



EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND LIFE SATISFACTION AMONG PARENTS OF CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS: A CORRELATIONAL STUDY

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Abstract

Parents of children with special needs often experience substantial emotional, social, and caregiving demands that can affect their psychological well-being and overall life satisfaction. Emotional intelligence has been recognized as an important psychological construct that facilitates the perception, understanding, regulation, and effective utilization of emotions in daily life. The present study investigated the relationship between emotional intelligence and life satisfaction among parents of special children. A quantitative correlational research design was employed. The sample comprised 100 parents of special children, including 50 fathers and 50 mothers, selected from public and private special education institutions in Faisalabad, Pakistan, through purposive sampling. Data were collected using the Emotional Intelligence Scale and the Life Satisfaction Scale. Pearson product-moment correlation analysis was performed to examine the association between the study variables. The findings revealed a weak positive relationship between emotional intelligence and life satisfaction; however, the relationship was not statistically significant ($r = .18, p > .05$). These results suggest that although parents with higher emotional intelligence may demonstrate a tendency toward greater life satisfaction, emotional intelligence alone does not appear to be a significant factor influencing life satisfaction in this population. The findings further indicate that parental life satisfaction may be shaped by a combination of psychological, social, economic, and environmental factors. The study contributes to the existing literature on the psychological well-being of parents of special children and underscores the importance of comprehensive support systems and interventions aimed at enhancing parental adjustment and quality of life.

Keywords: *Caregiving Challenges, Emotional Intelligence, Life Satisfaction, Parental Adjustment, Parents of Special Children, Psychological Well-Being, Special Needs.*

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1. Introduction

Parents are central to the healthy development and overall well-being of their children. However, raising a child with special needs often presents unique challenges that extend beyond typical parenting responsibilities. Children with intellectual disabilities, developmental disorders, sensory impairments, and other exceptional conditions frequently require continuous care, specialized educational services, and extensive parental involvement. Consequently, parents may encounter increased emotional demands, caregiving stress, financial pressures, and social challenges that can affect their psychological functioning and quality of life (Girolametto & Tannock, 1994; Ravindranadan & Raju, 2008).

Life satisfaction represents a key dimension of subjective well-being and refers to an individual's overall cognitive assessment of the quality and circumstances of their life (Diener, 1984). It reflects the extent to which people perceive their lives as fulfilling, meaningful, and consistent with their personal goals and expectations (Shin & Johnson, 1978). Higher levels of life satisfaction have been associated with positive mental health outcomes, enhanced psychological adjustment, and greater resilience in the face of adversity (Diener & Suh, 1997; Gilman & Huebner, 2006). Among parents of special children, life satisfaction may be shaped by multiple factors, including caregiving responsibilities, family support, social relationships, and individual coping resources (Huebner et al., 2005; Seligson et al., 2003).

One psychological factor that has gained considerable attention in contemporary research is emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence encompasses the capacity to recognize, understand, regulate, and effectively utilize emotions in oneself and others (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). Individuals possessing higher levels of emotional intelligence are generally more capable of managing emotional experiences, maintaining healthy interpersonal relationships, resolving problems effectively, and adapting to stressful situations (Goleman, 1995, 1998). These competencies may be particularly valuable for parents of special children, who often navigate complex emotional and practical challenges in their daily lives.

Previous literature has consistently highlighted the beneficial role of emotional intelligence in promoting psychological well-being and adaptive functioning. Individuals with strong emotional competencies tend to demonstrate greater emotional resilience, effective coping strategies, and improved mental health outcomes (Luke et al., 2008). Such abilities may assist parents in managing the demands associated with caring for a child with special needs and contribute to a more positive evaluation of their lives. Research has further suggested that emotional intelligence is positively associated with psychological well-being, self-esteem, and life satisfaction (Cohn et al., 2009; Kuppens et al., 2008). Despite the growing body of research on emotional intelligence and well-being, empirical evidence examining its association with life satisfaction among parents of special children remains limited, particularly within the Pakistani context. Moreover, cultural values, family structures, and socioeconomic conditions may influence how emotional intelligence relates to life satisfaction in this population.

