



THE MARITAL CHALLENGES OF RAISING A CHILD WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

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Abstract

Marriages are a source of joy and fulfillment for many people; however, to some, they can be challenging. Parents of children with special needs may experience a more demanding situation than those who have normal children. However, having a special child does not need to be a cause for a dysfunctional marriage. Children with different needs are as much a blessing as other children, and their parents can have a less difficult time caring for them when they have access to greater support, assets and resources. Parents of teens with special needs are required to make greater changes to ensure that their teens lead regular lives. Although the parents of young people face numerous challenges in raising them, the trouble is normally overlooked. Members of society ignore the burden of parents attending to children with special needs who have to stretch beyond their limits to cater to the needs of such young people (Sobsey, 2004). This study focuses on the challenges that accompany raising children with unique needs, with the purpose of setting up better support and coping techniques for parents. With better coping strategies, parents can regulate their state of affairs and experience a happier marriage.

This study is testing two hypotheses. The first is that raising a child with special needs affects the bonds between the mother and father. Secondly, the challenges related to raising a child with special needs have an effect on the other children. A descriptive research was used to facilitate statistics collection and planning. According to the study findings, the challenges faced by parents lead to an amplification of stressors that strain the bond between them. However, the existence of challenges does not necessarily weaken the bond between partners; in some cases, the bond grows stronger (Doron & Sharabany, 2013).

Keywords: Marriage, Parents, Children, Special Needs.

1. Introduction

Marital relationships are a source of support, a haven of safety from life's pressures and stresses, when they work well. However, marital relationships sometimes face challenges, some of which are outside the couple's jurisdiction. Usually, children are regarded as a great blessing to a married couple and the inability to have children can be devastating. While children with special needs are as great a blessing as normal children, various challenges are also associated with raising a baby with special needs. Parents of youngsters with special needs are required to make greater changes to ensure that their youngsters lead lives as ordinary as possible. Past researchers have continually portrayed the marriages of parents whose child has unique needs as difficult, dysfunctional, and most likely ending in divorce. The challenges associated with raising children who have special needs may cause stress in the marriage, making it challenging for the mother and father to experience their union. However, this does not have to be the case for parents of adolescents with special needs. With greater coping strategies, parents can regulate the scenario and experience a satisfying marriage (Sobsey, 2004).

This paper explores the challenges of raising children with specific needs, with the aim of establishing beneficial coping strategies for the parents.

2. Literature Review

Bangladesh is a developing country that is faced with many challenges which have slowed its progress. Research studies have indicated that the rights of children with disabilities in Bangladesh have been undermined due to the socio-economic demographics of their parents, as well as their caregivers. Many families with children who have special needs, have failed to satisfy their basic needs due to a variety of reasons including lack of governmental and societal support (Ahmed & Kashem, 2015). Children with disabilities actually need significant care and support from their parents in order to grow up healthy and skilled, able to fulfil their future dreams (Rakib, 2016).

2.1. Isolation by Relatives and Community

In some Bangladeshi communities, particularly the Biharis and the Rohingyas, the belief exists that a disability is a curse, as well as a punishment for the parents' sinful behaviours (Sultana, et al. 2018). Biharis and Rohingyas are communities in Bangladesh who have their origin in India. Research conducted by Human Rights Watch in the northern section of the city of Dhaka indicates that the relatives and friends of families who have children with disabilities or special needs tend to isolate them. Many of them do not want to be associated with such families, since they believe such a curse may also affect their family set-up. The studies conducted in the Rohinja and Bihari communities indicate that the isolated families are at risk of developing mental disorders, such as severe depression due to high levels of stress, feelings of neglect, and fear of entering social places (Kamruzzaman, M. 2017). This belief has also affected the welfare of children with special needs in such families, thus leading to poor access to health care services, parental isolation, and lack of education as a result of neglect and isolation. Research studies have indicated that due to limited support and knowledge, many Bangladeshi parents who have children with disabilities tend to keep them at home; in many cases, this is to avoid shame. A case study that was conducted in one of the indigenous communities of Bangladesh found the families of children with disabilities to be isolated from the other community members, thus receiving little or no aid from their neighbours (Sultana, S. et al. 2018).

