



Solo Parents Experiences in Facilitating the Behavior of Their Children with Additional Needs

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Vanessa N. Febria
Rachele A. Garcia
Arianne May B. Unajan
Darlene D. Porio
Moya R. Obenita

*Master of Arts in Education, Major in Special Education
Cebu Technological University, Main Campus, Cebu City
Group correspondence: febriavane@gmail.com*

Abstract

This study explored the lived experiences of fifteen (15) solo parents in managing the behavioral challenges of children with additional needs. Using a qualitative research design, data were gathered through in-depth interviews with selected solo parents and analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis. The findings revealed that children with additional needs commonly exhibit observable behavioral difficulties such as difficulty following routines, inattention and distractibility, and dependence on adults for task completion. Solo parents described their experiences as continuous real-life parenting adjustments involving repetition of instructions, physical redirection during behavioral outbursts, flexible routine management, and the use of calm communication to regulate emotions. Moreover, they experienced significant difficulties including exhaustion from constant supervision, challenges in handling public and school-related behavioral incidents, financial constraints affecting access to intervention services, and emotional stress when discipline strategies were ineffective. Despite these challenges, solo parents employed practical coping mechanisms such as taking short breaks for emotional regulation, seeking guidance from teachers, using calm post-incident communication, and maintaining simple and consistent home routines. The study concludes that solo parenting children with additional needs is characterized by high emotional, physical, and financial demands, yet also demonstrates resilience and adaptive coping strategies. These findings emphasize the importance of school-based support, parent training programs, and collaborative interventions to strengthen parenting capacity and improve child behavioral outcomes. The study recommends a parenting workshop to strengthen solo parents' skills in facilitating the behavior of children with additional needs.

Keywords. : *special education solo parents, additional needs, behavioral challenges, coping mechanisms, parenting strategies, emotional stress, qualitative, Lapu-Lapu, Cebu, Philippines*

Introduction

Parenting a child with special educational needs involves complex emotional, behavioral, and social challenges. These challenges become more demanding for solo parents who carry the responsibility of caregiving alone while also fulfilling financial and household obligations. In many cases, solo parents experience limited emotional, social, and institutional support, which further intensifies caregiving stress and difficulty in managing their children's behavior. For example, a solo parent may need to leave work early due to a child's behavioral outburst at school, resulting in lost income or work-related conflict. Others may struggle to maintain consistent discipline at home due to exhaustion and lack of guidance. These situations emphasize how caregiving demands, behavioral management, and support systems are deeply interconnected in the lived experiences of solo parents.

Recent evidence supports these challenges. Single parents raising children with disabilities experience poorer mental and physical health, higher poverty rates, and limited support from extended family and non-residential parents, which constrains their ability to balance caregiving and employment (Balbo & Burciu, 2026). Research further shows



that single parents often face discrimination and social stigma in employment and social settings, which limits access to opportunities and increases caregiving strain (Single Parent Rights, 2020). These conditions directly affect how solo parents manage their children's behavior, sustain daily routines, and engage with support systems.

In the Philippine context, solo parents of children with special learning needs encounter similar challenges. While the Expanded Solo Parents' Welfare Act (Republic Act No. 11861) provides benefits such as financial assistance, healthcare coverage, and educational support, many solo parents still experience difficulties in accessing these services. The Department of Social Welfare and Development continues to encourage solo parents to avail themselves of available programs; however, gaps in implementation and awareness remain. In real-life situations, solo parents often struggle to balance employment and caregiving, manage their children's behavioral issues at home, and coordinate effectively with teachers due to limited time and resources. The Department of Education (2023) also emphasized the need to better understand solo parent employees to develop responsive support programs, recognizing their unique challenges in both work and caregiving contexts.

