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An Exploration of Discrepancy Between Global and Situational Meaning in Parents Raising a Child with a Disability

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to examine whether the global and situational meaning of parents raising a child with a disability, as well as the possible meaning discrepancy, can explain the psychological distress they are likely to experience, according to the Meaning Making Model. To this end, 186 parents of children with disabilities were tested with questionnaires measuring global and situational meaning, meaning discrepancy, and psychological distress. Results showed that parents reported moderately high levels of global meaning (beliefs $M = 3.48$, goals $M = 4$ and presence of meaning $M = 5.34$) and situational meaning ($M = 3.21$), moderate levels of global and situational meaning discrepancy ($M = 2.75$), and moderate to low levels of psychological distress ($M = 1.62$). Their distress was explained by dimensions of global and situational meaning but not by the discrepancy between them. The results of the study highlight the importance of global and situational meaning in buffering the distress of parents raising a child with a disability. Mental health professionals can include a meaning-centred approach in their counselling interventions with these parents to help them view the disability as a manageable and controllable situation and, thus, reduce the level of distress they may experience.

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Meaning in life; meaning making model; disability; parenting; psychological distress

In recent years, the concept of meaning in life has been the subject of increased theoretical and research interest, as meaning-making in the presence of serious life events is considered a valuable dimension for coping with them (Vohs et al., 2019). The birth of a child with a disability is a big challenge in the life of a family (Isa et al., 2016). Previous research has shown that having a child with a disability is likely to result in a psychological burden (Al-Farsi et al., 2016) that has serious and long-lasting effects on the family (Pousada et al., 2013). Other studies, however, have shown that parents report moderate (Arai et al., 2024; Platsidou et al., 2021) or even high levels of various forms of subjective well-being (Olsson & Hwang, 2006). Parents' acceptance of their child's disability is influenced, among other factors, by their own sense of meaning in life (Park & Gutierrez, 2013). The degree of acceptance varies according to their coping strategies (Fritz & Sewell-Roberts, 2020; Micheal et al., 2018) and adaptation outcomes, such as family satisfaction (Kalgota & Warwal, 2014; Yilmaz, 2019).

It has been argued that individuals who experience stressful events or challenging situations, such as parents raising a child with a disability, attempt to create a worldview that progressively incorporates the experience of the stressful event or challenge (Lachnit et al., 2020; Stefer, 2022). Several models have been proposed to explain meaning-making, one of which is the Meaning Making Model, based on a growing body of research on an individual's response to adversity (George & Park, 2016a; Park, 2022; Park & Folkman, 1997; Park et al., 2012). According to the theoretical principles of this meaning-making framework (Park, 2010), in the case of parents who give birth to a child with a disability, their global meaning (i.e. general orienting systems consisting of beliefs, goals, and subjective feelings of meaning or purpose) and situational meaning of the event (i.e. their appraised meaning of the disability) may come into discrepancy. This discrepancy, in turn, may generate distress to parents, which may take the form of anxiety or depression, as well as intense motivation to reduce discrepancy through the activation of meaning-making processes aiming to (re)create meaning which will incorporate the child's disability (Park, 2013). Depending on the severity, distress may affect their ability to cope with the child's difficulties and the family's overall needs, and consequently, their adaptation to the challenging situation (the child's disability).

The present study seeks to explore whether the discrepancy between global and situational meaning experienced by parents of pre-school-aged children recently diagnosed with a disability contributes to psychological distress. By examining all components of meaning as outlined in the Meaning Making Model, the study aims to shed light on the processes through which parents interpret and adapt to their child's disability. The findings are expected to offer valuable insights for the development of targeted psychological interventions, ultimately supporting parents in navigating the challenges of raising a child with a disability and promoting their overall well-being.

Meaning-Making in the Face of Challenging Situations

According to the Meaning Making Model (George & Park, 2016a; Park & Folkman, 1997), meaning-making in the process of coping with stressful events or challenging situations involves two main components: global meaning and situational meaning. Global meaning refers to an individual's general orienting systems and worldview, encompassing three sub-components: global beliefs, global goals, and the individual's subjective sense of meaning or purpose in life (Park, 2010). Global beliefs encompass the fundamental schemas through which individuals interpret their experiences of the world (Silberman, 2005), referring to domains such as justice, luck, control, predictability, and goodness (Clifton et al., 2019; Koltko-Rivera, 2004; Park, 2017; Pilkington et al., 2021). These beliefs enable individuals to take a more proactive approach to dealing with adversity when it arises (Park, 2016a). Global goals refer to the ideals, states, or objects that individuals strive to either maintain (if already possessed) or desire to attain, such as relationships, work, knowledge, wealth, and success (Emmons, 2003; Lewis, 2020). Finally, a subjective sense of meaning refers to the perception that life is meaningful, characterised by comprehension, purpose, and significance (Costin & Vignoles, 2019; George & Park, 2016b).

