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Journal of Religion & Spirituality in Social Work: Social Thought

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: www.tandfonline.com/journals/wrsp20

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To cite this article: Asala Sabik, Shifaa Hamd, Khetam Asakli Faris & Ayelet Gur (17 May 2024): The power of faith in Israeli Druze parents of children with disabilities across the lifespan, Journal of Religion & Spirituality in Social Work: Social Thought, DOI: 10.1080/15426432.2024.2350373

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/15426432.2024.2350373

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Published online: 17 May 2024.

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JOURNAL OF RELIGION & SPIRITUALITY IN SOCIAL WORK: SOCIAL THOUGHT
https://doi.org/10.1080/15426432.2024.2350373

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The power of faith in Israeli Druze parents of children with disabilities across the lifespan

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ABSTRACT

This study addresses the underexplored topic of parenthood for children with disabilities within the Druze community in Israel. While existing research predominantly focuses on Western cultures, this qualitative investigation involves 21 Israeli Druze parents across different age groups. Thematic analysis of in-depth interviews revealed three key themes: Challenges and strengths, Parents' faith-based narratives, and The empowering role of religious faith. Notably, age-related distinctions emerged in experiences of loneliness and social support. The implications for social work practice and policy, and future research are discussed, emphasizing the significance of considering cultural and faith-based dynamics in supporting parents of children with disabilities.

ARTICLE HISTORY
Received 18 January 2024
Accepted 29 April 2024

KEYWORDS
Disability; Druze; parenthood; religion; spirituality

Introduction

Parenthood for children with disabilities can be an enduring and challenging life experience (Khalsa, 2023). This journey demands coping resources from families and presents significant challenges in acquiring the necessary support to handle the stressors that come with raising children with disabilities (Manor-Binyamini & Nator, 2016).

In the psychological domain, parents of children with disabilities (PCD) experience a higher prevalence of emotional challenges compared to parents of children with typical development, including lower quality of life and increased stress, depression, and anxiety (Chen et al., 2023; Ghaisani & Hendriani, 2022; Scherer et al., 2019; Staunton et al., 2023). Transitioning to the social context, PCD often encounter stigma directed toward them (Liao et al., 2019), which can be linked to heightened parental stress and adversely impact parenting functioning (Chan et al., 2023). Furthermore, the perceived lack of social support may exacerbate parents' experience of stigma (Tekola et al., 2020). Regarding employment and economic challenges, raising a child with a disability imposes a significant financial burden (Rogge & Janssen,

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2019; Shahat & Greco, 2021). Parenthood for children with disabilities may restrict parents' ability to work (Vinck & Van Lancker, 2020). Parenting a child with disabilities while being unemployed can be associated with increased anxiety for parents (Bujnowska et al., 2019).

One factor that can significantly impact how parents handle challenges related to children with disabilities is faith. According to Webster's Dictionary, faith is "something that is believed, especially with strong conviction" (Websters Dictionary, 2023). Religious faith and spirituality are inversely correlated with mental and emotional disorders. They are recognized for promoting positive religious coping, fostering community and support, and nurturing positive beliefs (Brown et al., 2013; Weber & Pargament, 2014). Additionally, faith-based interventions are beneficial (Anderson et al., 2015).

This study examines faith as a valuable resource for PCD across the lifespan. This study utilizes Hobfoll's (1989) conservation of resources theory. This theory centers on the premise that individuals are motivated by acquiring, preserving, and enhancing their resources.

The conservation of resources theory offers a framework to analyze reactions to stress, exclusivity, and coping methods, while emphasizing personal and communal resources. It highlights the significance of resources in dealing with challenges and posits that individuals can acquire new resources throughout life while also utilizing existing ones (Hobfoll, 1989, 2011; Hobfoll & Shirom, 2001; Hobfoll et al., 2018).

Studies have investigated the resources required by PCD to effectively manage their parenting experience, but a majority of these studies have been centered on Western-cultured families, neglecting minority groups (Manor-Binyamini & Nator, 2016; Samadi et al., 2014). The present study aims to bridge this gap by exploring the role of faith within the context of the Israeli Druze community. The significance of studying elements of caregiving for diverse populations is increasing, with a growing emphasis on culturally sensitive care that considers the beliefs and attitudes of individuals (Chau et al., 2011).

