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## The Effect of Parental Stress on Marital Quality in Parents of Children with Special Needs: The Mediating Role of Coping Styles

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### Abstract

The issue of family marital quality has always been one of the hot topics of research in the field of family. The family is the basic unit and primary environment for the growth and development of children, and the structural integrity of the family and the marital performance of parents affect the physical and psychological development of children. The presence of a disability event is a serious negative life issue and source of family stress for family life, which can exacerbate the family's life difficulties and marital difficulties. Therefore, exploring the influential mechanisms behind the marital quality of parents of children with special needs is meaningful to repair the couple relationship of parents of children with disabilities and improve the quality of life of families. This study is a cross-sectional study that focuses on the relationship between parenting stress, coping styles, and marital quality of parents of special children using a questionnaire survey of 234 parents of special children from Chongqing, Shandong, and Sichuan, China. The results of the study showed that the parenting stress of children with special needs significantly affected marital quality, and the coping styles adopted by parents of children with special needs significantly affected their marital quality. Parents' coping styles partially mediated the relationship between parental stress and marital quality, i.e., parental stress affected marital quality both directly and indirectly through social support. The results of this study broaden the understanding of the intrinsic relationship between parenting stress and marital quality and explain the mediating role of coping styles in their relationship. Based on the findings, parents with special needs children should first adopt a positive coping style when facing parenting stressful events and marital problems, change self-perceptions of the events, and enhance their emotion regulation skills in order to reduce parenting stress and improve marital quality. At the same time, this study provides solid theoretical and practical implications for families of special needs children, social workers and policy makers.

**Keywords:** Parents of Children with Special Needs, Parenting Stress, Coping Styles, Marital Quality.

### Research background

Since the 21st century, the divorce rate of Chinese people has continued to rise, and modern marriages are full of dissatisfaction and instability, and China has entered the "divorce era" (Li & Lu, 2022), with divorce becoming a common phenomenon (Sharay, 2015). The high divorce rate has changed the traditional cultural concept of marriage in China and has had an incalculable negative impact on society and families. The family is an irreplaceable relationship structure, and the stability of marriage is an important indicator of the harmonious development of society (Ji et al., 2023). The family is the basic unit and primary environment for children's growth and development, and the integrity of the family structure, the harmony of the family atmosphere, and the emotional and marital performance of the parents all implicitly influence the physical and psychological development of children. The family function theory suggests that the family has two main functions: first, it promotes the socialization of the child and makes the child a member of society; second, it promotes the stability of the child's personality, mental health and behavior.

Once the family structure and parents' marital status change, it will have a serious negative impact on children's development. Numerous studies have proven that the presence of a disabling event is a serious negative life issue for family life. The occurrence of a disability event becomes a major cause of marital difficulties and increased divorce rates in families with disabilities. Compared to parents of ordinary children, parents of children with special needs have a shrinking circle of friends and much less leisure time because of child care, which, combined with social discrimination and disapproval, creates more conflict and contradiction between couples, resulting in emotional damage and elevated divorce rates. Marital difficulties not only affect the quality of children's education, but also negatively impact the parents' own physical and mental health and professional development. Some studies point out that the divorce rate of parents of children with special needs is higher than that of parents of ordinary children, and that 70% of parents of children with disabilities in the United States choose to divorce, a divorce rate that is 50% of the divorce rate of the general population. In a study of the marital quality of parents of children with special needs in China, Xue and Lin (2013) concluded that the marital quality of parents of children with special needs was significantly lower than that of parents of normal children. Therefore, paying attention to the increasingly prominent marital problems of parents of children with special needs and exploring the influential mechanisms behind the marital quality of parents of children with special needs are important for repairing the marital relationship of parents of children with disabilities and improving the quality of life of families with children with disabilities (Guan et al., 2019), stabilize China's existing developmental achievements and maintain long-term developmental vitality are of great significance.

