

RESEARCH ARTICLE		The Role of Positive Thinking in Improving Quality of Life for Families of Children with Special Needs	
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<b>Abstract</b>			
<p>Concern for the quality of life of families of children with special needs has become a modern trend in the field of psychology and special education, as a high or low quality of life in a family has a positive or negative impact on the child, either transforming them into an effective and productive individual or a complex, negative, and weak-willed individual in the future.</p> <p>Convinced of the importance of positive thinking in improving quality of life, particularly for families of children with special needs, we decided to shed light on this topic with a scientific contribution, where we seek and aim to provide a clearer understanding of the concepts of quality of life and positive thinking, as well as to clarify the importance of the latter, which is considered the fundamental key to achieving positive mental health and improving quality of life for families in general, and families of children with special needs in particular.</p>			
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## Introduction

The progress of nations and societies is measured by the quality of life of their individuals in general, and marginalized groups, such as the elderly, those with chronic illnesses, and the disabled and their families in particular, as the concept of quality of life is modern in the field of special education and social life, and it also expresses the extent of concern for all members of society and the achievement of their well-being.

We note here, that disability has a significant impact on the quality of life of families, as some families with children with disabilities or special needs experience life stress and anxiety and therefore need to understand this life in a positive light.

In a study conducted by (Craig and Swan, 2002), which aimed to examine the impact of having a child with a

disability in the family on the level of psychological stress among parents, the results indicated that parents of children with disabilities experience higher levels of stress than parents without children with disabilities. In another study conducted by Nora (Nora, 1991), she aimed to investigate the problems resulting from the presence of an autistic child in the family, where the results showed that families of children with autism have a high degree of depression and problems with social adaptation compared to other families.

No one denies the importance of positive thinking and its role in enhancing the quality of life, as training these families in positive thinking ensures their ability to deal with their child's disability and with life's issues and crises, and it is the gateway to enhancing mental health and improving their quality of life.

In this regard, (Hijazi, 2008) points out that dealing with various problems, obstacles, and negatives can only be practically resolved through positive thinking, which alone provides solutions and explores potential solutions, therefore, positive thinking is not merely a systematic approach, but also an orientation that mobilizes energies and extracts both apparent and latent resources to solve problems (Hijazi, 2005, p. 329).

Therefore, there is an urgent need to study the positive and specific aspects of positive thinking as a key to achieving positive mental health and improving the quality of life for families with children with disabilities, as positive thinking leads to a positive response to life's problems and challenges, and overcoming its hardships and difficulties, as well as it is a positive approach that mobilizes energies and draws on existing potential, and it also constitutes an effective treatment for maintaining morale and mental health.

In this regard, (Seligman, 2008) notes, "Developing positive personality traits is essential for a person, they constitute a strong, protective shield against stress and its negative consequences, these traits also play a role in stimulating happiness, and they are one of the best ways to achieve contentment and psychological well-being, overcome failure, endure hardship, and free oneself from the cruelty of the past" (Seligman, 2008, p. 8).

### **Study Problem:**

Given the importance and role of positive thinking in improving the quality of life of families of children with special needs, we decided to present this scientific contribution by posing the following question:

- What is the importance and role of positive thinking in improving the quality of life of families of children with special needs?

### **Importance of the Study:**

- This study contributes to providing researchers with specific information about the concepts of quality of life and positive thinking, the various dimensions of these two concepts, and the importance and role of positive thinking in developing and improving the quality of life for families, particularly families with children with disabilities.

- The importance of this study stems from the importance of the topic it addresses, namely positive thinking and its role in improving the quality of life for families of children with special needs.

### **Study Objectives:**

Through this study, we aim to:

- Provide a clear understanding of the concepts of both quality of life and positive thinking;

- Clarify the importance and role of positive thinking, which is the key to achieving positive mental health and improving the quality of life for families of children with special needs;

- The goal of our study of quality of life for families of children with special needs is to combat some of the negative effects that disability leaves on families, including isolation, shame, and fear, as we find educated families living a good economic life, yet they are unhappy because they have not reached the stage of acceptance and contentment, conversely, we find poor families who, despite their financial need, show acceptance of their child's condition.

### **Theoretical framework:**

#### **First: Positive Thinking:**

##### **1- Definition of Positive Thinking:**

There are many definitions of the term positive thinking, but they all focus on optimism, imagination, and the individual's willingness to solve problems, as well as ignoring destructive negative thoughts; We cite some of these definitions:

- Scheier and Carver's definition: "It is the individual's possession of convictions and beliefs that lead them to develop positive expectations for their future experiences, manifested in the selection and preference of a specific behavior" (Scheier et Carver, 1993, p. 26).