At Ibo Elementary School in Lapu-Lapu City, similar concerns are observed. Children with additional needs who are raised by solo parents often exhibit behavioral challenges such as difficulty following routines, emotional outbursts, and social interaction difficulties. These parents are called to school due to behavioral incidents and some were unable to respond immediately due to work obligations. Others admitted to struggle consistent routines and behavioral strategies at home because of fatigue, stress, and lack of support. These situations emphasized challenges in behavior management, caregiving responsibilities, and access to support systems, which are central variables in this study.

Despite the growing body of literature on parenting children with special needs and solo parenthood, there remains a significant research gap. Most studies focus separately on parenting experiences or children with special needs, while limited research examines the intersection of solo parenting, behavioral management, and support systems in inclusive education settings. Particularly in local contexts such as Lapu-Lapu City, there is insufficient qualitative evidence that explores how solo parents actually experience and manage these challenges in daily life.

Therefore, this study seeks to address this gap by exploring the lived experiences of solo parents in facilitating the behavior of their children with special additional needs, focusing on their behavior management practices, caregiving challenges, and access to support systems. Using a qualitative phenomenological approach, the study aims to generate meaningful insights into their coping strategies and lived realities. The findings are expected to assist educators, school leaders, and policymakers in developing more responsive interventions, strengthening school-home partnerships, and improving inclusive education support mechanisms.

Statement of the Problem

This study sought to explore the lived experiences of solo parents in facilitating with the behavior of their children with additional needs at Ibo Elementary School for the school year 2025–2026, as basis parenting workshop in strengthening solo parents' skills in managing children's behavior.

Specifically, the study aimed to answer the following sub-questions:

1. *How do solo parents describe the behavior of their children with special educational needs?*
2. *How do solo parents describe their personal experiences in responding to and managing the behavioral challenges of their children with special needs?*
3. *How do solo parents narrate the difficulties and struggles they personally experience in managing the behavior of their children with special learning needs?*
4. *How do solo parents cope with the demands of raising a child with special educational needs?*
5. *Based on the findings and what program can be proposed to support solo parents and their children?*



Literature Review

Firstly, according to Ali and Soomar (2019), single parenting occurs when one parent, either the mother or father, is solely responsible for raising children. This situation often brings social stigma and cultural challenges, especially in societies like Pakistan, and can negatively affect children's behavior, personality, and overall well-being. Understanding these challenges can help support single parents and their children. Similarly, according to Chavda and Nisarga (2023), children of single parents can have emotional, behavioral, and social problems because the parent has to handle everything alone and may not get enough support. These problems can affect the child's health, growth, and school performance. Still, protective and coping strategies can help children do better.

Moreover, according to Arcilla, Zafe, Tuplano, Canaria, and Panesa (2023), solo parents taking care of young children face many problems, like money troubles, tiredness, and not having enough support. These problems affect their body and mind, causing stress and anxiety. Even with these challenges, solo parents stay committed to their children and use ways to cope and stay strong. The study shows that government help, healthcare, and community programs are needed to support solo parents and improve their well-being. Likewise, Smith (2022) found that single parents raising a child diagnosed with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) face significant psychological and emotional challenges. In a phenomenological study with 12 participants, the research found that parents experienced stress, exhaustion, frustration, and struggles with seeking help and support, while also dealing with issues around parental confidence and treatment outcomes. The study highlights the need for better awareness and support systems for single parents managing children with ADHD and related behavioral and emotional concerns.

Synthesis. These studies show that single-parent families face multiple challenges, including emotional, social, financial, and educational difficulties. However, research also emphasizes the positive side: children can develop resilience, social skills, and independence, especially when parents provide care, support, and guidance. Support systems such as school programs, government assistance, community involvement, and even household routines like chores play a key role in helping both parents and children thrive. Thus, understanding the lived experiences of solo parents can guide interventions and policies that promote the well-being and development of children in single-parent families.