In recent years, the issue of family marital quality has been one of the hot topics of research in the field of family. Domestic and international studies have found that among the many factors influencing parents' marital quality, parental stress has received much attention. Numerous studies have indicated that perceived parental stress of parents of children with disabilities is significantly and negatively related to marital quality, i.e., higher parental stress is associated with lower marital quality, leading to increased divorce rates in marital status (Gordon & Hinshaw, 2017) and increased negative affect and conflict in couples (Weitlauf et al., 2014), among other aspects. However, literature studies have found less research on the relationship between parenting stress and marital quality among parents of children with special needs in the Chinese context in the field of family studies, and therefore, it is worth exploring further in depth. Therefore, this study explores the relationship between

parental stress and marital quality of parents of children with special needs in the Chinese context and its intrinsic influencing mechanisms in order to promote the stable development of families with children with special needs.

### **Literature Review and Research Hypothesis**

#### *Marital quality and parental stress*

The term "marital quality" was first introduced by the American sociologist Hamilton in 1929, and later Klein suggested the term "marital quality" instead of "marital adjustment" in 1973. "Karney and Bradbury (1995) suggest that marital quality is an individual's experience and perception of their marriage, such as an assessment of the level of satisfaction with the relationship, which is equivalent to the level of marital satisfaction. Basharpour and Sheykhholeslami (2015) proposed that marital quality is the self-perception and experience of married people about their marital status, which is the basis for the normal functioning of the family, and that good marital relationships can reflect the quality of life and family functioning to a certain extent. Parenting stress refers to the parenting pressure felt by parents in their parent-child system, which can be influenced by many of the parents' own personal characteristics, the child's own traits, the parent-child relationship, the family's economic status, social support, and other factors that lead to various blockages in the parenting process (Guan et al., 2019; Barroso et al., 2018). The occurrence of children with special needs not only brings pain and harm to themselves, but also has a serious impact on their families. Due to the deficiencies and inadequacies of children with special needs in several areas, their parents are under tremendous pressure to help their children improve their motor, intellectual, behavioral, language and social adaptation skills and enhance their children's overall physical and mental development, resulting in changes in the family environment and affecting the marital happiness of couples to the extent that their marital cohesion and marital happiness are low compared to parents of normal children and their marriages are more likely to break up. These life events exacerbate the stress that parents experience from child rearing. At the same time, the problem of parents of children with special needs who lack special education expertise and rehabilitation skills to handle parenting tasks has become increasingly prominent. A study conducted by Narkunam et al (2014) in Malaysia found that parents of children with ADHD had significantly higher levels of stress. Kamaruddin et al (2017) In a stress survey of 120 parents of children with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) in Malaysia, it was concluded that 69 (57.5%) of the parents were experiencing high levels of stress. Huang (2006), a scholar from Taiwan, China, concluded that parental stress was significantly and negatively related to marital quality in a survey of job stress, intimate affect, and conflict coping strategies among 200 mothers of children with mental and physical disabilities in Taiwan Province, i.e., the higher the stress level of parents of children with mental and physical disabilities, the lower the marital quality of their couples. Hosseinkhanzadeh et al (2013) concluded in a comparative study of parents of children with intellectual disabilities and parents of deaf children with parents of normal children that the birth of a child with disabilities is the main stress and stressor for parents, and that excessive stress will lead to serious psychological problems for parents and more couples' conflict and dissatisfaction. This is a major cause of reduced psychological health of couples and damaging marital relationships. Brien-Bérard and Rivières-Pigeon (2022) found that parents raising children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) have been found to experience higher levels of stress and to face more challenges in the marital relationship than other parents. Thus, this

study hypothesized that parenting stress of parents of exceptional children negatively predicts their marital quality.

