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# The Impact of Caring for Children with Special Needs on Maternal Subjective Well-being: A Bibliometric Analysis

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## ABSTRACT

**Objective:** The literature on Maternal Subjective Well-being (MSW) has grown rapidly over the past two decades. MSW is a multidimensional construct encompassing subjective evaluations of mothers' lives, including overall life satisfaction, happiness, and emotional well-being. **Method:** A systematic literature review was conducted using PubMed, Scopus, and Google Scholar databases to identify English-language articles published between 2013 and 2023 using the keywords mother, subjective well-being, and special needs children, yielding 2,200 records, of which 8 met the inclusion criteria and were subsequently analyzed using the PRISMA framework and thematic synthesis approach. **Results:** The review identified eight eligible studies and found that maternal subjective well-being is influenced by both internal factors (self-efficacy, hope, positive perceptions, and resilience) and external factors (social support, family functioning, and partner relationships). The findings highlight that strengthening psychological resources and social support systems may play a key role in improving the well-being of mothers caring for children with special needs. **Novelty:** The review highlights resilience as a key protective factor that can mitigate the negative effects of parenting stress on maternal subjective well-being and quality of life among mothers of children with disabilities. A notable research gap is the limited understanding of how protective factors, particularly resilience and benefit finding, can be developed and activated to support positive maternal adaptation to caregiving demands.

## INTRODUCTION

The number of children with special needs is on the rise, and the majority of them live with their families. Family members, especially mothers, are the primary caregivers for these children. It is estimated that 80% of children with special needs are cared for by their mothers (Brekke & Alecu, 2023). The responsibility of caring for children with special needs is both challenging and rewarding. Mothers of these children are at an increased risk of experiencing mental health issues such as anxiety and depression. In addition, they may experience physical health issues such as headaches, back pain, and fatigue. Caring for children with special needs may also have a negative impact on mothers' subjective well-being.

Subjective well-being is a broad concept that encompasses a person's overall assessment of their life and their emotional experiences. It is commonly assessed using life satisfaction, happiness, and positive and negative affect. Subjective well-being is a key component of a good quality of life. It is positively associated with better physical and mental health and negatively associated with health-risk behaviors. Despite the importance of maternal subjective well-being, there is a lack of research exploring the impact of caring for children with special needs on maternal subjective well-being. This

8 literature review aimed to identify and synthesize the existing research on the impact of caring for children with special needs on maternal subjective well-being. The review was guided by the following research questions: What is known about the impact of caring for children with special needs on maternal subjective well-being? What factors are associated with maternal subjective well-being? What strategies are used to promote maternal subjective well-being? (Papadopoulos, 2021).

9  
2 The World Health Organization (WHO) defines children with special needs as those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairments that, together with various barriers, may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others. This definition includes children with disabilities, chronic illnesses, and those who are at risk of developmental delays. Caring for children with special needs is a challenging task for parents, especially for mothers. Studies have shown that mothers of children with special needs experience more stress than mothers of typically developing children. They have poorer mental health and lower subjective well-being (SWB), and they are less satisfied with their lives than mothers of typically developing children. SWB is defined as a cognitive and affective evaluation of one's life. The cognitive evaluation refers to overall life satisfaction, whereas the affective evaluation refers to the balance between positive and negative feelings.

The increasing number of children with special needs across countries has led to a growing need for long-term care in the family setting, with approximately 80% of primary caregiving responsibilities falling on mothers (Kudo, 2024; Vo & Fong, 2025). Several studies have shown that mothers caring for children with special needs experience higher levels of stress, anxiety, and depression than mothers of typically developing children (Andrioni et al., 2022; Findling et al., 2023). In addition to facing greater physical and emotional demands, they often experience limited time for social, work, and recreational activities, which can lead to decreased subjective well-being (SWB) and quality of life. However, factors that contribute to maintaining or improving maternal subjective well-being, such as resilience, social support, and positive perceptions of caregiving, remain poorly understood (Bi et al., 2022; Guo & Li, 2025; Yayla et al., 2026). This condition indicates the need for more in-depth studies to identify factors that influence maternal subjective well-being as a basis for developing effective interventions for families with children with special needs.

The maternal subjective well-being of mothers of children with disabilities is a multifaceted construct that encompasses their psychological, emotional, and social well-being (Ayoola et al., 2025; Dempsey et al., 2016; Kachroo et al., 2023). The well-being of mothers of children with disabilities is a topic of growing interest in the research literature, as the number of children with disabilities is increasing (WHO, 2018). The well-being of mothers of children with disabilities is also a topic of importance in the field of nursing, as mothers of children with disabilities are a vulnerable population who experience high levels of distress (Martinez-Marti et al., 2010). The purpose of this