Investigating the relationship between emotional intelligence and life satisfaction among parents of special children is important for both theoretical advancement and practical application. A better understanding of this relationship may provide valuable insights into the psychological factors associated with parental well-being and adjustment. Furthermore, the findings may assist psychologists, counselors, educators, and policymakers in developing evidence-based interventions and support programs aimed at enhancing the quality of life and psychological health of families raising children with special needs.

1.1. Research Gap

Although the constructs of emotional intelligence and life satisfaction have been extensively examined across diverse populations, limited empirical attention has been directed toward understanding these variables among parents of special children. Existing literature concerning parents of children with special needs has predominantly focused on adverse psychological outcomes, including parental stress, caregiver burden, anxiety, depression, and coping difficulties. While such investigations have contributed significantly to understanding the challenges faced by these parents, comparatively fewer studies have explored positive psychological resources that may enhance their well-being and overall quality of life.

Furthermore, the available research on emotional intelligence and life satisfaction has largely been conducted in Western societies, where cultural values, family dynamics, social support systems, and socioeconomic conditions differ considerably from those found in developing countries. Consequently, the generalizability of findings derived from Western populations to non-Western contexts remains uncertain. Within Pakistan, research examining the psychological well-being of parents of special children remains

relatively limited, particularly studies investigating the role of positive psychological factors such as emotional intelligence in shaping life satisfaction.

In addition, the relationship between emotional intelligence and life satisfaction may be influenced by contextual factors, including cultural expectations, family structures, economic resources, and the availability of social support. These factors may affect how parents perceive and manage the challenges associated with raising a child with special needs. Therefore, further empirical investigation is needed to determine whether findings reported in international literature are applicable within the Pakistani cultural context.

To address this gap in the literature, the present study examines the relationship between emotional intelligence and life satisfaction among parents of special children in Faisalabad, Pakistan. By focusing on a population that has received limited scholarly attention, the study seeks to contribute to the existing body of knowledge on parental well-being and provide insights that may inform the development of culturally relevant psychological interventions and support services for families of children with special needs.

1.2. Objectives of the Study

The present study was designed to achieve the following objective:

1. To examine the relationship between emotional intelligence and life satisfaction among parents of special children.

1.3. Scope of the Study

The study focused on parents of special children enrolled in selected public and private special education institutions in Faisalabad, Pakistan. The research specifically examined emotional intelligence and life satisfaction as key psychological variables associated with parental well-being. The findings of the study contribute to the growing body of literature on positive psychological functioning among parents of special children and provide insights that may be useful for mental health professionals, educators, counselors, and policymakers. The study may also serve as a foundation for future research investigating additional factors influencing the psychological adjustment and well-being of parents raising children with special needs.

2. Methodology

2.1. Participants and Sampling

The present study employed a quantitative correlational research design to investigate the relationship between emotional intelligence and life satisfaction among parents of special children. The sample consisted of **100 parents of special children**, including **50 fathers and 50 mothers**, recruited from selected public and private special education institutions in Faisalabad, Pakistan. Participants were selected using a **purposive sampling technique**, as they met the inclusion criteria of being parents of children enrolled in special education institutions.

The inclusion of both mothers and fathers provided a balanced representation of parental experiences related to raising a child with special needs. Participants varied in terms of demographic characteristics, including age, educational background, and socioeconomic status, thereby enhancing the representativeness of the sample within the target population.

2.2. Procedure

Prior to data collection, formal permission was obtained from the administrations of the selected public and private special education institutions. The purpose and objectives of the study were explained to the relevant authorities, and approval was secured to approach potential participants.

Parents who met the inclusion criteria were contacted and informed about the nature and purpose of the study. They were assured that their participation was entirely voluntary and that the information collected would remain confidential and be used solely for academic and research purposes. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before the administration of the research instruments.

Data were collected through self-report questionnaires administered individually to the participants. Clear instructions regarding the completion of the questionnaires were provided, and participants were encouraged to respond honestly and accurately. The researcher remained available throughout the data collection process to address any questions or concerns. Upon completion of the questionnaires, participants were thanked for their cooperation and valuable contribution to the study.