Deeply steeped in tradition, the Druze community is transforming from collective-oriented to embracing individual-centric values. This shift is evident in various aspects, including social dynamics, economic practices, family structures, and women's empowerment within the community (Amrani, 2010; Dana, 2009; Haj-Yahia, 1994). These processes may be attributed to the exposure of the Druze community to Western culture (Dana, 2009; Natoor, 2014).

The Druze community in Israel is estimated to have a population of 150,000 people (Central Bureau of Statistics Israel, 2022). While the Druze community is assimilated into the Israeli population in some aspects, such as serving in the army, they maintain distinct characteristics related to ethnicity, heritage, and religion (Nisan, 2010). Halabi (2014) suggests that the Druze community in Israel embodies a complex blend of group identities, including the Druze identity mainly rooted in religious heritage, the Arab identity expressed through

language and culture, and the Israeli identity stemming from their status as civilians of the state of Israel and their service in the Israeli army. Given the focus of this article on the Druze faith, understanding the fundamental framework of this faith is essential.

The Druze faith places significant emphasis on a person's spirituality and encompasses laws primarily focused on matters of morality. Unlike two other monotheistic religions, the Druze faith does not require any religious laws to be observed publicly (Amrani, 2010). At its core, the Druze faith firmly believes in one God, an entity that, akin to other monotheistic religions, transcends human understanding and definition. According to Druze beliefs, the soul is eternal, while the body is physical and non-eternal. A central tenet of the Druze faith is the belief in reincarnation, wherein the soul has the potential to be reborn into a new body after death (Dana, 2009; Halabi, 2014; Halabi & Horenczyk, 2020).

Many Druze individuals, both practicing religious and nonreligious, hold beliefs in the will of God and the concept of reincarnation. These beliefs may offer support to Druze parents in navigating the psychological and emotional challenges of raising a child with a disability (Halabi & Horenczyk, 2020; Natoor, 2014). Within the belief in reincarnation in the Druze faith, individuals may experience different life circumstances in each incarnation, including periods of sickness or disability. This perspective fosters positive attitudes toward people with disabilities among the Druze community. A study by Mari et al. (1986), comparing the attitudes of Israeli Arab PCD from Muslim, Christian, and Druze backgrounds, found that Druze parents had the most positive attitudes toward children with disabilities. However, when it comes to Druze parents of children with intellectual disabilities, they may experience high levels of stress, a lower sense of efficacy in coping with the challenges around them, and a diminished sense of meaning and hope (Manor-Binyamini & Nator, 2016). Conversely, in a study focusing on Druze mothers of children with autism, parents expressed that their religious faith held significant value in coping with the challenges of having a child with autism (Halabi-Elshiekh, 2012).

Research on parenthood in the context of children with disabilities within the Druze community is limited. Existing studies have primarily focused on parenthood for children and teenagers, with even fewer investigations regarding older children with disabilities. However, the challenges of raising a child with a disability evolve throughout the child's lifespan, with each age presenting its distinct circumstances (Gur et al., 2020). Thus, this study aimed to address this gap by examining children with disabilities of various ages and exploring the role of religious faith across the family lifespan. Hence, the present study aims to investigate the role of religious faith among parents with children of varying age groups: young children (0–6 years old), school-age children (6–21 years old), and adult children (21+ years old).

Method

As stated, the study aims to explore the role of faith in the lives of parents raising children with disabilities within the Druze society across the lifespan. The research was conducted using a qualitative approach, with the primary objective of comprehending the participants' experiences and perceptions. Through this approach, the study sought to gain insights into their emotions and interpretations of the reality in which they navigate their lives (Mohajan, 2018). Conducting in-depth interviews allows for meaningful interactions with PCD, providing valuable insights into the role of faith in their journey. Additionally, it offers an opportunity to hear personal stories, experiences, challenges, and success stories related to accepting and raising children over the years.