As the research on the relationship between parental stress and marital quality keeps growing, some researchers have found that parental stress not only affects marital quality directly, but also indirectly through other factors, such as personality Hou (2012), attributional style (Davey et al., 2001; Fincham & Bradbury, 1991), social support Yang (2017), and others. These studies suggest that there are yet other factors that can explain the mechanism of influence of parenting stress on marital quality, and coping style is one of them. The concept of coping styles has a long history, and Xie (1998) argued that coping styles are specific coping strategies expressed in the coping process following cognitive appraisals, with positive coping based on positive cognitive appraisals and negative coping based on negative cognitive appraisals. The reasons for considering coping styles as a potential mediating variable between parenting stress and marital quality in this study are as follows. First, stressful events are inevitable in marital relationships. The results of questionnaires by Turkish scholars show that when facing stress, the better the quality of marriage will be when individuals feel more positive responses from their partners in the marriage (Yedirir & Hamarta, 2015). Second, McCubbin and McCubbin (1988) resilience model of family stress adjustment and adaptation, based on the dual ABCX model, provides a theoretical basis for the impact of coping styles on marital quality. The theory suggests that the factors that have a greater impact on the construct of family psychological adjustment resilience are crisis assessment, family resources, family values, family adjustment type, social support, and family schema. According to McCubbin, family schema is the key to assessing marital satisfaction. Stressful events first change the family's existing family schema, and the family then uses its own resources, social support, and consistency to develop a new schema, and the new family schema determines whether the family is able to overcome the crisis, maintain marital stability, and improve marital quality when facing a crisis. The theory points out that positive and restorative factors have positive significance in improving marital quality and maintaining marital stability (Yang, 2017). Based on the above analysis, this study hypothesized that: positive coping styles of parents of children with special needs positively predicted their marital quality and negative coping styles of parents of children with special needs negatively predicted their marital quality; in addition, coping styles partially mediated the relationship between parenting stress and marital quality.

In summary, the main purpose of this study was to examine the mediating effect of coping styles in the relationship between their parenting stress and marital quality, using parents of children with special needs as the study population. This study has a dual contribution at the theoretical and practical levels. On the one hand, this study tests the resilience model of family stress adjustment and adaptation, which helps to explain the way parenting stress affects marital quality from a theoretical perspective. On the other hand, this study's examination of the mediating effect of coping styles is beneficial to provide theoretical basis and support for how to adjust coping styles to improve the marital quality of parents of children with special needs, help society transform its focus perspective to enhance services for families with children with special needs, help social workers clearly understand the influencing mechanism of marital quality of parents of children with special needs, and provide theoretical basis and support for psychological counseling, family care and guidance for parents of children with special needs. In turn, it provides practical insights for enhancing family well-being.



## Research Method

In this study, the questionnaire method was used to study and analyze the current situation of parental stress, coping styles, and marital quality of parents of special children and their relationships.

Questionnaire survey method. The article mainly distributes questionnaires to parents of children with special needs and conducts surveys. The survey was conducted on a one-to-one basis, with the investigator explaining the purpose of the survey, the content and questions of the questionnaire to the research subjects, and adopting the principle of voluntarism to fill in and collect on the spot.

Statistical analysis of data SPSS 22.0 statistical software was used to process and analyze the data. The t-test, one-way ANOVA, multi-way ANOVA, Pearson's correlation analysis, and multiple regression analysis were used to complete the hypothesis model validation.

### Study subjects

With the consent of the relevant school and institution directors and student guardians, the researcher used a convenience sampling method to select 270 parents of special children in 13 special education schools and institutions mainly in Shandong Province, Chongqing City and Sichuan Province to participate in the questionnaire survey, and a total of 234 valid questionnaires were obtained after excluding 36 invalid questionnaires, with a valid recovery rate of 86.6%. Among them, 90 were fathers (38.50%) and 144 were mothers (61.50%); 60 (25.60%) were educated in elementary school or below. 99 people (42.3%) in junior high school, 53 people (22.6%) in high school, 22 people (9.40%) in bachelor's degree or above; 118 people (50.4%) were not employed, 116 people (49.6%) were employed; 16 people (6.80%) were aged 20-30, 105 people (51.70%) were aged 31-40, 96 people (41.00%) were aged 41-50, and 51 above 17 (7.30%); 212 people (90.6%) were first married, 8 people (3.4%) were separated, 12 people (5.1%) were divorced, and 2 people (0.9%) were widowed; 122 people (52.10%) had a monthly household income of less than 2,000 yuan, 56 people (23.9%) had a monthly income of 2,000-3,999 yuan, 42 people (17.9%) had a monthly income of 4,000-5,999 yuan, and 14 (6.0%) were above RMB 6000.

### Research Instruments

The questionnaire of this study is divided into three main parts: The Parenting Stress Scale, the Coping Style Scale, and the Chinese Marital Quality Scale.