Situational meaning refers to one's cognitive appraisals of a potentially stressful situation or event. It includes appraisals of the stressor(s), potential discrepancies between

global and situational meaning, meaning-making processes, and the products of meaning-making processes referred to as meanings made (Park, 2016a). When an individual experiences a stressful event, a cognitive appraisal of the event's meaning is initially triggered (e.g. what it means, why it happened); then, the appraised situational meaning is compared to the individual's global meaning. If it is perceived as inconsistent with or violating dimensions of global meaning (for example, when a life event makes someone question their belief about whether God exists; Park et al., 2017), then a discrepancy may occur that can lead the person to experience distress (George & Park, 2020; Park et al., 2016). In the case of parents raising a child with a disability, discrepancy between global and situational meaning is likely to occur when, for example, parents' sense of the comprehensibility of the world is compromised by wondering about the meaning of the disability or when their sense of controllability is violated by a sense of powerlessness about the child's disability (Platsidou & Mavridou, 2025). This discrepancy is likely to lead them to psychological distress, the level of which depends on the extent of the discrepancy.

Subjective sense of meaning, as part of global meaning, plays a crucial role in determining whether a stressful event or challenging situation will eventually be incorporated into the existing global meaning or whether it will cause a discrepancy (George & Park, 2016c). Research has shown that individuals with a higher sense of meaning in life tend to appraise stressful events in a way that results in a lower degree of discrepancy between their situational and global meaning (George & Park, 2016b). In addition, a strong sense of meaning in life has been shown to moderate the relationship between stressful life events and negative outcomes (Cohen & Cairns, 2012; Haynes et al., 2017; Szymanski & Mikorski, 2016), but is also associated with better mental health outcomes across populations as veterans (Blackburn & Owens, 2015), students (Steger & Kashdan, 2013) or cancer patients (Winger et al., 2016).

It is assumed that global meaning is constructed early in life and is shaped based on personal experiences (Park, 2016a). Although the extent to which individuals are aware of their global beliefs and goals has not been identified, it appears that these strongly influence their thoughts, behaviour, and emotional responses (Park, 2010). For example, previous research underlines the importance of global meaning for anxiety or depression in individuals experiencing stressful situations (e.g. Anders et al., 2014; Appel et al., 2020). Other findings highlight the importance of studying the components of situational meaning that, as they interact with the components of global meaning, influence coping with serious life events such as terminal illnesses, natural disasters, wars, sexual assaults (e.g. George & Park, 2016b; Park, 2016b; Steger & Kashdan, 2009), as well as parents raising a child with a disability (Platsidou & Mavridou, 2025). As a result of this research, the Meaning Making Model has provided a theoretical and empirical foundation for numerous clinical interventions aimed at addressing serious life events, such as trauma (Anders et al., 2014) and terminal illness (Krok & Telka, 2018).

The Present Study: Aim and Research Hypotheses

Although global and situational meaning have been extensively studied in other population groups (e.g. those facing chronic illness or bereavement), there is a notable lack of research focusing on parents of children with disabilities. Existing studies often examine isolated components of global and/or situational meaning,

leaving a gap in our understanding of how individuals experiencing a stressful event, such as a child's disability, (re)construct meaning and adapt in the face of new conditions.

This study addresses the need for a more comprehensive investigation into how parents of children with disabilities navigate meaning-making processes, particularly the potential discrepancy between their general worldview and beliefs (global meaning) and their interpretation of their child's disability (situational meaning). While this discrepancy is theorised to contribute to psychological distress, empirical evidence remains limited. A deeper understanding of this process is essential for informing targeted psychological support.

Using the Meaning Making Model as a theoretical framework, the study examines all components of global and situational meaning in parents who have recently received a disability diagnosis for their pre-school-aged child. Specifically, the study investigates the following: (1) To what extent do parents of children with disabilities report (a) discrepancies between their global and situational meaning, and (b) psychological distress? (2) Does the discrepancy between global and situational meaning mediate the relationship between meaning components and psychological distress? To answer them, the following research hypotheses were tested:

H1: It is expected that parents experience a discrepancy between their global (beliefs, goals, and subjective sense of meaning) and situational meaning (appraised stress due to the disability of their child) as a result of their child's newly diagnosed disability.

H2: Parents are expected to experience psychological distress (anxiety and depression) as a result of their child's disability.

H3: Parents' level of distress is expected to be predicted by their global and situational meaning and the degree of discrepancy between them. Specifically, discrepancy in meaning is expected to mediate the relationship between their global and situational meaning and distress. This model is depicted in [Figure 1](#).