Participants

The study involved 21 Israeli Druze parents, including 2 fathers and 19 mothers, all of whom have a child with a disability. Among the participants, 20 are married and one is divorced. Furthermore, 11 are homemakers, while the remaining participants are employed outside the household. Among the participants, six possess academic education.

Their children were diagnosed with various illnesses or disabilities and were recognized by the National Insurance Institute as eligible to receive a children with disabilities allowance. The research was conducted in Druze settlements in the Galilee and the Golan regions. The age range of the participating parents varied from 25 to 68 years old. The sample was divided into three groups based on their children's ages: (1) 7 parents of children aged 0–6; (2) 7 parents of children aged 6–21; and (3) 7 parents of adults aged 21 and above.

The children in the group presented a diverse range of disabilities. Some were diagnosed with developmental disabilities (DD) and intellectual disabilities (ID), while others were identified with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Certain individuals in this group also encountered additional health difficulties, including epilepsy and persistent hyperplastic primary vitreous (PHPV), which coincided with functional disabilities. Furthermore, cases of Down Syndrome and sensor disabilities were observed among the children. A couple of children were also found to have cerebral palsy (CP).

Measures

An in-depth, semi-structured interview guide was utilized, comprising eight open questions. The first part focused on obtaining demographic data of the parents, including gender, age, employment, and education. The second part delved into the personal characteristics of the child with the disability, such as the type of disability, its severity, gender, and age. The third part explored the

participants' experiences of parenting a child with a disability. Lastly, the fourth part examined the role of faith in the lives of parents raising children with disabilities. The interview guide is available upon request from the authors for those seeking additional details about the research methodology.

Procedure

The current study was approved by the appropriate information. Participants were recruited using convenience sampling. Once eligible participants were identified, the researchers contacted them and explained the study's objectives. It was emphasized that participation was entirely voluntary, and they could choose not to participate without facing consequences. Upon obtaining participants' informed consent, face-to-face interviews were conducted, and the interviews were recorded and transcribed. Participants' identities were kept anonymous to protect confidentiality, and any identifying information was modified. The interview duration typically ranged from 60 to 90 minutes. Due to the presence of sensitive personal details concerning the participants, the transcriptions of the interviews cannot be made available to ensure the protection of privacy and confidentiality.

Data analysis

A thematic analysis was applied following the guidelines of Braun and Clarke (2012). The process involved three stages: First, three researchers independently read and coded the content of the interviews, categorizing them into potential themes. Next, the researchers collectively discussed the coding and potential themes, resolving any differences until an agreement was reached. Finally, all four researchers collaborated to group the themes and present them in a clear and comprehensive manner.

Trustworthiness

To ensure the trustworthiness of the research, several steps were taken. Firstly, significant resources and time were dedicated to acquiring consistent data. Professional data collection procedures were strictly adhered to during the interviews, which were recorded only after obtaining participants' consent. The interviews were meticulously transcribed for accuracy. The study and its results were evaluated by the research supervisor, and researchers engaged in self-criticism and reflexivity to enhance the overall rigor of the study (Rose & Johnson, 2020).

Researcher characteristics and reflexivity

The first, second, and third authors are Druze female social workers with experience working with diverse populations, particularly parents of children with various disabilities. The fourth author is a Jewish clinical social worker and researcher specializing in the psychosocial aspects of disability. Our commitment lies in expanding the limited knowledge about the Druze society and developing culture-based intervention methods to better serve this community.

Results

The thematic analysis revealed three main themes on the role of religious faith in the lives of Druze PCD across the lifespan: (1) Challenges and strengths of Druze parents raising children with disabilities, (2) Parents' faith-based narratives of their child's disability, and (3) The empowering role of religious faith as a resource. The themes and sub-themes are depicted in Figure 1.