Theoretical Framework

First, **Family Systems Theory by Bowen (1978)**. Family Systems Theory, developed by Murray Bowen (1978), explains that the family is an emotional unit or system where each member is interconnected and mutually influences one another. The theory emphasizes that individuals cannot be fully understood in isolation because their behavior, emotions, and relationships are shaped by continuous interaction patterns within the family. When one member experiences stress, such as a child with special learning or behavioral needs, the entire family system is affected and must adjust to restore balance. Bowen also introduced the concept of differentiation of self, which refers to the ability to balance emotional responses and rational thinking within relationships. Brown and Errington (2024) applied Bowen Family Systems Theory to explain how emotional processes within families influence behavior and relationship functioning. Their work highlights that differentiation of self is essential in managing emotional reactivity and maintaining healthy parent-child relationships.

Moreover, **Resilience Theory by Masten (2001)**. Resilience Theory explains how individuals adapt positively and function effectively despite significant adversity. It emphasizes that resilience is not a fixed trait but a dynamic capacity developed through coping strategies, protective factors, personal strengths, and social support systems. The theory focuses on how individuals maintain or regain functioning in the face of stress and hardship. **Shaukat and Rashid (2022) applied Resilience Theory** to show that resilience reduces caregiving burden among single parents by improving their ability to cope with parenting demands. Bradley and Goldstein (2022) emphasized that resilience is demonstrated through persistence, adaptability, and the ability of parents to prioritize their children despite challenges. Parungao (2024) used Resilience Theory to explain how single mothers survive financial hardship,



emotional stress, and limited institutional support by developing adaptive coping strategies and strengthening their psychological endurance. In this study, Resilience Theory is applied to explain how parents manage the demands of raising children with special learning needs despite emotional, financial, and behavioral challenges. It highlights how they develop strength through lived experiences and use coping strategies such as acceptance, problem-solving, emotional regulation, faith, and support systems. The theory also explains how parents continue to function effectively despite ongoing stressors, demonstrating adaptability and perseverance in caregiving roles.

Lastly, **Stress and Coping Theory by Lazarus & Folkman (1984)**. Stress and Coping Theory explains that stress arises when individuals perceive that environmental demands exceed their available resources. Coping refers to the cognitive and behavioral efforts used to manage these demands. The theory distinguishes between problem-focused coping, which addresses the source of stress, and emotion-focused coping, which regulates emotional responses. Ahmad et al. (2018) applied Stress and Coping Theory to explain that self-coping mechanisms among single mothers involve cognitive, emotional, and behavioral strategies used to manage financial and psychological stress. Their findings show that coping is often problem-focused, where individuals actively respond to stressors such as financial strain, caregiving demands, and family responsibilities. In this study, the theory explains how parents experience stress when managing children's behavioral challenges, balancing caregiving responsibilities, and dealing with limited support systems. It also explains the coping strategies used, such as seeking social support, establishing routines, practicing acceptance, using emotional regulation techniques, and relying on spiritual or religious coping. These strategies help parents manage daily stressors and maintain caregiving stability despite ongoing challenges.

Legal Bases

First, **Republic Act No. 8972 – Solo Parents' Welfare Act of 2000**. **Republic Act No. 8972**, also known as the Solo Parents' Welfare Act of 2000, provides the primary legal recognition of solo parents in the Philippines and acknowledges the unique challenges they face in raising their children independently. The law ensures that solo parents are given access to support mechanisms such as flexible work arrangements, parental leave, and social welfare services. In the context of this study, this law is significant because it highlights the multiple roles that solo parents assume as primary caregivers, disciplinarians, and providers. These overlapping responsibilities become more complex when raising children with special educational needs who may exhibit behavioral challenges. The law underscores the need for support systems that can assist solo parents in managing these responsibilities effectively. It also recognizes that without adequate assistance, solo parents may experience stress, fatigue, and difficulty in maintaining consistent caregiving practices, which can influence how they respond to their children's behavior and overall development.

