

Examining the Coping Strategies of Parents of Children with Neurodevelopmental Disorders amidst Negative Attitudes of Society

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Neurodevelopmental disabilities are any physical or mental conditions that may limit a child's capacity to develop cognitively, physically, and emotionally in comparison to other children. Raising a child with a neurodevelopmental disorder can be challenging, but with effective coping mechanisms, parents can maintain their well-being and overcome the difficulties. This study focuses on the coping strategies of parents of children with neurodevelopmental disorders amidst the negative attitudes of society in Sri Lanka. For this purpose, the current study used semi-structured interviews to gather qualitative data from ten parents of children with neurodevelopmental disorders using the snowball sampling method. The results revealed that parents faced negative societal attitudes and used various coping strategies. Acceptance was powerful in managing a parent's life challenges and stressors. Social support helped parents handle stress and emotions significantly, providing resources and support. In addition, spiritual support was a successful coping method, as spiritual beliefs and practices could provide comfort, strength, and a sense of purpose during tough times. However, a small number of parents used maladaptive coping strategies, claiming that they helped with temporary relief and distraction from painful situations. Gender differences in coping methods were observed. Women employed religious engagement and openness, while men preferred to hide emotions and choose harmful coping tactics such as alcohol use. In conclusion, parents believed that having a realistic perspective on their child's condition and accepting the circumstances as they were, enabled them to cope. Parents felt free to share their positive and negative emotions and experiences with their social circles. Although spirituality can provide relief for parents raising a child with a neurodevelopmental disorder, it should be viewed as a coping mechanism and not a replacement for the assistance of professionals. The gender difference in coping mechanisms indicated that males tend to resort to maladaptive coping mechanisms than females.

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