Challenges and strengths of Druze parents raising children with disabilities

PCD across all age groups shared their experiences of facing challenges throughout their child's lifespan, as one participant eloquently stated, "At every moment, we need to face many challenges at once" (Mother to a child with ASD). However, amidst these challenges, they also expressed having resources that help them cope effectively. This theme encompasses

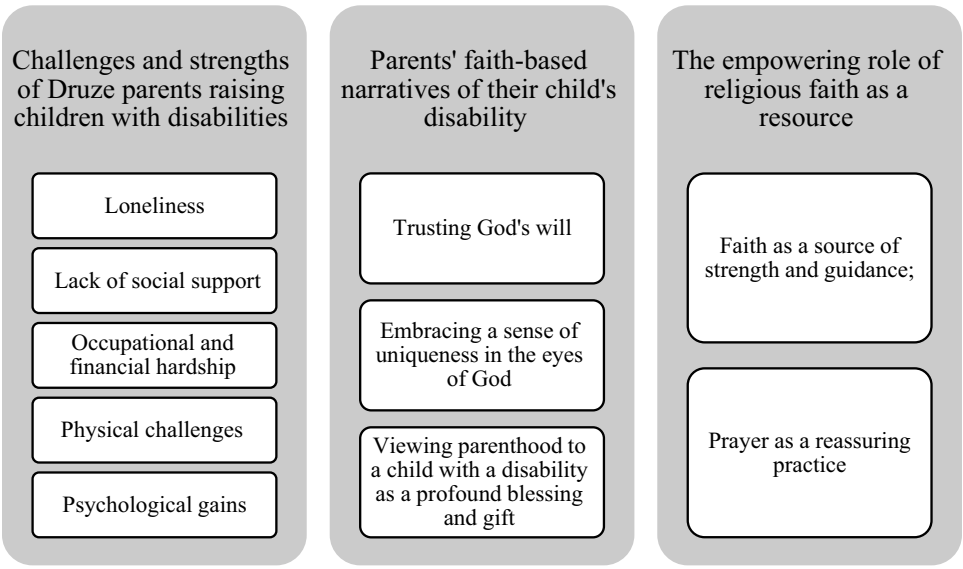


Figure 1. Thematic Analysis of Religious Faith in Druze Parents of Children with Disabilities: Main Themes and Sub-themes.

five sub-themes: (1) Loneliness; (2) Lack of social support; (3) Occupational and financial hardship; (4) Physical challenges; and (5) Psychological gains.

Loneliness

Many parents of young children (0–6) and adults (21+) expressed a profound sense of loneliness as a significant challenge they face in raising a child with a disability. Parents of young children (0–6) shared that this loneliness and social isolation caused them psychological and emotional hardship, as one parent poignantly stated, "I would rather stay home, especially during family special occasions, as they (family) are judgmental toward my child's behavior" (Mother of a child with ASD). Similarly, parents of adults (21+) revealed that they often feel alone in dealing with their child with a disability, with one parent expressing, "It's very hard for me to cope; I feel very lonely and alone in this journey" (Mother of a child with ID).

Lack of social support

In all age groups, parents consistently expressed the lack of social support they experience while raising a child with a disability. Parents of young children (0–6) particularly emphasized the difficulty in preparing for everyday life and family and social events without sufficient support. Many parents shared instances of facing criticism from others, as exemplified by one parent of a child (6–21) who stated, "Sometimes people would criticize, maybe because my son wore glasses at such a young age; people looked at me as a negligent mother" (Mother of a child with PHPV). Similarly, another parent mentioned receiving criticism in handling her daughter's seizures, saying, "There were harsh reactions when my daughter had seizures; people told me how to hold her, as if I don't know how to take care of my daughter or I'm neglecting her" (Mother of a child with epilepsy).

One mother shared the painful experience of being criticized for her lack of knowledge during her pregnancy: "You didn't know about the disability during my pregnancy? You didn't think of abortion instead of carrying the pain with you for the rest of your life" (Mother of a child with CP). Despite the challenges, some participants expressed receiving some social support, particularly from religious individuals who believe in the will and control of God in determining people's fate, as mentioned by one mother of a young child (0–6): "Fortunately for us, there are still people who can understand what we're going through and how drained and stressed we are" (Mother of a child with ID).