Furthermore, **Republic Act No. 11861 – Expanded Solo Parents' Welfare Act of 2022**. **Republic Act No. 11861** strengthens and expands the provisions of RA 8972 by providing more comprehensive benefits and institutional support for solo parents. This includes monthly subsidies for qualified solo parents, expanded parental leave, healthcare benefits, educational assistance, and priority access to livelihood programs. The law reflects a more responsive approach to the realities faced by solo parents, especially those raising children with additional needs. In relation to this study, RA 11861 is highly relevant as it recognizes that solo parents require sustained support to meet the emotional, behavioral, and developmental needs of their children. The expanded benefits aim to reduce the burden on solo parents, enabling them to better manage their children's behavior and provide a more stable home environment. Furthermore, the law highlights the importance of coordinated support from government agencies and institutions, which is essential in helping solo parents navigate the complexities of raising children with special educational needs.

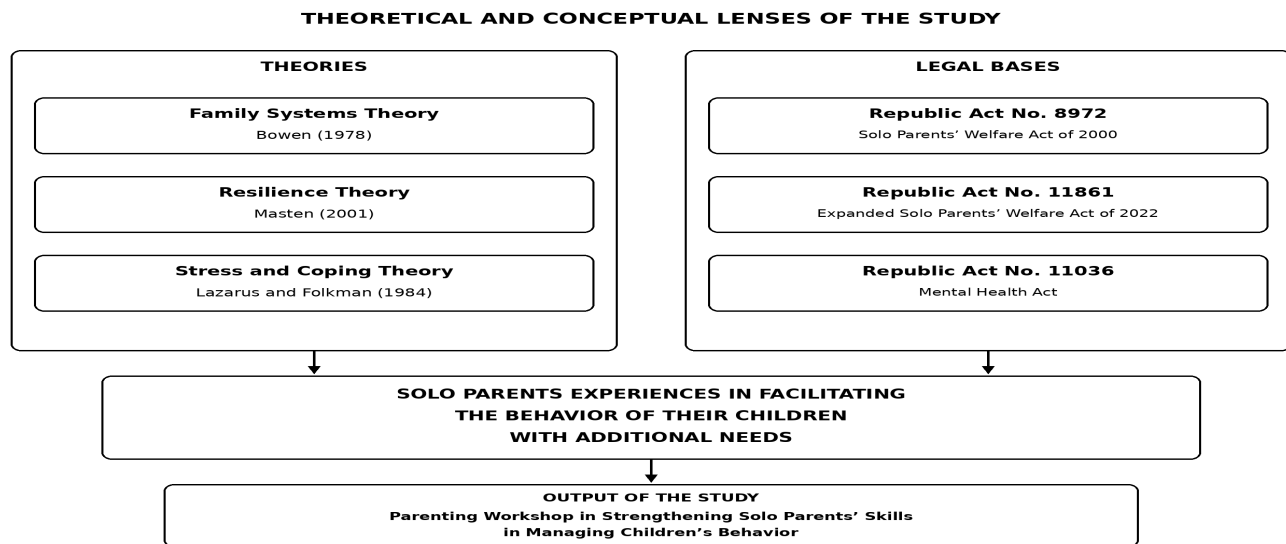


Figure 1. Theoretical and Conceptual Lenses of the Study

Lastly, **Republic Act No. 11036 – Mental Health Act**. Republic Act No. 11036, or the **Mental Health Act**, promotes the protection and integration of mental health services into the general healthcare system in the Philippines. It ensures that individuals have access to mental health care, including counseling, psychological services, and community-based support. This law is particularly relevant to both solo parents and children with special educational needs, as they may experience emotional, psychological, and behavioral challenges. For solo parents, the demands of caregiving, combined with financial and social pressures, can lead to stress, anxiety, and emotional exhaustion. At the same time, children with special educational needs may exhibit behaviors that require professional intervention and understanding. The Mental Health Act supports the availability of services that can help both parents and children manage these challenges more effectively. It also emphasizes the importance of early intervention, awareness, and support systems, which are crucial in promoting positive behavioral outcomes and overall well-being within the family.