Method

Participants

The sample consisted of 186 parents of pre-school-aged children who had been diagnosed with a disability. The mean time since they had received the diagnosis was 2.99 years ($SD = 1.48$). Parents' age ranged from 25 to 63 years ($M = 39.04$ years, $SD = 6.04$ years). The majority of participants were female (135, 72.6%) and of Greek ethnicity (93%); most of them were married (170, 91.4%) and had two children (46.8%). Regarding their educational level, 89 (47.8%) held a university or college degree, 56 (30.1%) were high school graduates, 22 (11.8%) were graduates of compulsory education, and 19 (10.2%) had pursued postgraduate or doctoral degrees. The majority of participants (105, 56.5%) reported having a moderate financial status, while 33.3% reported having a good financial status, and 10.2% reported having a poor financial status.

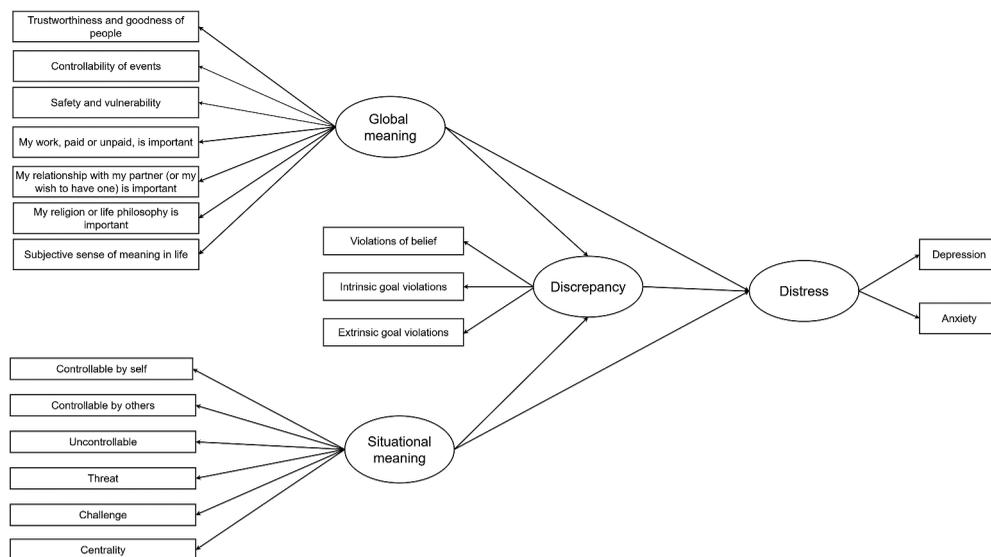


Figure 1. Relations between global and situational meaning, discrepancy and psychological distress, according to the meaning making Model.

Regarding their children with disabilities, 121 (65.1%) were boys and 65 (43.9%) were girls, aged 3 to 7 years ($M = 5.1$ years, $SD = 1.04$). Almost half of the children (46.3%) attended special education pre-school units, (39.8% attended a special kindergarten and 6.5% attended an early intervention unit); the rest (45.2%) attended kindergartens for typically developing children (25.8% attended a kindergarten with parallel support, 19.4% attended a kindergarten with an inclusion class and 2.7% attended a day care centre). Finally, 11 (5.9%) children did not attend any education unit. The children's disabilities, as reported by their parents, mainly included autism spectrum disorder (62.4%). Other disabilities reported less frequently were multiple disabilities (9.1%), various syndromes (9.1%), mental retardation (8.1%), motor disabilities (8.1%) and sensory disabilities (2.7%). The level of functioning of autism was reported to be mild (45.6%), moderate (45.6%), or severe (8.8%). The level of disability of mental retardation was reported to be mild (53.3%), moderate (40%), or severe (0.6%).

Research Instruments

Global Meaning

Global meaning was assessed by evaluating the three components that comprise it: (1) global beliefs, (2) global goals, and (3) subjective sense of meaning in life.

Global beliefs. The World Assumptions Questionnaire (WAQ), created by Kaler (2009), was used to measure global beliefs. It consists of 22 items that, in the original version of the scale, assess four dimensions of global beliefs: (1) Controllability of events, i.e. the ability to control events (e.g. Item 18: 'Most of what happens to me happens because I choose it'), (2) Comprehensibility & predictability of people, which means to understand and predict people's behaviour (e.g. Item 8: 'People often behave in unpredictable ways'),

(3) Trustworthiness and goodness of people, i.e. to trust and believe that people are good (e.g. Item 9: 'For the most part, I think people are good'), and (4) Safety and vulnerability, which relate to how safe or vulnerable someone feels (e.g. Item 11: 'You never know what's going to happen tomorrow'). Participants are asked to respond using a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly Agree*).

Confirmatory Factor Analysis applied to the scale showed that, in this sample, the factorial structure was confirmed for the subscales Controllability of events (6 statements, $\alpha = .66$), Trustworthiness and goodness of people (4 statements, $\alpha = .77$), and Safety and vulnerability (4 statements, $\alpha = .75$), but not for the Comprehensibility & predictability of people ($\chi^2/df (p) = 102/74 (p < .001)$, CFI = .929, TLI = 913, SRMR = .054, RMSEA = .045). Thus, only the means of the first three subscales were used.