2.3. Measures

2.3.1 Emotional Intelligence Scale

Emotional intelligence was assessed using the **Emotional Intelligence Scale (EIS)** developed by Schutte et al. (1998) and adapted into Urdu by Malik (2013). The scale measures an individual's ability to perceive, understand, regulate, and effectively utilize emotions in daily life. It assesses various dimensions of emotional functioning, including emotional awareness, emotional regulation, empathy, and interpersonal competence. Higher scores on the scale indicate greater emotional intelligence. The Urdu adaptation has demonstrated satisfactory psychometric properties and has been widely used in Pakistani research settings.

2.3.2 Life Satisfaction Scale

Life satisfaction was measured using the **Life Satisfaction Scale** developed by Mahmood (2013). The scale consists of 21 items designed to assess an individual's overall evaluation of life and subjective well-being. Participants respond to each item on a five-point Likert-type scale, with higher scores reflecting greater satisfaction with life. The instrument has been used in previous studies conducted in Pakistan and has demonstrated acceptable validity and reliability.

2.4. Reliability

Reliability refers to the degree to which an instrument consistently measures a psychological construct across different occasions and populations. The instruments used in the present study demonstrated satisfactory psychometric properties and were considered appropriate for assessing the study variables.

The **Emotional Intelligence Scale (EIS)** exhibited strong internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of **.87**. In addition, the scale demonstrated satisfactory temporal stability, with a two-week test–retest reliability coefficient of **.78**. These findings indicate that the instrument is a reliable measure of emotional intelligence and suitable for use within the Pakistani cultural context.

The **Life Satisfaction Scale** has previously demonstrated acceptable reliability and validity among Pakistani populations. The scale was considered appropriate for assessing participants' perceptions of life satisfaction and subjective well-being.

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3. Results

This chapter presents the statistical findings of the study examining the relationship between emotional intelligence and life satisfaction among parents of special children. Data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS Version 20). Descriptive statistics were computed to summarize participants' demographic characteristics, and Pearson product–moment correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between emotional intelligence and life satisfaction.

3.1. Demographic Characteristics of Participants

The study sample consisted of 100 parents of special children recruited from public and private special education institutions in Faisalabad, Pakistan. Of the total participants, 50 (50%) were fathers and 50 (50%) were mothers. Furthermore, 60% of participants belonged to joint family systems, whereas 40% belonged to nuclear family systems. Regarding residence, 62% of participants resided in urban areas and 38% in rural areas. Monthly income levels varied across participants, with 48% reporting an income between PKR 5,000 and 20,000, 18% reporting an income between PKR 20,000 and 35,000, and 34% reporting an income between PKR 35,000 and 50,000.

Table 3.1: Demographic Characteristics of Parents of Special Children (N = 100)

Characteristic	f	%
Gender		
Male	50	50.0
Female	50	50.0

Family Type		
Joint Family	60	60.0
Nuclear Family	40	40.0
Residence		
Rural	38	38.0
Urban	62	62.0
Monthly Income (PKR)		
5,000–20,000	48	48.0
20,000–35,000	18	18.0
35,000–50,000	34	34.0

3.2. Relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Life Satisfaction

To examine the relationship between emotional intelligence and life satisfaction among parents of special children, Pearson product–moment correlation analysis was performed.

Table 3.2: Correlation between Emotional Intelligence and Life Satisfaction Among Parents of Special Children (N = 100)

Variable	1	2
1. Emotional Intelligence	—	.18
2. Life Satisfaction	.18	—

Note. r = Pearson correlation coefficient. Correlation was not statistically significant ($p > .05$).

The results of the Pearson product–moment correlation analysis indicated a positive relationship between emotional intelligence and life satisfaction ($r = .18$). However, the relationship was not statistically significant ($p > .05$). These findings suggest that parents who reported higher levels of emotional intelligence tended to report slightly higher levels of life satisfaction; nevertheless, the magnitude of the relationship was weak and insufficient to reach statistical significance. Therefore, the study hypothesis proposing a significant positive relationship between emotional intelligence and life satisfaction was not supported.

3.3. Gender Differences in Life Satisfaction

Although the primary objective of the study was to examine the relationship between emotional intelligence and life satisfaction, an independent-samples t-test was conducted to assess differences in life satisfaction between male and female parents.

Table 3.3: Comparison of Male and Female Parents on Life Satisfaction

Variable	Female (n = 50) M (SD)	Male (n = 50) M (SD)	t(98)	p
Life Satisfaction	61.06 (11.53)	56.28 (12.97)	1.94	.05

Note. Higher scores indicate greater life satisfaction.