- Mohamed Khair Allah (2008) defines positive thinking as "a personal predisposition to positively anticipate events, and a hopeful outlook toward the future, which makes the individual more optimistic, anticipate good things to happen, and aspire to success" (Khair Allah, 2008, p. 508).

- Said Al-Raqeeb (2008) defines positive thinking as "having a good opinion of yourself, thinking well of others, and adopting the optimal lifestyle" (Said, 2008, p. 5).

In light of the above, we can define positive thinking as a way of thinking that an individual acquires through education and learning, by modifying negative thoughts about himself and others, which leads him to achieve successes in his life, which are reflected in the individual and society.

## 2- Positive Thinking Skills:

**2-1 Emotional Control and Mental Process Control:** Hassan Al-Ghanjari (2006) points out the possibility of increasing individuals' feelings of happiness by changing their lifestyle and misconceptions, and training them to manage their emotions and impulses. (Al-Ghanjari, 2006, p. 93)

**2-2 Optimism and Positive Expectations:** Optimism is the hope of achieving positive results despite the obstacles that stand in our way, as all it takes is the courage to be optimistic because it is our only option if we want to succeed and avoid dead ends, surrender, and negativity. (Vera, 2005, p. 29)

**2-3 Self-Acceptance:** This means that the individual knows themselves and the capabilities, cognitive, and behavioral processes that influence their actions, by identifying their strengths and weaknesses, allowing them to build their positions and decisions based on them.

**2-4 Perseverance:** Perseverance and seriousness are two characteristics of effective intelligence, where perseverance is defined as continuing to perform a task despite difficulties, regardless of the time and effort involved, if an individual lacks perseverance, the work will not be completed, and thus, it will not be perfect.

**2-5 Accepting Personal Responsibility:** Positive people do not cite a lack of time or make excuses. Rather, they dare to assume their responsibilities without hesitation, such individuals are models of success who help others succeed as well, achieving victory for themselves and those around them.

A positive mental attitude is closely linked to success in every area of life, as when individuals place themselves in a positive frame of mind, they not only feel better internally but—more importantly—also positively influence their surroundings because people prefer the company of happy, calm, and positive-minded individuals, which is reflected in the way people interact with them (Vera, 2008, p. 118).

## 3- The Importance of Positive Thinking:

The importance of positive thinking is embodied in an individual's response to changing their way of thinking; if an individual chooses to think positively, they can eliminate many unwanted feelings that may hinder them from achieving their best, therefore, positive mental thinking is closely linked to success in every area of life.

## 4- Obstacles to Positive Thinking:

- Weak belief in one's goal and one's positive beliefs.

- Previous programming: This refers to an individual's previous experiences, especially during the first seven years of life, where more than 90% of values are acquired from parents, family, school, and friends; If programming is negative, it severely impacts the individual in all aspects, including thinking.

- Lack of purpose: This refers to the lack of a specific goal in one's life, preventing one from utilizing their abilities and leading them to live in a state of loss.

- Fear of failure: This refers to the individual's feeling that if they attempt any action, they will inevitably fail.

- Echoes: This refers to the individual's self-talk, which bounces back to them like an echo of a voice.

- Internal influences: These are among the greatest challenges an individual faces in life, these are the challenges they face within themselves, which can impact their happiness and thinking.

- External influences: These can be among the most important factors in losing goals and negative thinking. An individual may be influenced by a friend, leading them to behave similarly, therefore, external influences, whether people, the media, or others, can be among the most significant obstacles to thinking.

- Living in the past: Especially if the individual has not learned from the past, they find themselves imprisoned in negative feelings that exist only in memory.
- Fear of confrontation: Refers to succumbing to pressure and the inability to confront it (Rowland, 2010, pp. 33-42).

## Second: Quality of Life:

### 1 - Definition of Quality of Life:

#### 1-1 Linguistic Definition:

Quality comes from the root word "excellence," which is the opposite of "bad," and something with quality, i.e., it becomes good (Ibn Mandhur, 1998, p. 720).

The interpretation of the word "quality" depends on the researcher's objective; if the researcher is seeking to evaluate the positive aspects of an individual's life, meaning whether the respondents rate their lives as good, the measurement tool used to collect information should be designed to assess the quality of life of the respondents, as the concept of "quality of life" has been adapted instead of "type of life" in the precise disciplines of psychology, both theoretical and applied, especially health psychology, positive psychology, and mental health.

