

**STRENGTHENING PARENTAL RESILIENCE IN FAMILIES OF CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES: A REVIEW OF PROTECTIVE FACTORS AND SUPPORT SYSTEMS****Cihile Kath**

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ABSTRACT Families of children with disabilities may face continuing emotional, social, financial, educational, and caregiving demands. Parental resilience can support adaptation and family well-being, but it is shaped not only by individual strengths but also by family relationships, social support, participation, and access to services. This narrative review examines protective factors and support systems associated with parental resilience among families of children with disabilities. The sources were thematically examined to identify major patterns related to parental resilience. Four interconnected areas emerged: psychological and meaning-based resources; family and social relationships; parental participation and advocacy; and supportive service and institutional environments. The findings suggest that self-efficacy, coping, acceptance, social support, family cohesion, and parental participation may support adaptation. Accessible health, rehabilitation, education, and community services can further strengthen family well-being. The review supports family-centred and strengths-based social work approaches that address both parental capacities and environmental barriers. Further research, particularly in India and other low- and middle-income settings, is needed to examine how family, community, and service environments influence parental resilience.

KEYWORDS : Parental Resilience; Children with Disabilities; Protective Factors; Social Support**1. INTRODUCTION**

Raising a child with a disability may involve continuing responsibilities related to care, education, health, rehabilitation, communication, and social participation. Families may also experience financial pressure, emotional stress, social isolation, and difficulties in accessing appropriate services. Indian studies have examined resilience, coping, and vulnerability among parents of children with intellectual and other disabilities (Kumar & Deepalatha, 2019; Mohan & Kulkarni, 2018; Rajan & Romate, 2022; Singh & Kumar, 2022).

Family resilience refers to the processes through which families respond to adversity and use available resources to adapt to changing circumstances (Walsh, 2021). In the context of disability, this perspective is important because parents' adjustment is influenced not only by their personal capacities but also by family relationships, social networks, services, and the wider social environment.

Recent research has examined psychological and contextual factors associated with parental resilience (Broll et al., 2025; Tejakum et al., 2025). Other studies have considered acceptance, spirituality, parental participation, advocacy, and inclusive environments. However, these dimensions are often examined separately or within specific disability groups.

Therefore, this narrative review examines the protective factors and support systems associated with parental resilience among families of children with disabilities. It brings together psychological, relational, participatory, and environmental dimensions and considers their relevance to social work practice.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE**2.1 Psychological and Meaning-Based Resources**

Research suggests that parental resilience is associated with psychological resources such as coping, self-efficacy, optimism, emotional regulation, and acceptance. Mohan and Kulkarni (2018), Kumar and Deepalatha (2019), Singh and Kumar (2022), and Thapa and Jalal (2024) examined resilience among parents of children with intellectual or other disabilities. Recent research has also considered emotional intelligence, self-compassion, resilience, and psychological well-being among parents of children with developmental disabilities and cerebral palsy (Sharma & Upadhyay, 2026; Sudeep & Venkatesan, 2025).

Acceptance and meaning-making may help parents adjust to changing family circumstances. Shiju et al. (2023) examined parents' experiences of accepting their child's disability. Spirituality and religion may also provide meaning and emotional resources for some families (Carter, 2024; McWhirter & McIntyre, 2021). Chua and Shorey (2022) further found evidence concerning the value of

mindfulness- and acceptance-based interventions for the mental well-being of parents of children with developmental disabilities.

2.2 Family and Social Support

Resilience is also connected with the quality of relationships surrounding parents. Family cohesion, social networks, peer relationships, and professional support can provide emotional, practical, and informational assistance. Broll et al. (2025) identified social and psychological factors associated with resilience, while Flores-Buils and Andrés-Roqueta (2022) highlighted the role of social support among parents of children with neurodevelopmental disorders. Widyawati et al. (2023) also examined protective factors associated with parental resilience and quality of life. McConnell and Savage (2015) emphasised the importance of considering stress and resilience within the broader family context. Kovács et al. (2022) further examined resilience in relation to parental involvement.

2.3 Participation, Advocacy and Supportive Environments

Parents may demonstrate resilience through active participation and advocacy. Burke et al. (2025) examined individual, peer, and systemic advocacy among parents of children with disabilities, while Li et al. (2026) examined factors associated with parent advocacy activities. These studies broaden the understanding of resilience beyond personal coping.

The wider environment also matters. Inclusive education and disability services can influence children's participation and the responsibilities placed on parents (UNESCO, 2020; UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia, 2021). Indian literature has discussed challenges associated with implementing inclusive education under NEP 2020 (Khanam & Ahmad, 2025; Rakshit & Yadav, 2025). Disability-sector initiatives also highlight the importance of coordinated and inclusive support systems (Association of People with Disability, 2025; Keystone Human Services, 2025). Recent review evidence on family resilience interventions further indicates growing interest in family-level approaches (Guo et al., 2026).

Overall, the literature indicates that parental resilience involves an interaction between personal resources, relationships, participation, and environmental support. This provides the basis for the thematic synthesis presented in this review.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study used a narrative review design to synthesise literature on parental resilience among families of children with disabilities. It was not designed as an exhaustive systematic review and therefore does not claim to include all available literature.

Literature published mainly from 2015 onward was considered, while

earlier sources were retained when conceptually relevant. Literature was identified using combinations of terms related to parental resilience, children with disabilities, coping, protective factors, family support, social support, acceptance, spirituality, advocacy, participation, inclusive education, disability services, and resilience interventions.