2.2 Divorce

Human Rights Watch has claimed that 35% of parents who raise children with disabilities do not stay together for more than 10 years. The research study argued that the high level of male chauvinism among many families in the Bangladeshi communities, as well as gender imbalances, may lead to divorce. The male parents are seen to pose superior ability which exclude them from contributing to the disability of the child. When the divorce occurs, the female parent is the victim of the situation since she is believed to possess the genetic traits that contributed to the disabilities in the child. Statistics indicate that female parents are, therefore, chased away from the families and take the children with special needs with them. Therefore, this action may end up exposing such mothers to the challenges of raising their children. These mothers may then suffer from mental challenges, such as depression, while the children with special needs may develop chronic malnutrition (Rakib M.A. 2016).

2.3. Lack of Support

A research study was conducted within the indigenous community at the refugee camps in Dhaka, and it found that parents who raised children with disabilities faced lack of support from family members and society, as well as lack of financial aid from the Bangladeshi government (Ahmed, N. 2015). Children with disabilities actually require extensive support, especially in terms of material support, in order to grow healthy and fulfill their dreams. Due to low social status among these families, their children often experience challenges such as poor nutrition, chronic illnesses, and inadequate healthcare services due to poverty. The research study indicated that lack of support for families raising children with disabilities continue to expose them to the above mentioned challenges. Even though the government of Bangladesh has been claiming to support these children, studies show that very little support

is delivered to the parents raising such children, especially in terms of the equipment and facilities required by children with special needs.

2.4. Parental Socio-Economic Status

High levels of poverty exist among many parents in the communities of Bangladesh. Parents who are raising children with disabilities face even greater financial challenges. This has widely affected the welfare of these children. In Bangladesh, a majority of the children with special needs are cared for by their families at home, due to the parents' financial instability. A study that was conducted within the community of Biharis indicates that 60% of these parents are earning very little from the activities they undertake every day. Therefore, raising children with disabilities in such poor families is a formidable task for the parents and has caused many parents to see their children with disabilities as a burden.

2.5 Lack of Facilities and Equipment

It is a fact that children with disabilities need effective care, especially in terms of facilities and equipment, such as wheelchairs, to make their lives easier and healthier. Most of these items are very expensive to acquire, thus making them impossible for the parents who come from poor communities, such as the Bihari (Rakib M.A. 2016). According to Maloni et al. rehabilitation centers are scarce or nonexistent in some parts of Bangladesh. This means that parents tend to stay at home with their children, particularly with those who have intellectual disorders. Many such parents have insufficient skills and knowledge to handle these intellectually disabled children. This situation poses numerous challenges to parents of such children (Sultana et al. 2018).

3. Case Studies

3.1. Analysis Regarding Disabled Children in Bangladesh

Since Bangladesh is among the countries that ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (Rakib, 2016), a case study was commissioned by UNICEF to research the challenges associated with parents who raise children with disabilities in different parts of Bangladesh. The study also included input on possible solutions. This analysis was grounded in the conviction that all children should be valued equally, regardless of their physical, social, and psychological status. The case study was conducted with the aim of identifying whether parents and their children with disabilities had been impacted by the program currently offered, as well as of making the lives of disabled children more visible, thus validating their career dreams.

The results of the case study indicated that in Bangladesh out of more than 1.6 million disabled children only 4% of the students had access to education nationally. This shows that many disabled children have been marginalized as far as education is concerned, due to high levels of poverty. Despite the attempt of the Bangladeshi government to introduce strategies to ensure effective learning for children with disabilities, this study claims that many parents are unaware of this program, and instead tend to keep these children at home, hence limiting their access to acquiring skills and knowledge (Kamruzzaman, 2017).