#### 1-2 Terminological Definition:

The concept of quality of life is broad and complex, capable of several definitions, it can be said briefly that the concept of quality of life measures the level of satisfaction with the most important aspects of an individual's life, however, this definition remains largely relative; Below we review the most important definitions that address this concept:

- The World Health Organization (WHO, 1999) defines quality of life as an individual's perception of their life within the context of their society's cultural norms and values, and the level of relationship between achieving their goals and expectations according to their specific normative concepts. From another perspective, it is the process of integrating and integrating the individual's physiological and psychological health aspects, their level of independence, and their social relationships, and the relationship between these factors and the environmental events that may arise in the future.
- Carol Ryff defines it as a sense of well-being, represented by an individual's elevated status in themselves and their life in general, their independence in determining their life path, and their pursuit of successful and reciprocal social relationships with others, which is also linked to a general sense of happiness and reassurance (Ryff, 2006, p. 85).
- Reine et al. (2003) define it as an individual's sense of happiness and satisfaction in light of current life circumstances, as they are influenced by life events and changes in emotional intensity, where the link between objective and subjective quality of life assessments is influenced by the individual's insight (Reine et al., 2003, p. 297).
- Bognar (2005) defines quality of life as a representation of a person's overall well-being and the factors influencing their life in particular (Bognar, 2005, p. 561).

From the above, we conclude that most of the definitions provided are relatively consistent with the definition set by the World Health Organization and that despite the disparity and differences in arriving at a unified definition of the concept of quality of life, there is agreement that quality of life is a multidimensional and dynamic concept that is affected by various aspects and events in an individual's life.

### 2- Quality of Life Indicators:

Fallowfield (1990) identified quality of life indicators as follows:

- **Psychological indicators:** These are manifested in the individual's degree of anxiety and depression, ability to cope with illness, and feelings of happiness and satisfaction.
- **Social indicators:** These are evident through personal relationships and their quality, as well as the individual's participation in social and recreational activities.
- **Vocational indicators:** These are assessed by the individual's degree of satisfaction with and love for their profession, their ability to perform their job duties, and their ability to cope with their work obligations.
- **Physical indicators:** These include the individual's satisfaction with their health, coping with pain, ability to sleep, appetite, and sexual ability (Mansi and Kazem, 2010, p. 45).

### 3- Domains and dimensions of quality of life:

According to the World Health Organization, the domains and dimensions of quality of life are as follows:

**3-1 Physical health:** This includes energy, fatigue, comfort (discomfort), pain, sleep, and rest.

**3-2 Psychological health:** This includes body image and appearance, positive emotions, self-esteem, and responses (learning, memory, concentration).

**3-3 Level of Independence:** This includes mobility, daily activities, independence in treatment and medical assistance, and the ability to work.

**3-4 Social Relationships:** Personal relationships, social support, and sexual activity.

**3-5 Environment:** This includes resources and finances, freedom and security, health care, social assistance, and housing, learning ability, hobbies, the physical environment, pollution, noise, and climate.

**3-6 Spiritual Health:** This includes spirituality, religiosity, and personal beliefs.

### 4- Aspects of Quality of Life:

It includes several factors that must be present to achieve a good life, such as:

**4-1 Life Satisfaction:** According to the Psychology Dictionary, life satisfaction is the satisfaction of motivations and needs and the reduction of associated stress, as some researchers have used it as a synonym for quality of life, where satisfaction means comfort.

Satisfaction is represented by an individual's acceptance of themselves, satisfaction with their lifestyle and accomplishments, an optimistic outlook on life, and harmony with themselves and others; it represents positive indicators of feelings and attitudes that express an individual's conviction and satisfaction with their personal, social, economic, and professional capabilities, which are reflected in their positive or negative feelings.

**4-2 Meaning of Life:** The term meaning of life includes two main aspects:

- The first: refers to the individual's thoughts related to their personal experiences and interpretations of life events.
- The second: refers to the individual's goals and motivations (Asmaa and Mohsen, 2016, p. 393).

Therefore, the meaning of life is closely linked to the quality of life, as the more an individual feels his value and importance in society, the more others miss him, and the importance of his work, the greater his ability to innovate, develop, and plan successfully for life, which increases his sense of the quality of his life.

### 5- Quality of Life Challenges:

Many Challenges and obstacles prevent people from experiencing the quality of life, the most important of which are life pressures, a loss of a sense of meaning in life, a lack of religious devotion, the lack of comprehensive healthcare, the inability of many individuals to cope with various life situations, technological backwardness, and the lack of services provided to individuals.

### 6- Quality of Life for Families with Children with Autism:

The sense of quality of life is an important issue in the life of the individual in general and the life of the family in particular, as it is the starting point for many of the problems that families with a child with special needs may suffer from and complain about, because the individual's sense of a low quality of life often leads to numerous problems in their life, such as depression, social isolation, psychological loneliness, and anxiety.