Global goals. Nair's (2003) Life Goals Questionnaire was used to assess global goals. It consists of nine items that address life goals related to family, work, relationships, leisure, religion, and other aspects of life. For the present study, three of the nine goals were included due to consistent research evidence linking them to indicators of subjective well-being, life satisfaction, and positive affect (e.g. Werner & Shulman, 2013; You et al., 2019). Specifically, participants were asked to indicate how important each of the following goals was to them (e.g. Item 4: 'My work, paid or unpaid', Item 5: 'My relationship with my partner (or my wish to have one)' and Item 8: 'My religion or life philosophy') on a Likert-type scale where 1 = *Not at all important* and 5 = *Very important*.

The subjective sense of meaning in life was assessed using the 'Presence of Meaning' subscale of the Meaning in Life Questionnaire (Steger et al., 2006). The subscale comprises five items (e.g. Item 1: 'I understand my life's meaning') and is rated on a 7-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (*completely wrong*) to 7 (*completely right*). Exploratory factor analysis performed on the scale revealed a single factor that explained 68.18% of the total variance and yielded a reliability coefficient of $\alpha = .88$.

Situational Meaning

To measure situational meaning, we used a multidimensional scale developed by Peacock and Wong (1990), the Stress Appraisal Measure, which aims to assess both primary and secondary appraisals of a specific stressor, namely, the child's disability in our case. Primary appraisals encompass threat (i.e. the risk of future harm), challenge (i.e. the potential for growth or gains), and centrality (i.e. the impact on well-being). Secondary appraisals are relatively independent and concern perceived controllability by self (i.e. skills to cope with the event), controllability by others (i.e. help to cope with the event), and uncontrollability (i.e. hopelessness regarding the event).

The instrument comprises 24 items assessing seven dimensions, of which six were used (the Stress subscale was examined using another research instrument). Confirmatory factor analysis confirmed the factorial structure of the following six dimensions ($\chi^2/df (p) = 417/227 (p < .001)$, CFI = .904, TLI = .883, SRMR = .065, RMSEA = .067): (a) Controllable by self (4 items, $\alpha = .75$, Item 11: 'Do I have the ability to do well in this situation?'); (b) Controllable by others (4 items, $\alpha = .78$, Item 21: "Is there anyone who can help me manage this problem?"); (c) Uncontrollable (4 statements, $\alpha = .81$, Item 19: 'Is the problem unresolvable by anyone?'); (d) Threat (4 items, $\alpha = .74$, Item 24: 'Is this going to have a negative impact on me?'); (e) Challenge (4 items, $\alpha = .69$, Item 9: 'To what extent can

I become a stronger person because of this problem?') and (f) Centrality (4 items, $\alpha = .79$, Item 23: 'Does this situation have long-term consequences for me?'). Participants provide their responses based on a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly Agree*).

Discrepancy

The discrepancy between situational and global meaning was measured using the Global Meaning Violation Scale (GMVS) by Park et al. (2016). It includes 13 items forming three dimensions: (1) Violations of belief (5 items, Item 1: 'How much does the occurrence of your child's disability violate your sense of the world being fair or just?'); (2) Violations of internal goals (5 items, Item 9: 'How much does your child's disability interfere with your ability to accomplish inner peace?'); (3) Violations of external goals (3 items, Item 11: 'How much does your child's disability interfere with your ability to accomplish achievement in your career?') Participants are asked to rate how much they agree with each item using a Likert-type scale from 1 (*Not at all*) to 5 (*Very much*).

A three-factor model proposed by the developers of the scale was tested and found to fit the data well (χ^2/df (p) = 118/58 ($p < .001$), CFI = 0.956, TLI = 0.940, SRMR = 0.057, RMSEA = 0.075). The reliability of the three subscales was satisfactory ($\alpha = .80$, .90, and .87, respectively).

Psychological Distress

Distress was assessed using two (of the three) subscales of the Depression Anxiety Stress Scale (DASS21; Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995): Depression (7 items, Item 6: 'I couldn't seem to experience any positive feeling at all') and Anxiety (7 items, Item 13: 'I felt I was close to panic'). Participants indicated the extent to which each item was valid for them on a Likert-type scale (where 1 = *not at all* and 5 = *very much*).

The two-factor model tested was found to have a good fit to the data ($\chi^2/df = 157/62$, $p < .001$, CFI = .941, TLI = .914, SRMR = .051, RMSEA = .081). The reliability indices of the subscales were high ($\alpha = .91$ and .87, respectively).