Parents of adults with disabilities (21+) revealed feeling a lack of trust in others and carrying the sole responsibility for their child's care. As shared by one participant, "We had no support, me and my husband alone handled the situation, we felt alone and lacked support. Nobody helped us; when I had to go out, I would only leave them with my sisters. Nobody

else in the family was willing to hold her; they would convey the message – she's your daughter, and she's only your responsibility!" (Mother of a child with ID and seizures).

Occupational and financial hardship

Differences were evident between the age groups in terms of personal development and economic challenges. Parents of young children (0–6) and parents of adults (21+) emphasized financial difficulties, while parents of children (6–21) did not discuss this aspect. Parents of young children (0–6) expressed challenges related to employment, as one participant shared, "I had to cut work, especially in the winter when we spend a lot of time in the hospital because of health problems" (Mother of a child with autism and complex health issues).

Parents of adults (21+) highlighted the dependency of their child on them and the considerable effort and energy required to take care of their child, which impacted their own employment. As one mother candidly expressed, "I can't go out and work since there is nobody that will take care of her. Her health conditions often demand frequent checkups and hospitalizations, which affects my husband's work as well since he has to take time off. Many times, we feel a financial burden" (Mother of a child with intellectual disability – ID).

Physical challenges

Parents of young children (0–6) and parents of adults (21+) discussed the physical effects of raising a child with a disability. However, parents of children (6–21) did not mention this issue. Parents of young children (0–6) shared that they experienced physical difficulties and exhaustion, particularly due to the day-to-day care required for their child. Many children with disabilities attend special education schools located far from their families' homes, necessitating early morning preparations and the transportation of various essential items such as a car seat and a heavy bag containing clothing and daily necessities. Additionally, parents often had to drive their children to hospitals, and they expressed the challenges associated with these trips. As one participant explained, "My son is my soul, and I am not complaining; I need to take care of him, and I'm willing to give up everything for him. However, I face considerable difficulty with the hospital trips as they take many hours and leave me feeling very tired" (Mother of a child with ASD and heart problems).

Likewise, parents of adults (21+) emphasized the physical challenges of caring for their child with a disability. Providing constant care requires physical strength, and as many of these parents were older, they found it challenging to accommodate their grown-up children's physical needs. One parent shared, "It's physically demanding since my daughter is not independent and relies on me for everything. She

is also heavy, and I need to assist her with everything. I'm not young, and it leaves me feeling tired" (Mother of a child with ID and blindness).

Psychological gains

Parents of children of all age groups emphasized the personal development and resources gained since having a child with disabilities. Parents of young children (0–6) spoke of the strength and patience they have developed as parents. One parent shared, "I'm not like every other mother; I am a patient mother with many strengths. I think I am special and unique" (Mother of a child with developmental disability – DD). Parents of children (6–21) also expressed their strength and patience in dealing with their child's disabilities and the challenges they face. As one parent stated, "To be a mother of a girl with special needs is to be a strong woman who has always handled challenges. I learned how to be flexible and creative to find solutions and adapt myself to my daughter's needs" (Mother of a child with epilepsy). Additionally, parents of adults (21+) shared that they had become even stronger and more effective since having a child with a disability. One parent stated, "Since raising my daughter, I found out that I have many strengths that I was not aware of, and that I know how to cope" (Mother of a child with ID). Similarly, another mother shared, "I feel that I am strong and that I can handle my daughter's disabilities" (Mother of a child with ID and seizures).

In the area of personal development, a few parents expressed that having a child with a disability motivated them to further advance their professional development. As one mother shared, "Thanks to my child's disability and struggles, I became an educated woman. I got a bachelor's in special education so I can help my son and other children and PCD who are struggling. I became more active and aware" (Mother of a child with developmental disabilities, DD).

Parents' faith-based narratives of their child's disability

This theme encompasses three significant sub-themes: (1) Trusting God's will; (2) Embracing a sense of uniqueness in the eyes of God; and (3) Viewing parenthood to a child with a disability as a profound blessing and gift. Furthermore, parents in all age groups expressed a positive outlook regarding their parenthood, primarily attributing it to their strong focus on their religious faith. They shared a deep belief in God's will and accepted their fate with grace. Many parents mentioned feeling chosen by God, as they are strong individuals capable of handling the challenges of raising a child with disabilities. Furthermore, parents of all age groups expressed the view of their child as a precious gift and a blessing from God. Their faith provided them with a profound sense of purpose and hope throughout their parenting journey.