#### Short Form of Parenting Stress Indicators

In this study, the short-form parental stress indicator short form scale translated by Taiwanese scholar Ren (1995) was used. The scale has 36 questions divided into 3 sub-dimensions, each with 12 questions each. (i) The parental worries dimension, with questions numbered 1-12, describes parental worries, role bondage, social isolation, and poor relationship between husband and wife, etc. The higher the score of this dimension, the more worries they feel about their parental roles and the higher the relative parental stress. (ii) Dysfunctional parent-child interaction dimension, with questions numbered 13-23 and 34, which describes the relationship situation of parent-child interaction, positive reinforcement given by children to parents, and attachment. Higher scores on this dimension indicate a poorer parent-child relationship and higher relative parenting stress. (iii) The difficult child dimension, with questions numbered 24-33 and 35-36, includes questions about the child's adjustment, needs, emotions, attention and activity level. Higher scores on this dimension indicate more traits that parents find difficult to care for in their children and higher relative parenting stress.

This scale is a five-point Likert scale in which the child's parents respond based on whether the situation described in the question matches the reality of the situation for themselves or their child. It is scored in reverse order. The scale consists of "strongly agree", "agree", "unsure", "disagree", "strongly disagree", and "disagree", "Strongly disagree" were scored as 5, 4, 3, 2, and 1 respectively. The total score of each dimension is 60, and the total score of the scale is 180. Parental stress can be divided into the following levels: equal to and below 85 as normal stress level, 86-90 as critical high level, 91-98 as high level, and equal to or more than 99 as very high level. The Chinese version of the scale has been widely used in China, and the internal consistency of the scale is 0.924, which has good reliability.

### *Coping Style Scale*

This scale was developed by Xie (1998) and is divided into 2 dimensions, including 20 questions. The first dimension: positive coping: consists of questions 1-12. The higher a parent's score on this dimension, the more positive coping he or she adopts when facing difficulties and frustrations in life. The second dimension: the negative coping dimension: consists of questions 13-20. The higher the parent's score on this dimension, the more negative coping the parent has in the face of difficulties and frustrations. The questionnaire is a self-assessment scale, which the participant chooses to answer according to his or her own situation. The scale was rated on a 4-point scale, ranging from "do not use", "occasionally use", "sometimes use" to "often use", with scores of 0, 1, 2 and 3, respectively. The total score of the positive coping dimension was 36, and the total score of the negative coping dimension was 24. Reliability and validity analysis: The Alpha value of the scale ranged from 0.78 to 0.90, and the retest reliability was 0.89, indicating that the scale has good reliability and validity.

### *Chinese Marital Quality Questionnaire*

This questionnaire was developed by Cheng et al. (2004) on the basis of interview and consultation and according to the actual situation in China. There are ninety questions in the questionnaire and each question is scored on a five-point scale of 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 respectively. The questionnaire consists of 10 dimensions. The retest correlation, split-half correlation and a-coefficient of the total score of the questionnaire were 0.852, 0.899 and 0.925, respectively. The internal consistency coefficient of the questionnaire was high, and the structural and empirical validity were ideal, which met the criteria of psychology and were commonly used in China.

## **Research Results**

### *Test for common method biases*

In this study, the measures of parental stress, coping styles and marital quality of special children were answered by their parents, and there is a possibility of common method bias. Therefore, during the data collection process, two steps were taken to control and test for common method bias according to the recommendations of related studies (Zhou & Long, 2004). First, controls were made in terms of measurement procedures, such as using anonymous methods for measurement. Second, after data collection, Harman's one-way test was conducted to test for common method bias in the independent and dependent variables. All variables of parenting stress, coping style, and marital quality were put into one exploratory factor analysis to test the results of the unrotated factor analysis. The results showed that the factor analysis extracted a total of 38 factors with a characteristic root greater than 1. The variance explained by the first common factor was 17.366%, and there

were no cases where only one factor or a factor explained more than 40% (Tang&Wen,2020). Therefore, there is no significant common method bias in the data of this study.