Procedure

All research instruments, except for the DASS21, were translated into Greek using the double-blind translation method. Data collection took place from October to December 2022, following permission from the University of Macedonia's Committee of Research Ethics. Data collection was conducted using both printed (in-person) and electronic (Google Forms) questionnaires. Participants completed a series of questionnaires that always began with an informed consent form and a demographic questionnaire. Parental participation was voluntary and anonymous, ensured through the use of identification codes, which were also necessary for participation in the second phase of the study. The sample was identified via purposive sampling in general preschool units in Thessaloniki and special education settings across Greece. Additional participants were recruited from early intervention centres, daycare centres, disability-related organisations, and online parent communities of children with disabilities. In printed form, the researcher distributed the research protocol to the above-mentioned settings, where parents received,

completed, and returned the questionnaires to the school. The researcher was notified upon their collection. In total, 186 questionnaires were completed, of which 145 (77%) were in printed form and 41 (22%) were submitted electronically.

Data Analysis

Firstly, Confirmatory Factor Analyses (CFAs) were conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics (version 21) to validate the factorial structure of the instruments used. The reliability of all study (sub)scales was evaluated using *Cronbach's alpha*. At the next step, we employed Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to test the hypothesised model, which describes the relationships between global and situational meaning and distress, and the mediation of discrepancy, using IBM AMOS statistical software (version 21). For the SEM analyses, we reversed the item scores in the uncontrollable, threat, and centrality subscales of situational meaning so that all variables were positively expressed. The indices of model fit goodness were assessed following the recommendations outlined by Kline (2015).

Results

Means of Global and Situational Meaning, Discrepancy, and Distress

Table 1 presents the means (and standard deviations) reported by parents for all variables. Concerning global meaning, parents reported moderately high means for global beliefs and a subjective sense of meaning in life, as well as higher means for global goals. In the situational meaning, the means indicating positive appraisals (Controllable by self, Controllable by others, and Challenge) were moderately high. In contrast, the means indicating negative appraisals (Uncontrollable, Centrality, and Threat) were moderately low. Overall, the moderate cognitive appraisals of stress due to the child's disability reported by the parents suggest that they view disability as a positive challenge that they can manage.

Additionally, parents appear to experience a moderate degree of discrepancy between their global and situational meaning, as they reported moderate violations of their beliefs, intrinsic and extrinsic goals ($M = 2.91$, $M = 2.89$, and $M = 2.44$, respectively). These findings partially support H1, which predicted a notable discrepancy in meaning for the parents as a result of their child's disability. In relation to H2, which posited that parents of children with a disability would experience high psychological distress, it was found that they reported moderately low levels of both anxiety ($M = 1.50$) and depression ($M = 1.73$). As a result, this hypothesis was not confirmed.

Testing the Meaning Making Model

Albeit parents reported experiencing low levels of distress, we proceeded to test whether this could be explained by their global and situational meaning mediated by discrepancy, as suggested by the Meaning Making Model. To test H3, we developed a model that incorporates all the variables measured in this study. However, the fit of this model to the data was poor ($\chi^2/241 = 2.073$, $p < .001$, CFI = .807, IFI = .812, SRMR = .089, CI 90% [0.067- -0.086], RMSEA = .076).

Table 1. Means and standard deviations of all variables.

	M	SD
Global meaning		
Global beliefs		
Controllability of events	3.12	0.47
Trustworthiness and goodness of people	3.30	0.67
Safety and vulnerability	4.03	0.53
Presence of meaning in life	5.34	0.94
Global goals		
4. My work, paid or unpaid is important	4.03	0.91
5. My relationship with my partner (or my wish to have one) is important	4.32	0.93
8. My religion or life philosophy is important	3.66	1.11
Situational meaning		
Controllable by self	3.65	0.69
Controllable by others	3.54	0.81
Uncontrollable	2.17	0.85
Threat	3.48	0.74
Challenge	3.64	0.69
Centrality	2.75	0.90
Discrepancy		
Belief violations	2.91	1.05
Intrinsic goal violations	2.89	1.13
Extrinsic goal violations	2.44	1.23
Distress		
Depression	1.73	0.83
Anxiety	1.50	0.69

All variables were measured on a Likert-type scale from 1 to 5, except for the Subjective sense of meaning in life that was measured on a scale from 1 to 7.

After conducting a preliminary linear regression analysis to determine which components of global and situational meaning could predict discrepancy, three subscales of global beliefs (Comprehensibility & predictability, Trustworthiness and goodness of people, and Safety and vulnerability) were found to have non-significant indices. As a result, these components were removed from the analysis and the model was tested again with the retained components (i.e. the Controllability of events, the three global goals, and the subjective sense of meaning). Also, following Kline's (2015) suggestions for improving the model, the residuals among the situational meaning components were allowed to correlate. After removing the paths that were not statistically significant, the model fitted the data adequately ($\chi^2/88 = 1.810$, $p < .001$, CFI = .931, IFI = .933, SRMR = .079, CI 90% [0.049–0.082], RMSEA = .066). As shown in Figure 2, consistent with the assumptions of the Meaning Making Model, both global and situational meaning are negatively predicted by psychological distress. However, discrepancy is only predicted by situational meaning and does not predict psychological distress; this means that discrepancy cannot mediate the relationships between global and situational meaning and distress, rejecting H3 at this point.