In this regard, the study by Bowen et al. (2003) confirms that families with children with disabilities often experience physical and psychological distress or difficulty related to their care for their children, which affects their quality of life (Abd Allah, 2014, p. 492).

Another study conducted by Peralta and Arellano (2010) entitled: "Family and Disability", this study aimed to describe the experiences of some families of individuals with mental disabilities and to highlight their quality of life and the right to self-determination, where the study sample consisted of (4) families of children with mental disabilities; the study reached a set of results, the most important of which is that concerns about the future of their children are among the most important challenges facing and worrying these families, as the study also presented some suggestions regarding helping these families develop self-determination skills and improving their quality of life.

The presence of a child with a disability in a family increases family pressures and paves the way for a series of unbearable psychological worries and altered functioning, as their presence threatens the emotional stability of the family and places pressure on the parents and all family members in general, and it also impacts family adaptation,

resilience, and quality. Families with children with disabilities view life differently than others, and they exhibit symptoms of anxiety and psychological disturbances, we note here, that the quality of life for families with children with special needs is not the luxury some imagine, but rather lies in the extent of acceptance and satisfaction with the disabled child within the family.

### **7- The role of positive thinking in improving the quality of life for families of children with special needs:**

The importance of positive thinking in an individual's life lies in the fact that a positive person interprets situations of failure and inability to achieve goals as an opportunity for development and improvement, and feels optimistic and happy, meanwhile, a negative person interprets situations of success and achieving goals as an acquired right that has been delayed, and feels oppressed or wronged by the laws and the people around them.

A study by Rebecca (2003) and Edmeads (2004) found that a positive thinking pattern has a significant impact on increasing feelings of satisfaction and happiness, and learning various concepts; in this regard, Seligman (2002) says that developing positive traits and characteristics in the personality is essential for the human being, as they are a strong fortress against pressures and their negative results; these positive traits also have an important role in stimulating true happiness, as they are among the best ways to reach satisfaction and psychological happiness, overcome failure and anxiety, endure difficulties, and free the individual from the harshness of past experiences (Seligman, 2002, p. 8).

For families of children with special needs, positive thinking plays a significant role, as it is among the factors that facilitate successful acceptance, which in turn contributes to improving the quality of life for these families, where positive thinking corrects erroneous beliefs that may have previously reinforced the family's rejection of their child with a disability.

For instance, a study by William et al. (2002) conducted with parents of children with severe disabilities aimed to identify the role of positive thinking, specifically focusing on optimism and hope, as positive, effective, and robust strategies for managing psychological distress in their daily lives stemming from their children's disability, where the study's findings revealed that optimism and hope are positive and effective mechanisms for coping with stress. Both variables were found to be predictive of social desirability, reduced psychological distress, and lower stress levels associated with their children's severe disabilities, consequently enhancing the parents' quality of life (William et al., 2002, p. 441).

Similarly, another study by Cook (2010) investigated the impact of fostering optimism and hope on reducing stress and improving behaviors among a sample of mothers of children with intellectual disabilities, as the research concluded that higher levels of hope and optimism in these mothers correlated with lower levels of stress experienced by the families; furthermore, this increase was associated with improved behaviors directed towards their children with intellectual disabilities, evident in their caregiving practices and interaction styles.

Corroborating this perspective, Seligman emphasizes that individuals characterized by positive thinking possess traits enabling them to overcome failure and endure diverse challenges, as he posits that the positive attributes of such individuals act as a robust protective buffer against psychological stress, facilitating the endurance of hardships and the effective confrontation of life's problems, furthermore, Seligman asserts that positive thinkers exhibit a greater capacity for self-regulation, control, and flexibility when facing stressful life events, their enhanced understanding of the causes of such situations consequently increases their likelihood of addressing them effectively.

### **Conclusion:**

Training families of children with special needs in positive thinking ensures their ability to deal with life's issues and crises. It is the gateway to enhancing their mental health and improving their quality of life and the lives of their children, as positive thinking is a hidden power and a true asset for humans because it is the path to happiness through the individual's ability to predict and anticipate their positive abilities in all aspects of life.

Developing positive thinking skills among families of children with special needs is a powerful weapon that contributes to accepting the disabled child, thus achieving happiness and contentment, contributing to improving quality of life, and avoiding anxiety about the future.

### **Recommendations and Suggestions:**

- Organize training courses for families of children with special needs throughout the year to train them in practicing positive thinking and how to utilize these skills to improve their quality of life, as well as to help them overcome disability.
- Prepare a comprehensive guide that includes information and activities for training on practicing positive thinking skills among families of children with special needs.

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