Trusting God's will

Participants of all age groups emphasized their belief that having a child with a disability was part of God's will, and they expressed acceptance of this parenthood journey. One parent shared, "It's challenging to have a child with a disability, but I firmly believe that this is God's will, and I accept it" (Mother of a child with DD). Similarly, another parent stated, "This is the path God has chosen for us, and we embrace it wholeheartedly." (Mother of a child with cerebral palsy).

Embracing a sense of uniqueness in the eyes of god

Parents of young children (0–6) and adults (21+) shared a common belief that they were chosen by God to have a child with disabilities because they are special and strong parents. They viewed themselves as unique in the eyes of God, and this belief provided them with a sense of strength and purpose in their parenting journey. As one parent of a young child (0–6) with a disability stated, "If God wouldn't have seen me as a strong woman, he would not have chosen me to have a child with a disability. This parenthood is different at all levels, and it takes a lot of strength and patience." (Mother of a child with ID). Similarly, parents of adults (21+) expressed that they believed God saw them as strong individuals capable of coping with the challenges of raising a child with disabilities. One parent shared, "God sees me and my husband as people who are strong enough to cope, and it gives me strength that God has chosen us. In my eyes, it's a blessing, and not everyone is fortunate enough" (Mother of a child with ID end blindness). Another mother echoed this sentiment, saying, "The belief that God gave us our daughter as a blessing and that God knows whom to choose to have a child with disabilities, the belief that God sees me and my husband as very strong people helps us cope. We believe that if we weren't able to cope, God wouldn't have chosen us to have this gift" (mother of a child with ID).

Parents of children (6–21) did not address this issue. While parents of young children (0–6) and adults (21+) expressed their belief in being chosen by God to have a child with disabilities due to their perceived strength and special qualities, parents of children in the age group of 6–21 did not discuss this aspect of their parenthood experience. The theme of feeling unique and chosen by God seemed to be more prominent among parents of young children and adults with disabilities.

Viewing parenthood to a child with a disability as a profound blessing and gift

Participants in all age groups expressed that parenting a child with disabilities was viewed as a gift and a blessing from God. In the words of one parent of a young child (0–6): "God gave us a special gift that is different from all his siblings, maybe it's a test by God to check our willingness to deal with and have a special child" (Mother of a child with ASD and medical problems). Similarly,

another parent expressed, "Our daughter is a gift from God and is our life test, this makes us cope with all the world" (Mother of a child with CP). Additionally, a parent of an adult child (21+) shared, "My daughter is a light in my eyes, she's everything to me, she is a blessing and a gift from God" (Mother of a child with ID).

The empowering role of religious faith as a resource

All parents who participated in this study stated that faith was a resource for them to cope with their child's disability. They stated that faith strengthens them and makes them accept the will of God and that their faith is strengthened with time. This theme includes two sub-themes: (1) Faith as a source of strength and guidance; (2) prayer as a reassuring practice.

Faith as a source of strength and guidance

In all age groups, parents stated that their faith gave them the strength to cope. As a mother to a young child (0–6) shared: "Through faith, we preserve our strength. We feel God is guiding us and our children in every step and every place. He is the one who takes care of us" (Mother of a child with CP). Likewise, in the words of a parent of a child (6–21): "The belief that someone helps me feel strong from inside, and that with Him, I'm not alone. I always turn to God to help me" (Mother of a child with PHPV). Similarly, a parent of an adult (21+) shared: "God knows whom to choose to give a child with a disability. He gave me the strength to cope with my daughter" (Mother of a child with arthritis).

Prayer as a reassuring practice

Parents of young children (0–6) stated that they use a lot of prayers as they cope with the many pressures and challenges they face as PCD. As one parent stated: "God, I beg you to keep giving me strength, I know you hear me and the challenges of mine and my son. Every time I feel overwhelmed, I turn to God through prayer to strengthen me and help me through this stage of life. Many times I go to the grave of the prophet Jethro to pray and seek help from him" (Mother of a child with ASD and health problems).