The above findings, combined with the moderate means of the discrepancy subscales (violations of beliefs, intrinsic and extrinsic goals), led us to test a new model that did not involve discrepancy. The model presented in Figure 3 fits the data well ($\chi^2/50 = 1.738$, $p < .001$, CFI = .955, IFI = .957, SRMR = .064, CI 90% [0.040–0.085], RMSEA = .063). In this model, both global and situational meaning predict lower levels of psychological distress, with the effect of global meaning being greater than that of situational meaning.

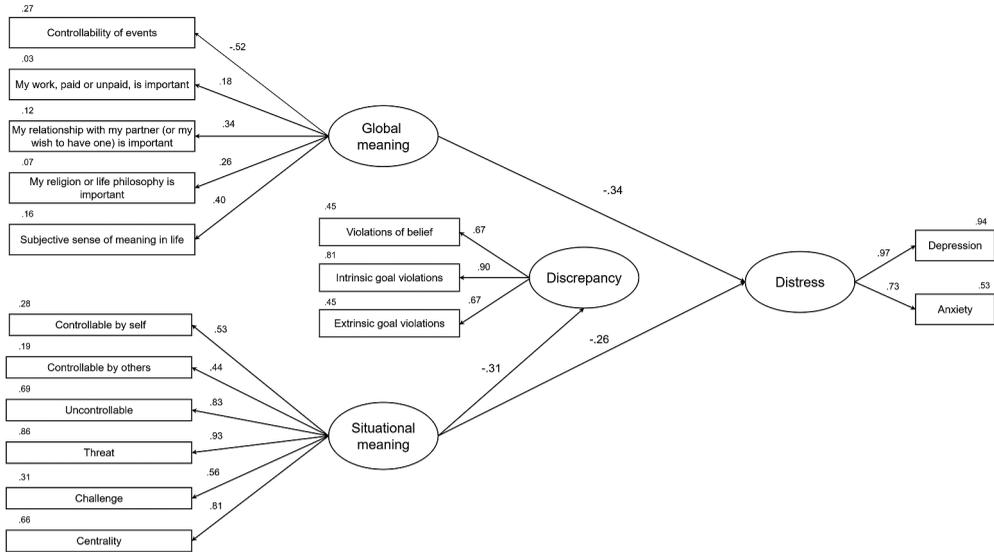


Figure 2. Prediction of psychological distress by the global and the situational meaning and the lack of mediation of discrepancy.

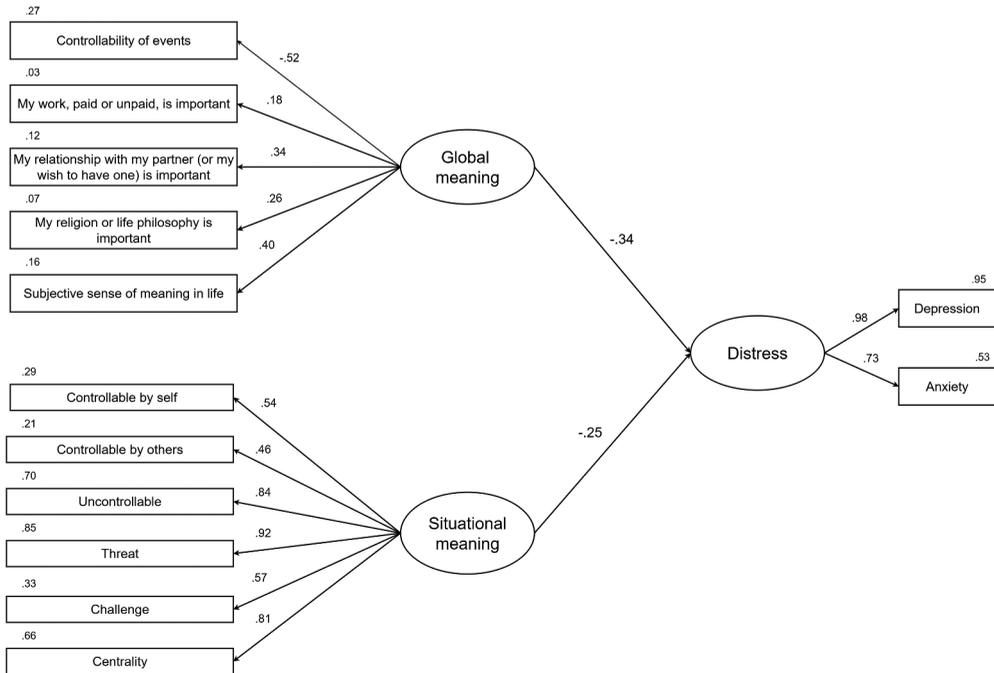


Figure 3. Prediction of psychological distress by means of the global meaning and the situational meaning.

