cooperation and inventor options. Using case study and grassroots efforts, it enhances the importance of enabling parents to assist children with disabilities during epidemic and provides ways for long-term solutions.

Jankovska et al.,(2024) study, "Exploring parental perspectives: The impact of assistive technologies on inclusive education for children with disabilities" investigates parental perceptions on the utilisation of assistive technologies to facilitate inclusive education for children with impairments in mainstream educational settings. Using a questionnaire, it gathered insights on parents' awareness, satisfaction, perceived benefits, and challenges related to these tools. Overall, parents held a positive view, recognizing the role of assistive technologies in improving learning and promoting inclusion. However, issues like limited access, high costs, and lack of proper training were identified as key barriers. The study highlights the need for stronger collaboration between parents and schools, along with targeted policies to enhance the effective use of assistive technologies in education.

Sineaiet al.,(2025) in their study examines the educational impact of COVID-19 school closures on children with disabilities in Malawi. Based on telephone interviews with 99 parents and caregivers, the findings reveal widespread dissatisfaction with the lack of educational support during the closures. Many parents reported no contact with schools or teachers, and children engaged in minimal formal learning. Despite this, parents expressed confidence that their children would return to school, citing disrupted routines and increased loneliness. The study emphasizes the urgent need to prioritize both the mental health and learning of children with disabilities and to actively involve parents in their education.

METHODOLOGY

The perspectives of parents caring for disabled children were investigated in this qualitative study. 30 parents were selected at random from the parent body of The Arunodaya Special Children School, in Mysore District. The information was gathered using semi-structured interviews, which gave participants an opportunity to share their stories, thoughts, and feelings on the support systems that are already in place. A self-created questionnaire with five open-ended questions regarding the support system was delivered to the parents. The parents were requested to document the nature of support they receive concerning the measurements. People were given a range from 1 to 5 to rate how useful the support system was, where 1 signifies no effectiveness and 5 denotes considerable effectiveness. The parents' experiences were collated. The interview data was subjected to thematic analysis in order to find trends and topics pertaining to parental issues, support systems, and perceived impacts on their child's social and academic growth.

RESULTS

Table 1. Participants: Parents and Children (Semi-Urban Area, N=30 Parents)

Participants	Number	Details
Parents	30	15 fathers and 15 mothers
Families	15	All residents in semi-urban settings
Children's Gender	8-Male, 7- Female	Gender of child in each family
Children's Age Range	8-15 years	Mix of primary and middle-school aged children

The data revealed that the parents encountered a number of significant challenges, including financial hardship, time limits, and difficulties getting necessary support services. There was a lack of qualified therapists and educators, which contributed to participants' emotional distress and burnout. Despite their inconsistency, familial networks and community support organizations show efficacy as valuable support systems. Parental involvement positively influenced both academic and social success. Over time, parents saw an improvement in their children's social interactions and academic performance.

1. Obstacles Encountered by Parents: Parents encounter numerous obstacles that hinder their capacity to assist their child's education and welfare. Financial strain, restricted access to qualified practitioners, and emotional fatigue are prevalent challenges. These challenges can impede consistent engagement in their child's educational journey, despite their great commitment and desire to assist.

Table 2. The Main Obstacles Parents of Children with Disabilities Face

Challenge	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Description
Financial Strain	25	83%	Parents indicated substantial expenses associated with therapy, specialized schooling, and medical care.
Limited Access to Resources	22	73%	Challenges in obtaining qualified educators, counsellors, assistive technologies, and educational resources.
Emotional Stress and Burnout	27	90%	Substantial emotional burden resulting from persistent support need and caregiving responsibilities.
Social Stigma	18	60%	Experiences of discrimination and exclusion resulting in loneliness.
Time Constraints	20	67%	Reconciling professional obligations with caring duties, with constrained time for additional commitments.