The results revealed a statistically significant gender difference in life satisfaction. Female parents reported higher levels of life satisfaction ($M = 61.06$, $SD = 11.53$) than male parents ($M = 56.28$, $SD = 12.97$). These findings suggest that mothers of special children experienced relatively greater life satisfaction compared to fathers within the present sample.

3.4. Summary of Findings

The results of the study demonstrated that emotional intelligence was positively associated with life satisfaction among parents of special children; however, the relationship was not statistically significant. Consequently, the hypothesis proposing a significant positive relationship between emotional intelligence and life satisfaction was not supported. Additionally, female parents reported significantly higher levels of life satisfaction than male parents. Overall, the findings suggest that emotional intelligence alone may not be a strong determinant of life satisfaction among parents of special children, and that other psychological, social, and environmental factors may contribute to their overall well-being.

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The satisfactory reliability of the selected instruments supported their use in examining the relationship between emotional intelligence and life satisfaction among parents of special children.

3.5. Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using the **Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS)**. Descriptive statistics were computed to summarize participant characteristics and study variables. Pearson product-moment correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between emotional intelligence and life satisfaction among parents of special children. Statistical significance was evaluated at the **.05 level**.

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4. Discussion

The present study examined the relationship between emotional intelligence and life satisfaction among parents of special children. The findings revealed a positive but non-significant relationship between emotional intelligence and life satisfaction ($r = .18$, $p > .05$). Although parents with higher levels of emotional intelligence tended to report greater life satisfaction, the relationship was weak and did not reach statistical significance. Therefore, the study hypothesis proposing a significant positive relationship between emotional intelligence and life satisfaction was not supported.

The positive direction of the relationship is consistent with the theoretical understanding of emotional intelligence as an important psychological resource that promotes adaptive functioning and emotional well-being. Emotional intelligence enables individuals to recognize, understand, regulate, and effectively manage emotions, which may facilitate adjustment to stressful life circumstances. Parents of special children often encounter emotional, financial, and social challenges associated with caregiving responsibilities. Consequently, emotionally intelligent parents may be better equipped to cope with these challenges and maintain a positive outlook toward life.

The findings of the present study are partially consistent with previous research indicating that emotional intelligence contributes positively to subjective well-being and life satisfaction. For example, Schutte et al. (2002) reported that individuals with higher emotional intelligence tend to experience greater psychological well-being and satisfaction with life. Similarly, Extremera and Fernández-Berrocal (2005) found that emotional intelligence was positively associated with life satisfaction and mental health outcomes. These studies suggest that emotional competencies play a significant role in promoting positive psychological functioning and overall well-being.

However, unlike many previous studies that reported significant positive associations between emotional intelligence and life satisfaction, the relationship observed in the present study was not statistically significant. This discrepancy may be attributed to several factors. First, parents of special children face unique caregiving demands that may influence their life satisfaction beyond emotional intelligence alone. Factors such as financial strain, caregiving burden, severity of the child's disability, availability of social support, family functioning, and access to healthcare services may have a stronger influence on life satisfaction than emotional intelligence.

Second, cultural and socioeconomic factors may have contributed to the findings. In Pakistani society, parents of special children often experience social stigma, limited institutional support, and increased caregiving responsibilities. Such challenges may affect life satisfaction regardless of an individual's emotional competencies. Consequently, emotional intelligence alone may not be sufficient to overcome the broader environmental and social stressors faced by these parents.

Another possible explanation for the non-significant relationship is that life satisfaction is a multidimensional construct influenced by various personal, social, economic, and psychological factors. While emotional intelligence may contribute to effective emotional regulation and coping, other variables such as social support, marital satisfaction, resilience, financial stability, and psychological adjustment may play a more substantial role in determining overall life satisfaction among parents of special children.

The findings of the present study highlight the importance of adopting a comprehensive approach when addressing the psychological well-being of parents of

special children. Interventions focusing solely on emotional intelligence may not be sufficient to enhance life satisfaction. Instead, support programs should incorporate emotional skills training alongside counseling services, family support initiatives, stress management strategies, and community-based resources designed to reduce caregiving burden and improve quality of life.