Descriptive statistics and correlation analysis

The researcher used SPSS 22.0 software for descriptive statistical analysis of the data. The means, standard deviations, and correlation coefficient matrix for each variable in the study are shown in Table 1. Parenting stress of parents of children with special needs was significantly and significantly negatively correlated with positive coping style and marital satisfaction ( $r=-0.201$ ,  $p<0.01$ ;  $r=-0.411$ ,  $p<0.01$ ) and positively correlated with negative coping style ( $r=-0.146$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). Marital satisfaction had a significant positive relationship with positive coping style ( $r=0.317$ ,  $p<0.01$ ) and a significant negative relationship with negative coping style ( $r=-0.249$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). The results indicated that the significance level was reached between all variables. Hypothesis H1 was initially tested.

Table 1

*Means, standard errors and correlation coefficients of each study variable (N=234)*

Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4
Parenting stress	103.32	22.11	1			
Positive coping	19.79	6.26	-0.201**	1		
Negative coping	9.18	4.38	0.146*	0.186**	1	
Marital quality	60.08	15.30	-0.411**	0.317**	-0.249**	1

Notes : \*  $p<0.05$  \*\*  $p<0.01$

Predictive role of parenting stress and coping style of special children's parents on marital quality

To further examine the predictive effect of total parental stress score and its dimensions, and two dimensions of coping style on marital quality. A stepwise multiple regression analysis was conducted to investigate whether parental stress and coping style were predictive of marital quality, using total parental stress score and its dimensions and coping style dimensions as independent variables and marital quality as dependent variables. The results of the regression analysis are shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2

*Stepwise multiple regression table of parental stress and coping styles of parents of children with special needs on marital quality*

Order of input variables	R	R <sup>2</sup>	( $\Delta R^2$ )	F	( $\Delta F$ )	B	( $\beta$ )
Constants						73.606	
1. Parental sorrow	0.396	0.157	0.153	57.316**	43.193**	-0.529	-0.319
2.Positive coping	0.467	0.218	0.071	45.931**	32.237**	0.76	0.311
3.Negative coping	0.544	0.296	0.077	41.766**	32.175**	-0.994	-0.285

Notes : \*  $p<0.05$  \*\*  $p<0.01$

In Table 2 of the above stepwise multiple regression analysis, it can be found that three of the five predictor variables have significant predictive power for "marital satisfaction", in the order of "parental sadness", "positive coping", and "negative coping". " and "negative coping". The multivariate correlation coefficient between the three predictor variables and "marital quality" was 0.544,  $R^2 = 0.296$ , and the F-value of the final regression model holistic



test was 41.766 ( $p=0.000<0.001$ ). Thus, the three variables could explain 29.6% of the variance of "marital satisfaction".

In terms of the predictive power of each variable, the highest predictive variable of "marital quality" was "parental distress", which explained 15.3% of the variance. The next strongest predictor was "negative coping", which explained 7.7% of the variance. Lastly, "positive coping" explained 7.1% of the variance. From the standardized regression coefficients, the  $\beta$  values of the three predictor variables in the regression model are -0.319, 0.311, and -0.285, respectively. The  $\beta$  value of positive coping is positive, indicating that its effect on "marital quality" is positive. The  $\beta$  values of parental sadness and negative coping are negative, indicating that their effects on "marital quality" are negative. Therefore, the research hypothesis H2 is valid.

### The Mediation Effect Test of Coping Style

The prerequisite of the mediation effect test is to analyze the correlation between parental stress, coping style and marital quality, and if all three correlations are significant, then the mediation effect test can be conducted, otherwise the mediation effect test cannot be conducted. There is a significant correlation between the three variables in this study, therefore, following the standard procedure of mediating effect test (Wen et al., 2004), hierarchical regression analysis was used to explore the mediating role of coping style between parental stress and marital quality. Hierarchical regression analysis was used to explore the mediating role of coping styles between parenting stress and marital quality. An intermediate variable is an intermediate variable M between the independent variable X and the dependent variable Y. That is, if X influences Y through the influence variable M, then M is said to be the mediating variable (Wen et al., 2004). The normalized path of the relationship between the independent variable X, the mediating variable M and the dependent variable Y is detailed