Likewise, some of the parents of adults (21+) referred to prayer as a reassuring and empowering practice, and they turn to prayer in times of need. As stated by one parent: "Faith in God made me stronger when I breakdown I would raise my head and pray to God, and he will help you, and that brings a sense of calmness to me" (mother of a child with arthritis).

Discussion

Based on the limited research on the role of faith in the lives of Druze PCD and the need for culturally sensitive support services, this study aimed to explore

how religious faith serves as a resource for parents in the Druze community across different age groups. The study focused on parents of young children (0–6), parents of school-aged children (6–21), and parents of adults (21+) with disabilities to gain insights into their experiences and perspectives regarding the impact of faith on their parenting journey throughout the lifespan.

Parents of children across all age groups expressed both challenges and strengths in raising a child with disabilities. This aligns with previous literature; studies have shown positive effects such as increased satisfaction, hope, joy, and personal growth, as well as challenges such as depression, loneliness, post-traumatic stress, and negative feelings among family members (Al Yagon & Margalit, 2022; Grein & Glidden, 2015; Kiełb et al., 2019).

Furthermore, lack of social support was evident in all age groups, with parents expressing experiences of stigma and criticism from both the community and family. This resonates with the emphasis on the social stigma faced by PCD and their families (Ditchman et al., 2013; Liao et al., 2019; Tekola et al., 2020), as highlighted in previous research studies. Moreover, Parents of young children (0–6) and parents of adults (21+) also expressed feelings of loneliness, while parents of children (6–21) did not express this sentiment. This observation aligns with previous findings, as highlighted by Bohadana et al. (2019). This difference may be attributed to the fact that children (6–21) tend to receive more support in educational settings, which helps alleviate the burden on parents. Conversely, parents of adults (21+) who are no longer in the educational system experience more hardship and loneliness, as they lack that additional support (Bohadana et al., 2019).

The Druze community mainly resides in peripheral areas of Israel, where challenges related to limited resources and accessibility to services for people with disabilities, as well as a lack of employment opportunities and leisure activities, are common (Badran et al., 2022; Hijazi, 2018; Iraqi, 2018; Monnickendam-Givon, 2017). Loneliness among Druze adults with disabilities may be attributed to the scarcity of opportunities to engage in leisure activities due to the lack of accessibility within the Israeli Arab community (Azaiza et al., 2012; Badran et al., 2022). Consequently, adults with disabilities have limited activities, placing a significant burden on the family.

In this study, parents of adults (21+) faced physical challenges, likely due to their own aging process. In Israel, there has been a focus on including people with disabilities in the community (Baumbusch et al., 2017; Fine, 2022), leading to many individuals with disabilities living with their families. As a result, the responsibility of caregiving falls on the families, particularly aging parents who may face unique challenges in providing. Limited research has been conducted on aging parents as caregivers, despite their potential physical and psychological hardships (Fine, 2022). The literature suggests that parents caring for a child with a disability may encounter difficulties in maintaining their social lives and leisure activities due to their child's

dependence on them (Yoong & Koritsas, 2012), but they may also find a sense of purpose and fulfillment in caring for their child (Fine, 2022).

In this study, we found that faith played a significant role in the lives of Druze PCD across all age groups. Their faith provided a narrative that included accepting God's will, feeling chosen by God to be parents of a child with a disability, and viewing their parenthood as a divine gift. This aligns with previous research showing the central role of religious faith in the Druze community's acceptance of having a child with a disability (Halabi-Elshiekh, 2012). Similar findings were observed in the Israeli Arab community, where PCD expressed greater acceptance compared to Muslim and Christian parents (Mari et al., 1986). The strong religious faith in the Druze community emphasizes the belief in life after death and reincarnation, providing hope and optimism for parents. They believe that although their child may have challenges in this life, in the next life, their child may experience typical development (Mari et al., 1986).