Methodology

Research Design

This study used a **phenomenological qualitative research design** employing the thematic analysis approach of Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke to explore the lived experiences of solo parents in facilitating with the behavior of their children with special educational needs. This approach was appropriate because it provided a flexible and systematic method for identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns of meaning within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis was particularly suitable for this study because it allowed the researcher to deeply examine the experiences, perceptions, challenges, and coping strategies of solo parents while remaining grounded in the participants' own narratives. The method also enabled the researcher to organize rich qualitative data into meaningful themes that reflected both individual and shared experiences among the participants.

The study focused on how solo parents facilitate their children's behavior, the strategies they used, the challenges they encountered, and the ways they coped with the demands of raising a child with special educational needs. Data



were collected through in-depth interviews and observations, which provided rich and detailed accounts of each parent's lived experience.

The analysis followed the **six phases of Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis**. First, the researcher familiarized themselves with the data by reading and re-reading the interview transcripts to gain a deeper understanding of the participants' experiences. Second, initial codes were generated by identifying important and meaningful statements related to the participants' experiences, challenges, strategies, and coping mechanisms. Third, the codes were organized into potential themes by grouping similar patterns and ideas together. Fourth, the themes were reviewed and refined to ensure that they accurately represented the data and reflected meaningful patterns across participants' responses. Fifth, the themes were defined and named to clearly describe the essence of each theme and its relevance to the study. Finally, the findings were presented and interpreted through a detailed narrative discussion supported by participants' responses and relevant literature.

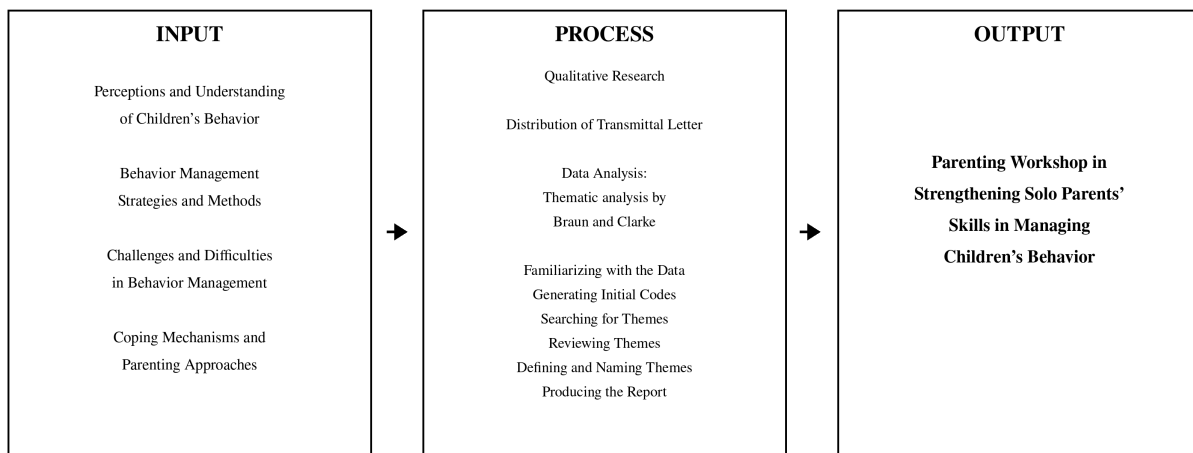


Figure 2. Input–Process–Output Model of the Study

Research Environment

The research environment of the study was **Ibo Elementary School, a public elementary school located in Barangay Ibo, Lapu-Lapu City, Cebu**, which catered to kindergarten to Grade 6 learners from nearby communities. As an inclusive school under the Department of Education, the school accommodated learners with varied learning abilities, developmental conditions, and behavioral needs. The school community was composed of families with different socio-economic backgrounds, including identified solo parents who were beneficiaries and members of the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps). Some of these solo parents were raising children with additional needs who manifested behavioral concerns such as inattentiveness, emotional outbursts, aggression, hyperactivity, and difficulty following classroom routines and social interactions.