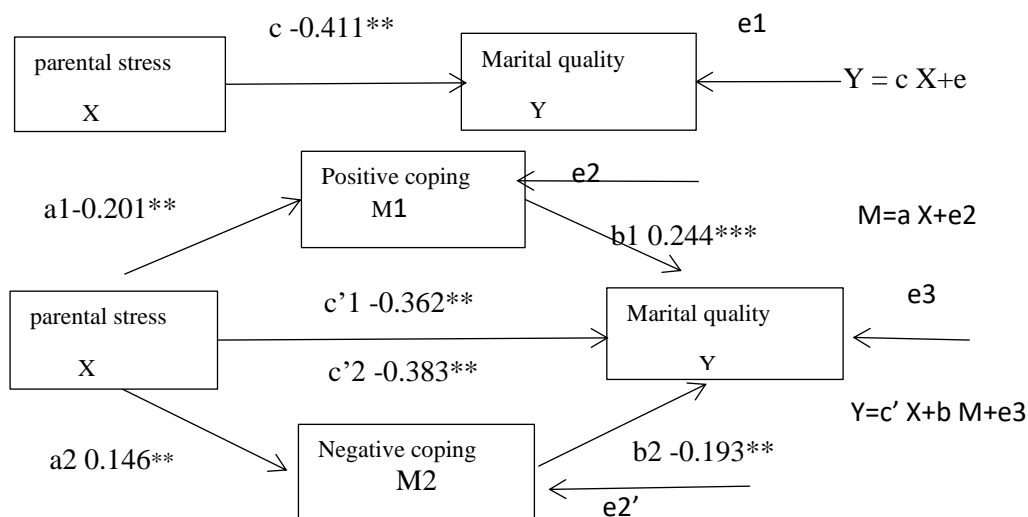


Figure 1. Path model of mediating effects of coping styles. Note: \* $p<0.05$ , \*\* $p<0.01$ , \*\*\* $p<0.001$ . All coefficients are standardized.

### Testing the mediating effect of positive coping style

In order to investigate the mediating effect of positive coping style between parental stress and marital quality, firstly, the independent, dependent and mediating variables were

centralized and a hierarchical regression analysis was conducted. In the first step, regression analysis of parental stress on marital satisfaction was made with parental stress as the independent variable and marital satisfaction as the dependent variable. In the second step, regression analysis of parental stress on positive coping was conducted with parental stress as the independent variable and positive coping as the dependent variable. In the third step, using parental stress and positive coping as independent variables and marital quality as dependent variables, make a regression analysis of parental stress and positive coping on marital satisfaction.

Table 3

*Regression analysis of positive coping style between parental stress and marital satisfaction*

		R	R <sup>2</sup>	(ΔR <sup>2</sup> )	F	β	t
Step 1	Parental Stress	0.411	0.169	0.165	47.124**	-0.411	-6.865**
Step 2	Parental Stress	0.201	0.04	0.036	9.754**	-0.201	-3.123**
Step 3	Parenting Stress	0.475	0.226	0.219	33.736**	-0.362	-6.124**
	Positive coping					0.244	4.133***

Notes : \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ .

Table 4

*Mediating effect test of positive coping style*

	Standardized regression equation	Regression coefficient test
Step 1	$Y = -0.411x$	$T = -6.865^{***}$
Step 2	$m = -0.201x$	$T = -3.123^{**}$
Step 3	$Y = -0.362x + 0.244m$	$T = -6.124^{***}$
		$T = 4.133^{***}$

Notes : \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ .

As shown in Tables 3 and 4 above, in the first step, the regression coefficient is significant, and there is a significant negative relationship between parental stress and marital quality. In the second step, the regression coefficient of parental stress on positive coping style is significant, and there is a significant negative relationship between parental stress and positive coping style. When positive coping style is added in the third step, the regression coefficient of parental stress on marital quality is still significant and lower compared to the regression coefficient in the first step. It can be judged that the mediating variable positive coping style plays a partially mediating role, the mediating effect value is  $-0.049$ , and the contribution of the mediating effect to the total effect is  $\text{Effect } M = ab/c = -0.201 \times 0.244 / (-0.411) = 11.9\%$ , that is, parental stress not only affects marital quality through positive coping style, but also plays a direct role on marital quality. Therefore, in the present study, positive coping styles played a partially mediating role between parental stress and marital quality. On the one hand, parental stress has a direct negative effect on marital quality, i.e., the higher the level of parental stress, the lower the marital quality; on the other hand, parental stress has an indirect negative effect on marital quality, i.e., the higher the level of parental stress, the lower the level of positive coping, resulting in a lower level of marital quality.