Discussion

The study aimed to investigate the role of discrepancy between global and situational meaning in experiencing and predicting psychological distress among parents raising a child with a disability. Specifically, it sought to examine the components comprising their global and situational meaning, the violations of global beliefs, external goals, and internal goals (indicating discrepancy between global and situational meaning), and the levels of psychological distress (anxiety and depression) they experience. In addition, the study aimed to determine whether parent-reported psychological distress can be predicted by the global and situational meaning of parents, with the degree of discrepancy between them mediating this relationship. The study adopted the Meaning Making Model (George & Park, 2016c; Park & Folkman, 1997), which proposes that stressors are likely to lead to a violation of individuals' global beliefs, goals, and subjective sense of meaning in life. When such violations occur, they are likely to contribute to psychological distress. To gather data, the study employed self-report questionnaires that were completed by parents of children with disabilities. The results derived from the study will be discussed in the following sections.

Global, Situational, and Discrepancy of Meaning of Parents Raising a Child with a Disability

Analysis of the results showed that, in terms of global meaning, parents reported moderately high means for their global beliefs and subjective sense of meaning in life, and higher means for global goals, suggesting that parents of children with disabilities have a significant orientation, worldview, sense of meaning and direction in their lives. This finding is common in relative studies, in which parents of children with disabilities reported a high (e.g. Lightsey & Sweeney, 2008; Samios & Baran, 2017; Yilmaz, 2019) or a moderately high (e.g. Platsidou et al., 2021) presence of meaning in life, despite the demands and challenges they face on a daily basis.

It is interesting to note that, in terms of situational meaning, parents reported moderate cognitive appraisals of their child's disability as a stressor; also, they reported experiencing relatively low levels of both anxiety and depression (rejecting the hypothesis 2 tested in the study). It is true that most studies (e.g. Baran et al., 2020; Barratt et al., 2025; McStay et al., 2014; Rivard et al., 2014) have shown that the children's disability is a strong stressor for their parents, who experience lower levels of subjective wellbeing compared to parents of typically developing children (Norlin & Broberg, 2012; Siah & Tan, 2016). However, this is not a conclusive result as other studies do not confirm it, suggesting satisfactory parental wellbeing (as shown in the systematic review of Beighton & Wills, 2019). For example, in Olsson and Hwang's (2006) study, 67.7% of mothers of children with intellectual disabilities reported high levels of subjective well-being; Platsidou et al. (2021) found that family members living with a person with a disability experience satisfactory well-being. In the study of Arai et al. (2024), parents caring for children with severe motor and intellectual disabilities reported an average level of subjective happiness, compared to the parents of children without disabilities.

In our study, the fact that parents do not perceive disability as a threatening or a very stressful situation may be explained by the relatively high means of specific situational

meaning components, such as the controllability of the situation both by oneself and by others in the form of assistance provided, and the parents' perception of disability as a positive challenge that makes them stronger. Also, both the mostly mild level of disability of the children and the moderate or high economic level reported by most participants may have played an important role in the moderate cognitive appraisals of stress reported by them.

Furthermore, our results showed that parents reported moderate means in the global meaning violation subscales, suggesting that they experience a modest discrepancy between their global and situational meaning in the face of their child's disability as a stressor. This finding partially confirms hypothesis 1. Furthermore, it is consistent with evidence from studies of participants experiencing serious life events, which also found low levels of violations of global meaning (e.g. Kaler et al., 2008; Rini et al., 2004). It appears that when parents receive a disability diagnosis for their preschool-aged child, a moderate degree of violation of their global meaning occurs, implying that they are likely to encounter challenges in reconciling their global understanding and life orientation with the specific circumstances of their child's disability. The role of the discrepancy in predicting distress among parents in our sample is explored below.

Prediction of Parental Distress

Primarily, the study aimed to explore whether parental distress could be explained by a combination of global and situational meaning, mediated by the degree of discrepancy between them, as proposed by the Meaning Making Model. However, the initial model showed poor fit to the data. Subsequent regression analysis revealed that two of the global beliefs dimensions did not have significant indices in predicting discrepancy. Consequently, these variables were removed from the analysis. The refined model was found to fit the data well. In this model, discrepancy was only predicted by situational meaning, and it did not predict distress, thereby rejecting Hypothesis 3. Both global meaning and situational meaning negatively predicted psychological distress.