Despite the absence of a statistically significant relationship, the positive association observed between emotional intelligence and life satisfaction suggests that emotional intelligence remains a potentially beneficial psychological resource. Future research should investigate additional factors that may mediate or moderate this relationship and should utilize larger and more diverse samples to gain a more comprehensive understanding of parental well-being among families of special children.

Overall, the findings contribute to the existing literature by providing empirical evidence regarding the relationship between emotional intelligence and life satisfaction among parents of special children in Pakistan. The study emphasizes the complex nature of life satisfaction and highlights the need for multidimensional interventions aimed at supporting the psychological well-being of parents raising children with special needs.

5. Conclusion

The present study examined the relationship between emotional intelligence and life satisfaction among parents of special children. Parents of children with special needs often encounter various emotional, social, and practical challenges that may influence their psychological well-being and overall quality of life. Therefore, understanding factors associated with life satisfaction is essential for promoting positive adjustment and well-being among this population.

The findings of the study revealed a positive but non-significant relationship between emotional intelligence and life satisfaction among parents of special children. Although parents with higher emotional intelligence tended to report slightly greater life satisfaction, the association was not statistically significant. Consequently, the study hypothesis proposing a significant positive relationship between emotional intelligence and life satisfaction was not supported. These findings suggest that emotional intelligence alone may not be a strong determinant of life satisfaction among parents of special children.

The results indicate that life satisfaction is likely influenced by multiple interacting factors beyond emotional intelligence. Variables such as social support, family functioning, financial stability, caregiving burden, access to resources, and cultural influences may play a more substantial role in shaping parents' overall satisfaction with life. Therefore, parental well-being should be understood within a broader psychosocial framework rather than being attributed solely to individual emotional competencies.

5.1. Implications of the Study

The present study contributes to the growing body of literature on the psychological well-being of parents of special children, particularly within the Pakistani context. The findings highlight the importance of addressing the diverse challenges faced by these parents through comprehensive support systems.

Mental health professionals, counselors, special education practitioners, and policymakers may utilize the findings to develop interventions aimed at enhancing parental well-being. Programs focusing on emotional awareness, stress management, coping skills, and psychological resilience may be beneficial. Additionally, increasing access to social support services, family counseling, and community-based resources may help improve the overall quality of life of parents caring for children with special needs.

The study also provides a foundation for future research exploring psychological strengths and protective factors that contribute to parental adjustment and life satisfaction.

5.2. Limitations of the Study

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings of the present study.

1. The study was conducted on a relatively small sample of parents from selected public and private special education institutions in Faisalabad, which may limit the generalizability of the findings.
2. The use of purposive sampling may have reduced the representativeness of the sample and restricted the application of findings to broader populations.
3. Data were collected through self-report measures, which may be subject to social desirability bias and response inaccuracies.
4. The study employed a cross-sectional research design, making it difficult to establish causal relationships between emotional intelligence and life satisfaction.
5. The investigation focused on only two psychological variables, whereas numerous social, economic, family-related, and environmental factors may also influence life satisfaction among parents of special children.

6. Recommendations for Future Research

Based on the findings and limitations of the present study, the following recommendations are proposed for future research:

1. Future studies should include larger and more diverse samples drawn from different cities and regions of Pakistan to enhance the generalizability of findings.
2. Researchers should examine additional variables such as social support, resilience, coping strategies, parenting stress, caregiver burden, marital satisfaction, and psychological adjustment to gain a more comprehensive understanding of factors affecting life satisfaction.

3. Longitudinal research designs should be employed to examine changes in emotional intelligence and life satisfaction over time and to explore potential causal relationships.
4. Comparative studies may be conducted among parents of children with different types of disabilities to identify variations in psychological experiences and well-being.
5. Future research should investigate potential mediators and moderators, such as social support and resilience, that may influence the relationship between emotional intelligence and life satisfaction.
6. Intervention-based studies may be conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of emotional intelligence training programs, counseling services, and support groups in improving the psychological well-being and life satisfaction of parents of special children.

In conclusion, the present study provides valuable insights into the relationship between emotional intelligence and life satisfaction among parents of special children. Although emotional intelligence was not found to be significantly associated with life satisfaction, the findings emphasize the complex and multidimensional nature of parental well-being and underscore the need for comprehensive psychological and social support for families raising children with special needs.

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