*Testing the mediating effect of negative coping styles*

In order to investigate the mediating effect of negative coping style between parental stress and marital quality, firstly, the independent variable, dependent variable and mediating variable were centralized and a hierarchical regression analysis was conducted. In the first step, regression analysis of parental stress on marital quality was made with parental stress as the independent variable and marital quality as the dependent variable. In the second step, the regression analysis of parental stress on negative coping was made with parental stress as the independent variable and negative coping as the dependent variable. In the third step, the regression analysis of parental stress and negative coping on marital satisfaction was made with parental stress and negative coping as the independent variables and marital quality as the dependent variable. The results are shown in Table 5 and Table 6 below.

Table 5

*Regression analysis of negative coping styles between parental stress and marital satisfaction*

	R	R <sup>2</sup>	ΔR <sup>2</sup>	F	β	t
Step 1 Parental Stress	0.411	0.169	0.165	47.124**	-0.411	-6.865**
Step 2 Parental Stress	0.146	0.021	0.017	5.066**	0.146	2.251*
Step 3 Parenting Stress	0.453	0.205	0.198	29.844**	-0.383	-6.454**
Negative coping					-0.193	-3.258**

Notes : \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ .

Table 6

*Tests for mediating effects of negative coping styles*

	Standardized regression equation	Regression coefficient test
Step 1	$Y = -0.411x$	$T = -6.865^{***}$
Step 2	$m = 0.146x$	$T = 2.251^*$
Step 3	$Y = -0.383x - 0.193m$	$T = -6.454^{***}$ $T = -3.258^{**}$

Notes : \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ .

From the data in Tables 5 and 6 above, it can be seen that the regression coefficient of parental stress on marital satisfaction in the first step is significant, and there is a statistically significant difference between parental stress and marital quality, with a significant negative relationship. In the second step, the regression coefficient of parental stress on negative coping is significant and there is a significant positive relationship between parental stress and negative coping. When positive coping style is added in the third step, the regression coefficient of parental stress on marital satisfaction is still significant and decreases compared to the regression coefficient in the first step. It can be judged that the mediating variable negative coping style plays a partly mediating role, the value of mediating effect is  $-0.028$ , and the contribution of mediating effect to the total effect is  $\text{Effect } M = ab/c = 0.146 \times -0.193 / (-0.411) = 6.8\%$ , that is, parental stress not only affects marital satisfaction through negative coping style, but also plays a direct role on marital satisfaction. Therefore, in this study, negative coping style plays a partly mediating role between parental stress and marital satisfaction. On the one hand, parental stress has a direct negative effect on marital quality, i.e., the higher the level of parental stress, the lower the marital quality; on the other hand,

parental stress has an indirect negative effect on marital quality, i.e., the higher the level of parental stress, the higher the level of negative coping, resulting in a lower level of marital quality. Therefore, the research hypothesis H3 is valid.

## Discussion

Parenting stress and coping styles of special children's parents significantly affect their marital quality

Parenting stress and marital quality in this study appeared to be significantly negatively correlated. This indicates that the more parents of children with special needs feel the stress of parenting sorrow, parent-child dysfunction, and difficult child dimensions in the process of raising their children, the more conflicts between their couples, the weaker their marital relationships, and the lower the quality of their marriages. The birth of a special child has many effects on the family. First of all, the special child brings psychological pressure to the parents. Parents of a special child are under great pressure in terms of parenting sorrow, dysfunctional parent-child interaction and difficult children, and often show bad psychological states such as worry, depression, depression and sadness (Lecavalier et al., 2006), and the psychological problems of parents of special children are the main reason for the divorce of couples (Wang, 2014). The second is role pressure. On the one hand, parents have to take care of their children, and on the other hand, they have to deal with the chores of family life, which reduces their time for social interpersonal interaction, limits the development of personal interests, reduces the time for leisure and recreation, and decreases the frequency of interaction with society, leading to an increase in mutual blame and complaints between couples, and hurts the relationship between couples. Finally, there is educational and medical pressure. Due to the limitations of educational and medical capabilities, the deficiencies and inadequacies of special children's emotional, behavioral, cognitive, emotional, linguistic and other aspects of their abilities cannot be completely cured, leading to arguments between couples over education and medical care, escalating conflicts between couples, and decreasing marital satisfaction and happiness.