3.2. A Study on Challenges Faced by Parents Who Raise Children with Autism in City of Dhaka, Bangladesh.

The purpose of this second case study, undertaken in the city of Dhaka, was to examine the challenges faced by parents raising children diagnosed with autism, which is a condition that is characterised by challenges in social interactions, communication and repetitive behaviours. The interviewed mothers reported various developmental issues among their children, such as language delay, poor eye contact, and fear of social interactions (Ahmed, 2015). The study indicated that the prevalence of the condition was increasing rapidly among children. Results noted that educating, as well as caring for children with autism is somewhat challenging for families, especially in Bangladesh where the poverty level is high. The study estimates that 40% of the children diagnosed with autism in Dhaka city are believed to have limited access to learning, as well as numerous barriers to treatment. The

mothers also reported a number of stressors; for example, they experienced challenges in finding appropriate educational settings for their children, as well as in coping with the financial burden of catering for the needs of such children.

3.3. A Case Study on Children with Disabilities in Bangladesh

The main aim of this third case study was to explore the situations of parents who raised disabled children in various parts of Bangladesh. This study was conducted to highlight the socio-cultural issues that limited their access to education and their inclusion. The research study found that parents with special needs children were neglected and isolated by other people in the society (Rakib, 2017).

3.4. Family Setting and Challenges

Over the past few years, a great increase has been seen in the number of divorces in Bangladesh. This trend has been linked to changing social and marital settings. Today, nearly half of the marriages end in divorce, which attracts attention to the challenges that affect marriage as a whole. Among the primary elements that have contributed to the increase in broken marriages are disputes about the allocation of energy or control, economic challenges, heightened tiers of immorality and pursuit of freedom, in particular amongst skilled and educated women. In addition, the ease of dissolving marriages and the breakdown of social norms that have held marriage together have additionally contributed to the increased numbers of divorces. Parents of youths with disabilities also face these challenges, in addition to the larger venture of bringing up a child who requires extra attention, medical care and love. Such households have also been shown to face greater financial challenges than regular families of equal financial capacity (Algood et al, 2013). As a result, the parents of young people with special needs are at greater risk of experiencing challenges in their marriage than those with normal children.

3.5. Marital Stability and Pride

Once a couple is married, society, family and friends all have high expectations that the couple will raise children. Traditionally, children have been an important uniting factor, enabling partners to overcome obstacles in their marriages. According to Sobsey (2004), certain components associated with raising children who have distinct needs result in excessive marital discord, dissatisfaction and eventual separation or divorce. However, the same elements used to measure functionality or dysfunctionality in regular marriages are also used to define marriages that include children with special needs. While most parents of children with unique needs remain married, a small but statistically sizeable group choose divorce. Although there is an increase in the rate of divorces in the world today, the parents of children with special needs should support each other. Since these children require more attention, care and love, it is advisable that their parents experience fewer marital challenges for the sake of their children. However, this can only be accomplished through the systems of assistance created for such parents (Tossebro & Wendelborg, 2017).

3.6. Support for Parents of Children with Special Needs

Raising a child with a congenital anomaly can either toughen or break a family, depending on its basis and resilience. Family values play a significant role in determining how fully the father and mother accept the accountability of caring for a unique child. Although raising a toddler with special needs can be challenging, many people have had extraordinary experiences while interacting with these special children. In other cases, caring for a baby with unique needs has encouraged the parents to become better people, or even urge them to pursue life paths of more value to humanity. According to Douglas et al. (2003), parents of adolescents with special needs can cope better if they receive help from aid systems. It is important to be aware that raising a child with special needs does not have to be a parent's burden; however, it must be seen as the responsibility of all humanity. In addition to economic help from the government, individuals in the society must play a role in supporting

parents of the children with disabilities. This will facilitate better coexistence and coping for the parents and the youth, thus reducing the challenges faced by the family.

3.4. Summary and Gap Analysis (Complete Evaluation)

Parents of children with special needs face many challenges, many of which they deal with alone. The lack of assistance for such families makes it more difficult for the parents and their children to lead ordinary lives. While researchers have addressed the challenges of raising special children, minimal attention has been given to the way this situation affects the bond between the parents and their ability to enjoy their marriage (Doron & Sharabany, 2013). The following research was done to provide more insight into the challenges faced by these parents and the support they need to thrive.

3.5. Hypothesis

- i. Raising a child with special needs influence the bond between parents.
- ii. Challenges associated with raising a child of any age with unique needs, and what effect does this have on the well-being of the parents and their other children.