The findings indicate that parents of young children (0–6) and adults (21+) believe that God chose them for the parenting role of a child with disabilities because of their strength and ability to handle the challenges. Their strong religious faith provides them with the strength they need in their parenthood journey. However, this belief was not expressed by parents of children (6–21). This difference may be attributed to the fact that parents of children (6–21) receive more social support and assistance from others in caregiving for their child, which may not emphasize the sense of being chosen to the same extent as in parents of children in other age groups.

We can also interpret the results through the lens of the conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989). In stressful experiences, individuals may both lose resources and gain resources. In the context of Druze PCD, religious faith appears to be enhanced through the challenging experience of parenting. This resource may help parents overcome the loss of resources, as demonstrated in the study, such as feelings of loneliness, occupational and financial challenges, and physical difficulties. The study by Waizbard-Bartov et al. (2019) highlights how parents raising children with autism spectrum disorder experience spiritual growth despite significant stressors, aligning with Hobfoll's conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989). Amidst challenges like navigating healthcare systems and daily routines, parents often find their personal resources depleted. However, the study shows that some parents experience growth in spiritual, emotional, and attitudinal dimensions. Specifically, some parents report a deepening of religious faith as a coping mechanism. Faith offers solace and meaning amidst the emotional strain of caregiving. It becomes a guiding force, providing comfort and reassurance.

One way in which parents of young children and adults utilized faith as a resource was through prayer. They expressed that prayer helps them to calm down during times of stress. This is consistent with other research that has

shown how parents with disabilities turn to prayer as an effective coping mechanism to deal with the stressors they face (Asa et al., 2021; Kara et al., 2021; Speraw, 2006).

When examining the effectiveness of faith as a coping mechanism, it becomes apparent that its impact can vary significantly depending on cultural, religious, and individual differences. Cultural and religious beliefs shape one's interpretation of faith and its role in coping with challenges, with practices and beliefs differing across communities (Lun & Bond, 2013; Oman, 2013).

Limitations and recommendations for future research

The current study has a few limitations that need to be taken into account. Firstly, this study included parents of children with a variety of disabilities, and it is possible that the role of faith as a resource may vary depending on the specific disability of the child. Therefore, future research should be conducted on specific disability populations, such as ID, ASD, and CP. Another limitation pertains to gender, as very few fathers participated in this study. It is well-documented that the parenting experience of children with disabilities differs between fathers and mothers (Boyd et al., 2019). Consequently, future research should focus on examining the role of religious faith in the parental experience of Druze fathers.

Implications for social work practice and policy

The findings of this study carry significant implications for the field of social work. Parents of adults (21+) appear to be at an increased risk of experiencing hardship, and thus targeted interventions should be developed for this specific population. Social workers can play a crucial role in the development and implementation of such interventions, facilitating access to resources and support systems that alleviate the challenges experienced by these families.

The peripheral areas seem to lack suitable work and leisure opportunities for individuals with disabilities, and parents also need access to appropriate social support, which could be facilitated through intervention programs or support groups for PCD. The identified lack of suitable work and leisure opportunities in peripheral areas for individuals with disabilities emphasizes the importance of policy initiatives and social work interventions aimed at creating inclusive environments. Social workers can advocate for policies that promote equal access to employment, education, and recreational activities for people with disabilities, contributing to the enhancement of their overall well-being.

Given the significant role that religious faith plays in how parents cope with the stressors and challenges of raising children with disabilities, it is important to involve religious leaders in these interventions. Social work professionals can collaborate with religious leaders to integrate faith-based resources into

intervention programs and support groups. This collaboration not only strengthens parents' religious faith as a coping resource but also has the potential to reduce societal stigma toward individuals with disabilities and their families.

Druze PCD face triple marginalization due to their disability, minority status, and living in the periphery. This intersectionality compounds the challenges they experience, as they lack sufficient attention in research and policy. The stigma associated with different cultures and disabilities further exacerbates their hardships, affecting their employment opportunities, access to healthcare, and education (Badran et al., 2022; Shaw et al., 2012). Social work practitioners must acknowledge and address the intersectionality of these challenges, advocating for the inclusion of Druze families in research, policy, and practice.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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