There was a partial mediating effect of coping style between parental stress marital quality. And the positive coping mediating effect was stronger than the negative coping mediating effect. Wu (2011) concluded from a survey of 706 married individuals in Henan Province, China, that positive and effective coping styles play an important role in couples' marital quality and can positively predict the level of marital quality. Qin (2012) showed that negative coping styles negatively predicted marital quality, i.e., the more negative coping styles parents adopted in the face of marital difficulties, the lower the marital quality. By collecting marital data from 4,626 adult subjects over a five-year period, American scholar Rauer et al. in 2014 found that positive behavioral interactions between couples had a positive predictive effect on marital satisfaction. This means that the more positive coping styles parents adopt when facing difficulties in their marriage, the higher the quality of the marriage.

Kamaruddin & Mamat (2015) in a study investigating parental stress among 110 children with learning disabilities in Tanjung Malim District, Perak, Malaysia, it was found that religion was a common coping resource used by parents to relieve emotional stress. Therefore, positive coping styles often used in the face of stress and problems in marital life, such as communicating with others, participating in recreational activities, emotional catharsis, religious prayer, etc. can help relieve stress and resolve marital difficulties. The negative ways

of coping often adopted in life and avoiding when facing problems in marriage will only complicate the problem and make it more difficult to solve.

Parenting stress of parents of extraordinary children affects their marital quality through coping styles

Both positive and negative coping styles partially mediated the effect between parenting stress and marital quality. This is consistent with the findings of (Chen, 2017). The results support the resilience model of family stress adjustment and adaptation, in which coping styles buffer the impact of stressful events on family schemas, thus ensuring family stability. Coping style is an automatic way of response that individuals develop for a long time when they encounter stress and problems, which is closer to individual personality traits than parenting stress, and it has a more stable and profound effect on the subjective well-being of parents of disability children. Parents of children with disabilities in this study face behavioral problems with their children with special needs, life adjustment problems, curriculum and instructional adjustments, and other external environmental stressors, and these stressful practices constantly challenge the balances of the parents' physical and emotional feelings. The parents of the children with disabilities in this study were confronted with behavioral problems, life adjustment problems, curriculum and instructional adjustments, and other external environmental stressors that constantly challenged the parents' balance of physical and emotional feelings. If parents of children with special needs can change their perceptions of stressful events, their receptors for judging stress will change. The positive coping approach helps to alleviate negative effects such as stress and distressing emotions caused to individuals by the task of parenting special children. It helps individuals to seek social support and solutions to their problems, which can increase their subjective well-being. Negative coping styles can increase the stress and nervousness that individuals feel as a result of parenting tasks. These negative effects may allow themselves to dwell on negative emotions and lead to a decrease in their feelings of positive emotions at work and in life, which can lead to lower levels of marital well-being.

### **Conclusions**

In summary, the results of this study not only support the resilience model of family stress adjustment and adaptation for marital quality, but bring important insights for the practice of improving the marital quality of parents of special children: when parents of special children face parenting stressful events and marital problems, they should first change their self-perceptions of the events, enhance their emotion regulation ability, and adjust their stress coping style. In this process, issues such as how to organize social resources to help carry out family education and psychological counseling for disabilities family, and to build support and guarantee mechanisms for families, communities, hospitals, rehabilitation training institutions, and society as a whole need to be addressed by further research. It is worth noting that the subjects of this study are mainly parents of children with five types of disorder: autism, cerebral palsy, intellectual disability, deafness, and visual disorder, but there are many other types of disorder that are not covered. Also, this study only studied parents of children with special needs and lacked a control group for the study of normal children's parents. The number of interviewees was too small and did not involve parents of children with all types of impairment. The interviewees were mainly mothers, while in fact the current marital quality of special children's parents in China varies widely in terms of children's disorder types, parental gender, and regions. Future research is still needed with parents of children from different geographic areas, different school segments, and different types of



handicaps, in order to explore the relationship between the variables and the influencing factors in more depth.

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