4. Method/Technique

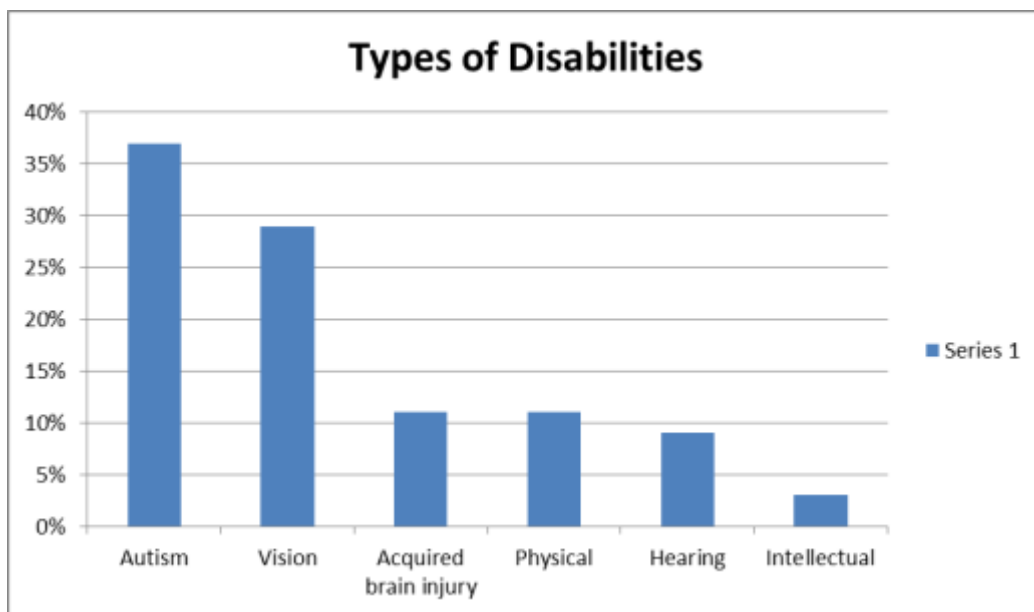
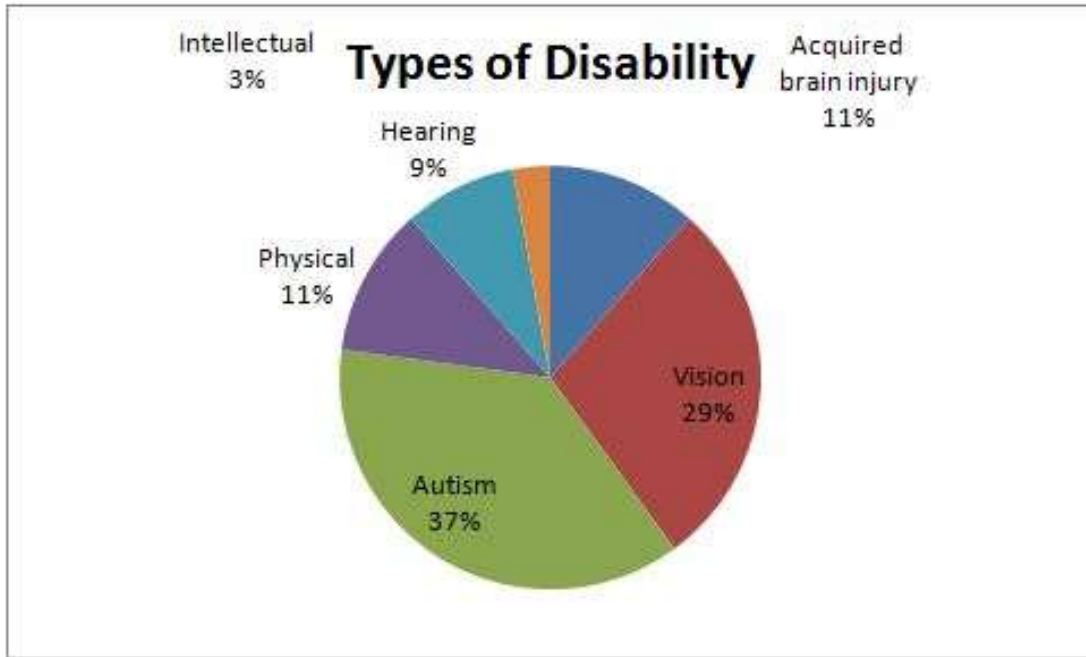
In the context of this study, the researcher focused on families of youths with special needs in Dhaka City. In order to choose a sample, a snowball sampling technique was used. Under this technique, a few members with the attribute of interest are found, then those subjects provide the names of others. This method was beneficial, since it is difficult to locate the households of children with special needs. A total of 35 families was selected for the study. The questionnaires were administered by the researcher during contact with willing respondents.