Sources were considered relevant when they addressed parental resilience or adaptation, psychological and relational resources, parental participation or advocacy, disability-related services, inclusion, or interventions relevant to family resilience. The final review included 27 sources, including empirical studies, systematic reviews, theoretical literature, and selected institutional or organisational sources.

The sources were thematically examined and group into four interconnected areas: psychological and meaning-based resources; family and social relationships; parental participation and advocacy; and supportive community, service, and institutional environments. The synthesis was interpretive and does not establish causal relationships

4. Findings

4.1 Psychological and Meaning-Based Resources

The reviewed literature indicates that coping, self-efficacy, acceptance, emotional resources, self-compassion, and meaning-making may help parents manage disability-related demands (Mohan & Kulkarni, 2018; Kumar & Deepalatha, 2019; Singh & Kumar, 2022; Sudeep & Venkatesan, 2025). Acceptance and spirituality may provide additional sources of meaning and emotional support for some parents (Shiju et al., 2023; Carter, 2024; McWhirter & McIntyre, 2021).

However, these resources should not be viewed separately from the social and practical conditions in which parents provide care.

4.2 Family and Social Relationships

Supportive relationships can provide emotional reassurance, practical help, information, and opportunities to share experiences. Family cohesion, social support, peer relationships, and professional assistance are associated with conditions that support resilience (Broll et al., 2025; Flores-Buils & Andrés-Roqueta, 2022; Widayawati et al., 2023).

The evidence therefore suggests that parental resilience is partly relational. Parents may cope more effectively when they have dependable support from family, peers, professionals, and wider social networks.

4.3 Parental Participation and Advocacy

Resilience may involve active participation rather than coping alone. Parents may obtain information, participate in decisions, seek services, and advocate for their children's rights and needs. Research on individual, peer, and systemic advocacy supports this broader understanding of parental agency (Burke et al., 2025; Li et al., 2026).

Participation may therefore help parents respond to service barriers and take an active role in decisions affecting their children.

4.4 Supportive Systems and Environments

Accessible health, rehabilitation, education, social protection, and community services can reduce some pressures experienced by families. Inclusive environments can also improve children's participation and reduce some difficulties faced by parents (UNESCO, 2020; UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia, 2021).

At the same time, fragmented services, limited information, and inaccessible systems can increase parental demands. Indian literature on inclusive education also points to continuing implementation challenges (Khanam & Ahmad, 2025; Rakshit & Yadav, 2025).

Overall, the findings show that parental resilience is shaped by the interaction of personal resources, supportive relationships, parental agency, and enabling environments.

5. DISCUSSION

The review supports understanding parental resilience as a dynamic and contextual process, rather than a fixed personal quality. Psychological resources such as coping, acceptance, and self-efficacy may help parents adapt, but their value is influenced by the support and services available to families. This is consistent with Tejakum et al. (2025), who identified both personal and contextual factors related to parental resilience.

The present review extends this understanding by bringing psychological, relational, participatory, and environmental factors together. In particular, parental participation and advocacy show that resilience can involve active efforts to obtain support, participate in decisions, and address barriers (Burke et al., 2025; Li et al., 2026).

The review also shows why resilience should not be treated as the responsibility of parents alone. Parents may experience additional pressure when services are difficult to access, poorly coordinated, or socially restrictive. Thus, individual coping cannot fully compensate for weak support systems.

From a social work perspective, this supports a family-centred and ecological approach. Social workers can strengthen parental coping and emotional well-being while also connecting families with services, building peer support, supporting parental participation, and addressing barriers to inclusion. Resilience is therefore better understood as something supported through both personal capacities and social environments.

6. Implications For Social Work, Policy And Practice

The findings support strengths-based, family-centred, and ecological social work practice. Parents should be recognised as active partners in decisions concerning their children's education, health, rehabilitation, and community participation.

Social workers can provide counselling, parent education, information, peer-support opportunities, service coordination, and advocacy assistance. Coordination among health, rehabilitation, education, social welfare, and community organisations is also important. At the policy level, accessible disability services, inclusive education, social protection, and community-based support can help create conditions that sustain family resilience.

Therefore, strengthening parental resilience requires both support for parents' personal capacities and action to reduce social, service-related, and environmental barriers.

7. Research Gaps And Future Directions

Further research is needed across different disability groups and family contexts. More evidence is particularly needed from India and other low- and middle-income countries, where cultural, socioeconomic, and service conditions may influence parental experiences. Longitudinal research could examine how resilience and support needs change as children grow.

Future studies should also evaluate multilevel interventions combining psychological support, parent education, peer networks, advocacy, service coordination, and community resources. Such research can help identify approaches that are both effective and appropriate for different family circumstances.

8. CONCLUSION

Parental resilience among families of children with disabilities is a multidimensional and contextual process. Personal resources such as coping, acceptance, and self-efficacy may support adaptation, while family relationships, social support, parental participation, and accessible services can strengthen the conditions in which resilience develops.

The review suggests that resilience should not be treated as the responsibility of parents alone. Family-centred, strengths-based, and ecological approaches are needed to support parents while addressing barriers within families, communities, services, and institutions. Social work has an important role in connecting families with resources, strengthening parental agency, promoting participation, and contributing to more inclusive support systems.

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