Financial strain (83%) and emotional stress (90%) were the most frequently reported challenges with parents stating the high costs of therapies and specialized education as major

burdens. “We pay roughly half of our monthly salary for therapy visits” one parent said. Mothers with children who have down syndromes have complained about “lack of educational accommodations” available to them. Additionally, 73% of parents expressed difficulty accessing resources, especially trained teachers and supportive devices. One parent remarked “We have to travel hours just to meet a speech therapist, we do not have one in our town”. Another parent said, “Narrow doors, absence of elevators in the school, steps in front of building entrances without ramps obstruct the mobility”. They also reported on physical barriers as “There was shortage of wheelchairs to assist my child when going to school”. While social stigma affected 60% of parents, often leading to feelings of isolation. “People either show pity for or ignore us like we are bearing a weight everyone can see,” said a mother. Some other parents said, “They were insulted and humiliated by their friends because of their disability, and they remembered the hostile behavior of their friends”. Beyond this, balancing work, family, and caregiving responsibilities was another issue, reported by 67% of parents. “I have to stop working, there was no one else who could care for my child full-time” declared one mother. Another parent said, “There are times when my family need to put up turns to take care of my child; there was almost never a free time, we are all involved”.

2. Support Systems Accessed by Parents and its perceived effectiveness: The support section includes family members, friends, teachers, community members, government, who provide physical or emotional support etc., including nurturing, looking after the child at home or assisting with school routines. The optimism from those around them played an enriching part in their child’s future development.

Table 3. Types of Support Systems and its effectiveness Accessed by Parents

Support System	Number of Parents Accessing	Effectiveness (Rated 1 not very effective - 5 to very effective)	Description
Family Support	24	80% (effective)	Family members helped out financially and emotionally.
School Resources (Special Educators, Therapists)	15	50% (satisfactory)	Resources were frequently scarce, and quality differed by school.
Community Support Groups	22	73% (effective)	shared experiences and offered moral support.
Government Assistance Programs	12	40% (not effective)	complicated application procedures and restricted accessibility.

Family support was the most frequently accessed system, with 24 parents reporting it as a vital source of emotional and nurturing assistance, giving it high effectiveness rating of 80%. One respondent said, “Without my mother and siblings, I do not know how I would survive this journey”. School resources, such as special educators and therapists, were available to 15 parents, though rated lower in effectiveness 50% due to perceived limitations in quality and accessibility. “The school tries, but their special educator only visits twice a week” complained a parent. An effective rate of 73% was found by community support groups with 22 parents, and one parent even went so far as to say, “Meeting other parents who understand

us changed everything, we feel so alone no more”. While another parent said in response to negative perception, “ I am worried that my child with disability may be exposed to violence from community members”. Besides this, 12 parents rely on government assistance programs and were less frequently accessed and rated lowest effective at 40% . State financial aid is crucial in helping caretakers fulfil their child's needs, since it provides crucial financial support to parents with CWSN. In this regard, one parent said, “It took us six months to get response to our application from the state authority”.

3. Impact and Influence on Child Development: Parents’ support can shape both academic and emotional growth, helping children feel more confident and do better in school. A broad base of parents shared that even simple actions like helping with school-like tasks at home or staying engaged in their child’s learning made a big difference. These efforts not only supported classroom learning but also helped their children connect better with the world around them, building skills and self-belief step by step.

Table 4.

Impact on Development	Improved Academic Performance	Improved Social Skills	Increased Confidence	Description
Parents reporting improvement	22	19	20	Although the rate of growth varied, parents reported favourable gains.
Percentage (%)	73%	63%	67%	Positive effects were connected with participation in school activities.

Children' social and academic growth were both boosted by their parents' active participation. Majority of the parents declared even though the difficulties, they remain committed to their child, being available and sensitive to the emotional needs. Not only that, but having high expectations for the child, appreciating it, and praising its strengths. The majority of parents questioned (73%) felt that their children's academic performance has improved. “He couldn’t even hold a pencil last year, now he writes small words: I have always sat beside my child to help him learn movements” said one proud parent whose child is suffering from cerebral palsy. Sustained parental involvement was ascribed by 63% to improved social skills. “My daughter used to hide when people visited; Now, she greets them and join in” explained another whose child has down syndrome. 67% observed an increase in their child’s confidence, with some describing it as “transformation in self-esteem” while others described specific “academic gains”, such as increased engagement in school activities and enhanced learning outcomes, as well as “social improvements”, including more comfort in group settings and communication skills. “He now raises his hand in class, that never happened before” shared a mother whose child has developmental verbal dyspraxia.