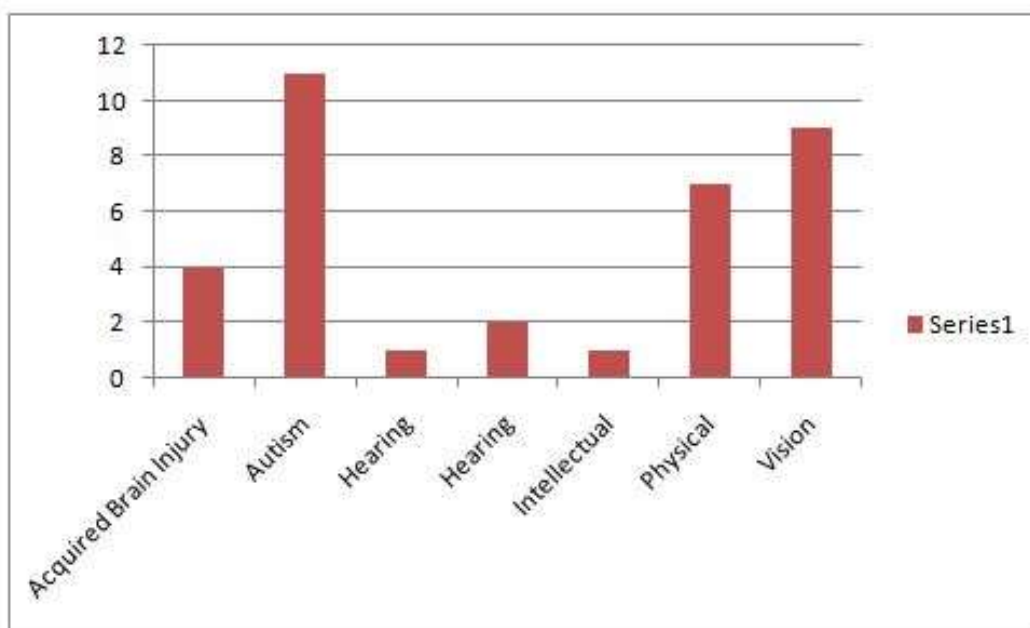
5. Result / Effects

In this study 35 individuals were interviewed. Out of the total 2 were single, 25 were married, 4 were separated and 4 were divorced. Out of the interviewees 5 are diploma holders, 20 are graduates and 10 have a post graduate degree. Before the birth of a child with special needs, 8 families were having a weak bond in their marriage in comparison to 5 after the birth. Before birth 13 of the families had an average marital bond while 14 had a strong bond. After marriage 10 had an average bond while 20 had a strong bond.