According to the Meaning Making Model, when stressors cause low discrepancy between the global and the situational meaning, then low psychological distress is also expected (Park & Gutierrez, 2013; Proulx & Inzlicht, 2012). However, in our study, the moderate discrepancy of meaning reported by parents did not predict their distress at all, disproving the Meaning Making model at this point and suggesting that the challenge in (re)creating meaning may not be as pronounced for them as initially hypothesised. One possible explanation for this finding may be related to the relatively high subjective sense of meaning reported by participants. Previous research has consistently shown that individuals with a high sense of meaning in life appraise stressors in a way that results in a lower discrepancy between their global and situational meaning (George & Park, 2016b; Maffly-Kipp et al., 2020). Another explanation can be found in Park's (2010) argument that when considering the discrepancy between global and situational meaning after a serious life event, such as the disability in our study, there are mostly minor violations rather than an overwhelming dissolution of global meaning. Thus, this discrepancy may not pose a serious threat to individuals' subjective well-being, as found in our study.

The above results led to the formulation and testing of a new model that excluded the discrepancy of meaning. The new model showed a good fit to the data, confirming the importance of both global and situational meaning in predicting parental distress. The effect of global meaning was found to be more substantial than that of situational meaning in predicting lower levels of parental distress, suggesting that, in this context, the general orienting systems and worldview (provided by global meaning) have a more substantial impact on buffering against psychological distress than meaning derived from appraisals of specific situations or circumstances. In the same vein, recent studies have consistently found a positive correlation between global meaning and coping with disability and other stressful situations, such as the COVID-19 pandemic (Tsibidaki, 2021), and a negative correlation between meaning in life and distress resulting from a serious life event (Winger et al., 2016).

Overall, these findings contribute to our understanding of the complex interplay between the meaning-making components and psychological well-being, particularly in the context of parenting a child with a disability. Firstly, they emphasise the importance of considering both global and situational meaning in understanding psychological distress among parents. Whereas global meaning provides a general framework, an orienting system for interpreting life events, situational meaning captures the cognitive appraisals of a potentially stressful situation or event. Second, the lack of a significant role for discrepancy in predicting anxiety and depression challenges previous theoretical assumptions (Janoff-Bulman & Yopyk, 2004; Schuler & Boals, 2016) about the mechanisms underlying the relationship between meaning and distress. Future research needs to explore alternative mechanisms that may further elucidate this relationship.

Conclusions, Implications, and Limitations of the Study

Overall, our findings suggest that parents view their child's disability as a positive challenge rather than a source of distress. They also imply that parents are likely to demonstrate a resilient attitude and believe that they can effectively cope with the challenges that come with raising a child with a disability. These findings point to the need for further research into the nuanced ways in which parents attempt to make sense of their experiences following the diagnosis of their child's disability. Also, they highlight the need for further investigation to fully understand the impact of violations of global meaning on the meaning-related coping processes that are triggered to achieve adaptation in the face of a challenging event, such as the disability. To support this objective, a comprehensive study with longitudinal data is currently underway, and we anticipate publishing the results in the near future. Hopefully, it will provide valuable insights and contribute to the existing body of knowledge in the field.

In terms of the practical application of our findings, mental health professionals supporting parents who, after the initial shock of a disability diagnosis, are trying to give (new) meaning to their lives that incorporates their child's disability, may benefit from the findings of this study in their counselling interventions. The study's results highlight the importance of both global and situational meaning in buffering the psychological distress of these parents. Mental health professionals can include a meaning-centred approach in their counselling interventions with the parents (Wong & Wong, 2012), which focuses on discovering what is important in their life and strengthening their 'will to meaning' (Frankl, 1985); the ultimate goal of such approach is to help parents reinterpret the global and situational meanings in

their lives and empower them to rely more on their global belief of controllability of events, their global goals regarding their relation to their partner, work, and religion or life philosophy, as well as their sense of meaning in life to cope more effectively with the daily demands of the child's disability on their family life. Similarly, helping parents to strengthen the components of their situational meaning may help them view the disability as something manageable and controllable, and thus experience lower levels of distress.

However, our findings should be interpreted with caution due to the cross-sectional nature of the study. Limitations also relate to the method of data collection and the instruments used. Response bias is a commonly discussed issue in behavioural research when self-report instruments are used (Brutus et al., 2013). Another limitation of the study is the overrepresentation of married Greek women in the sample of parents. This could potentially introduce bias as the experiences and perspectives of male, unmarried, or divorced parents may be different. Additionally, the sample was overrepresented by parents with medium to high levels of education and socioeconomic status. This may affect the generalisability of the findings, as parents from lower socio-economic backgrounds are likely to face different challenges and have different support needs for their children with disabilities. Moreover, the study participants were predominantly from urban areas, which may not accurately capture the challenges faced by parents living in rural or remote areas, such as limited access to specialist services or support networks, which may impact their psychological distress. In terms of their children with disabilities, there was no even distribution in terms of type or level of disability, with certain types of disability or more severe levels of disability underrepresented, leading to potential gaps in understanding the specific challenges faced by these children and their families.

In conclusion, while our findings shed light on the meaning-related experiences of our participants, the cross-sectional nature of the study, coupled with limitations in sample representation and data collection methods, urges caution in interpreting the results. Further research with more diverse samples and longitudinal designs is warranted to provide a comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by families of children with disabilities.

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