DISCUSSION

In this study, most parents emphasized how crucial their role is in guiding and educating their children at home. Many of them expressed opportunities to understand how their participation affects their child's development. Some mothers also stepped out to help

informally outside the classroom, which usually highlight a difference in the professional aid system provided by teachers and carers. The main concerns of the parents are feeling emotionally dry and financially spread. Therapy session and learning content comes at high cost, making it difficult for families to continuously support the need of their children. At top of it, social stigma often combines its emotional burden, which indicates the need for mental health services and inclusive programs that help families feel less alone. This study aligns with earlier research like *Muthukaruppanet al., (2020)*, who emphasized the value of family and community-based services for families, raising children with development challenges. *Pacheco-Moleroet al.,(2024)* also found that joining the family may reduce the load on the parents, especially when it comes to careful tasks. Given the support of the school, the reactions were mixed. Some parents found the support of the school helpful, while others said it was not primarily effective as schools lacked the necessary resources. However, parents appreciated community-based support groups, which gave them the opportunity to share their experiences and provide emotional support to each other. These groups also helped to have a strong relationship between parents. Additionally, research by *Guret al., (2023)* found that when parents are actively engaged in their child's education, it often leads to better educational and social consequences. Overall, it suggest that creating a strong, supportive environment around families can lead to a meaningful difference.

LIMITATIONS

The present study is delimited to selected parents of disability from Arunodaya Special Children School, in Mysore District. In the study, it is found that parents with disabilities may face limitations related to physical, intellectual, or social aspects of parenting, impacting their ability to provide care, manage resources, and access support services. These limitations can stem from disability itself, societal attitudes, and inadequate support systems.

1. Physical Limitation

Physical exertion: Parents with physical disabilities may struggle with tasks requiring lifting, carrying, or prolonged standing or walking, which are common in childcare.

Fatigue and pain: Caregiving responsibilities can exacerbate physical limits, leading to fatigue, musculoskeletal pain, and other health issues.

Accessibility challenges: Homes, public spaces, and transportation may not be adequately accessible, hindering the ability to care for children.

2. Intellectual Limitation

Cognitive challenges: Parents with intellectual disabilities may face difficulties with planning, problem-solving, and decision-making related to childcare.

Communication barriers: Some parents may have difficulty communicating effectively with their children or with service providers.

Financial management: Managing finances, budgeting, and accessing financial assistance can be challenging.

3. Social and Systematic Limitation

Societal stigma and discrimination: Negative attitudes and stereotypes about parents with disabilities can lead to devaluation of their parenting abilities and limited access to support.

Lack of accessible services: Many services, including healthcare, education, and childcare, may not be designed to accommodate the needs of parents with disabilities.

Isolation and lack of support networks: Parents with disabilities may experience isolation and lack the support networks available to other parents.

Impact on family relationships: Having parent with a disability can affect family dynamics and the division of caregiving responsibilities.

Legal barriers: In some cases, legal frameworks may restrict the rights of parents with disabilities, such as guardianship.

CONCLUSION

As their children's first and most important teachers, parents are essential in assisting their learning through play and observation. Their participation is crucial to a child's intellectual achievement. Many parents find it difficult to fully participate due to problems such as social shame, financial difficulties, and a lack of appropriate assistance. Learning results may be greatly enhanced by several types of engagement, such as maintaining open lines of contact with instructors, actively participating in school events, and seeking assistance with homework. However, staying active is more challenging for parents of disabled children due to the complexity of the challenges they confront.

In order to overcome these hurdles, one must first identify what is standing in the way of complete parental participation. Together, these families' specific needs may be met by schools and other support organizations in the form of inclusive, easily accessible, and highly successful support systems. As part of this effort, we must enhance special education programs and better assist parents in making informed decisions about available resources. By doing so, children with disabilities can be provided with better learning opportunities.

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