5.1. Types of Disability

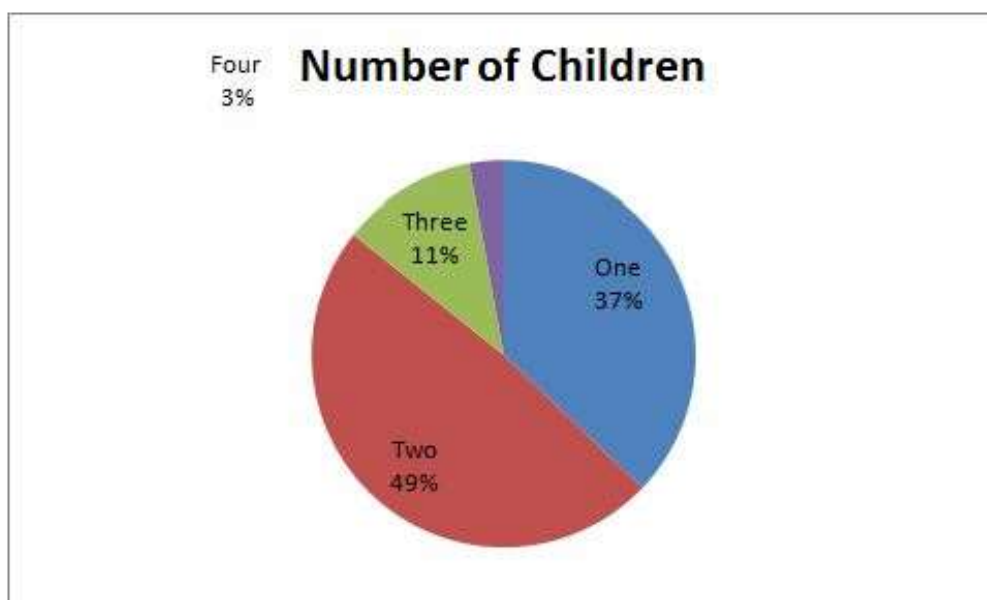
The questionnaire was set up to determine the most common kinds of impairments in the population. According to the findings, autism was the most prevalent disorder (37%) in the population, while visual impairment was the second most common disability (29%) in the interviewed families.





5.2 Number of Children in the Families

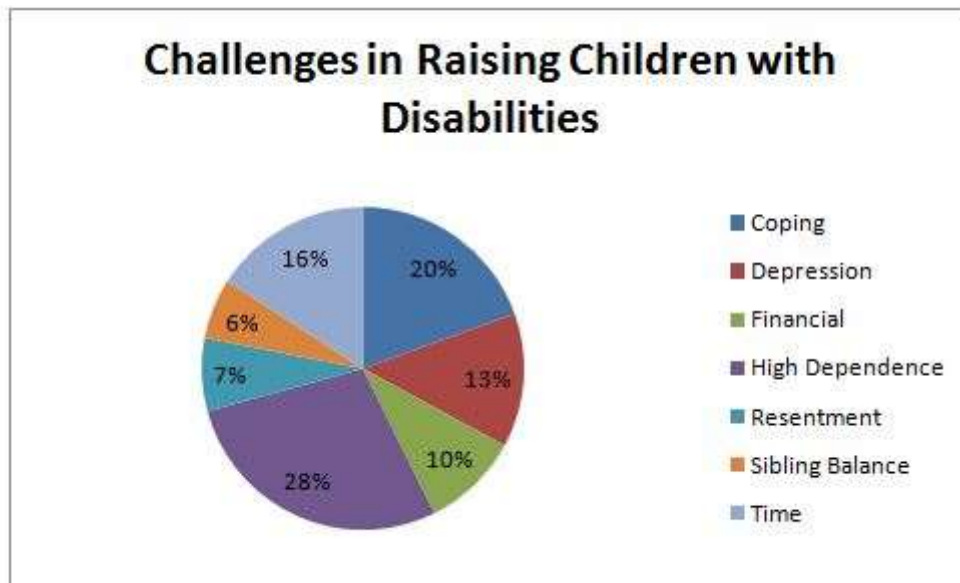
The researcher sought to discover the number of children born into the selected families, where at least one child was born with a disability. Typically, having a baby with special needs can affect the willingness of parents to have other children. However, the quantity of children born in a family may be affected by several other elements as well, including economic stability and level of schooling. Nearly half (49%) of the respondents had only two children, while the number of parents with 4 children constituted a minority (3%).



5.3. Challenges Faced by Parents of Children with Special Needs

The questionnaire also asked about the challenges faced by the mother and father while raising a youth with special needs. Several challenges were recognized, with the parents listing a variety of challenges. The majority of the parents mentioned dealing with the excessive dependence of children who have special needs. Other challenges, such as depression, resentment and coping with the needs of children without disabilities, were also

highlighted as considerable problems. A few parents mentioned issues with balancing their time with siblings.



5.4. Correlation

Bivariate analysis of the data was accomplished to determine the statistical outcomes. A 2-tailed Pearson’s correlation at 0.01 degree of importance was used to test for viable relationships between level of education, marital status, and partner bond before and after the birth of a child with special needs. The existence of a relationship between these variables implies that there is a degree of dependence in the way the unbiased variables have an effect on the functionality of the marriage. The results indicate that the variables correlating with each other exhibited high quality correlation. For instance there is a correlation between the partner bond and the level of education in the sampled families. This indicates that some variables impact others negatively, while others have a positive impact on different variables.

Pearson Correlation coefficient	Marital Status	Partner bond before	Partner bond after
Level of Education	-0.605	-0.073	0.336

5.5. Discussion

Raising a child with special needs is a journey that most parents are not prepared to undergo. Usually, couples expect a healthy baby, so a baby with special needs might be a shock. As a result, parenting this child can be a difficult journey for both mother and father, affecting their bond and the functionality of their marriage. Children with disabilities require more attention than ordinary children. Parents are required to make significant changes to the way they lead their lives in order to find the money for the extra care of their special child. In addition, youngsters with special needs require numerous visits to healthcare facilities to support their wellbeing. A combination of these factors leads to an increase in the parental stressors, which strains the bond between parents. Interestingly, the data from this study indicated that the partners with higher level of education and those with a noted an enhancement in their relationship in terms of a stronger marital bond (-0.073 to 0.336 Pearson correlation). Usually, partners who share a strong bond support each other throughout times of difficulty. In addition, more educated parents have a greater grasp, which allows them to cope better than less educated parents. Although the findings noted

several divorces and cases of separation, these incidents were not at a higher rate than marriages in the general population. Generally, improvements are focused on the challenges related to raising children with disabilities and target the wellbeing of the youth, and not the health of the marriage. Therefore, this research proposes that these families should find a balance in both the wellbeing of their children and that of their marriage.

Only 6% of the parents stated that they faced challenges in balancing siblings when one child required special care. The small percentage of challenges with balance between siblings doesn't signify against the general challenges such as financial constraints. This clarifies that the other children in the family are most likely receiving sufficient attention. Usually, when parents go through challenges in their parenting, the youngsters suffer more. For instance, when a mother and father face heavy medical expenditures for a special child, the siblings are at excessive risk of struggling too. As such, it is essential that researchers investigate the coping methods needed to ensure that parents of children with special needs experience fewer challenges. Future studies must focus on the implications of marital challenges on siblings, as well as on children with special needs.

Conclusion

i. Summary of Findings

The Principal Findings of The Observation Are Described, As Follows.

- Autism was, surprisingly, the most common disability amongst the children at 37% of children with special needs. Children with autism require help in numerous areas, including learning and coordinating their motor functions. Visual impairment was also a frequent disability in the adolescents of the interviewed parents. These youths require a specific education that can be high-priced for a household that is not financially stable.
- The number of children born to parents of children with special needs is no longer substantially different from that of ordinary parents. Parents of children with impairments are exposed to a number of factors that also have an effect on normal families. Although they experience extra challenges that require assistance, the birth of a child with special needs seldom influences the number of children born into the household.
- The majority of these parents found it difficult to deal with the excessive dependence of youths with special needs. Other parents experienced despair and coping challenges. A few parents had trouble balancing siblings and resentment.
- The challenges of raising special needs children lead to an increase in parental stressors, which stress the bond between parents. However, the existence of challenges does not necessarily weaken the bond between partners. In truth, the bond was shown to grow stronger in a significant proportion of relationships, especially those with higher levels of education. Support in terms of financial and educational aid to the children with special needs can help reduce this stress among the parents.

ii. Relevance of the Findings

The findings from this study indicate that there may be no difference in the rate of divorce between parents of children with special needs and families in the general population. This means that the rate of divorce among parents with disabled children and the rest of the families does not differ significantly.

The data collected during the interviews will help policy-makers design higher incentives and packages for youngsters with special needs, as well as their parents. When the well-wishers in the community are well informed, they may offer greater help and love for the families of children with impairments.

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