Figure 3. Research Environment at Ibo Elementary School

Participants

The participants of the study were **fifteen (15) solo parents of learners with additional needs** who were enrolled at Ibo Elementary School during the school year 2025–2026. The participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure that only individuals who met the specific inclusion criteria of the study were chosen.

The inclusion criteria required that the participants were solo parents (either solo mothers or solo fathers) who were solely responsible for the care and upbringing of their children and had learners with special educational needs or developmental conditions exhibiting behavioral challenges such as inattention, hyperactivity, emotional outbursts, difficulty following instructions, and other forms of classroom misbehavior as observed by teachers and school personnel. In line with the early identification and referral process for learners with disabilities and developmental concerns, these learners were identified through classroom observation, teacher documentation, and coordination with the guidance counselor and SPED personnel, consistent with the provisions of Department of Education DepEd Order No. 44, s. 2021 (Policy Guidelines on the Provision of Educational Programs and Services for Learners with Disabilities in the K to 12 Basic Education Program). Some of the selected participants were also identified as beneficiaries of the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps), reflecting their socio-economic conditions and additional parenting challenges. Table 1 shows the participants of the study.

Table 1. Distribution of Parent-Participants

Learning Needs	Frequency (f) of Parent-Participants	Percentage (%)
Ibo Elementary School	15	100
Total	15	100

Instrument and Data Collection

The study utilized a semi-structured interview guide as the primary instrument to examine the lived experiences of solo parents in facilitating to the behavior of their children with additional needs. The semi-structured format allowed the researcher to ask open-ended questions while providing flexibility to probe for deeper understanding, ensuring that participants could freely and in detail share their experiences. The interview guide focused on key areas such as parents' perceptions of their children's behavior, the strategies they used to manage behavior, the challenges they faced, and the coping mechanisms they employed in raising their children.

To ensure the instrument's validity and relevance, the interview guide was reviewed and validated by the researcher's adviser and special education experts from the Department of Education. This validation process



confirmed that the questions were clear, appropriate, and capable of eliciting rich, meaningful data aligned with the objectives of the study.

The process of data gathering for this study was divided into three major stages: Pre-Data Gathering Stage, Data Gathering Stage, and Post-Data Gathering Stage. Each stage outlined the systematic steps undertaken to ensure the credibility and rigor of the research process.

Pre-Data Gathering Stage. At the outset, the researcher secured approval from the Office of the Schools Division Superintendent (SDS) to conduct the research. Upon approval, a formal endorsement letter was forwarded to the Office of the Public Schools District Supervisor (PSDS) for further permission. After obtaining approval from the PSDS, the researcher coordinated with the school head of Ibo Elementary School to formally conduct the study within the school setting. An informed consent form was then distributed to the participants, clearly explaining the purpose, scope, and procedures of the study, as well as their rights, including voluntary participation and the right to withdraw at any time.

Data Gathering Stage. After securing the necessary permissions and completing the validation of the semi-structured interview guide, the researcher conducted the actual data collection process. This involved individual in-depth interviews with fifteen (15) solo parents of children with additional needs who served as the study participants. The semi-structured interviews enabled the researcher to gather rich and detailed narratives about the parents' lived experiences in facilitating the behavior of their children.

Each interview session was audio-recorded with the participants' informed consent to ensure accurate documentation of their responses. In addition, the researcher took field notes to capture non-verbal cues, emotions, and important contextual details that enriched the interpretation of the data. The interviews were conducted in a comfortable, private, and non-threatening environment at a time and place convenient for the participants to ensure openness and honesty in sharing their experiences. All ethical considerations, including voluntary participation, confidentiality, and anonymity, were strictly observed throughout the data gathering process.

Post-Data Gathering Stage. After all interviews were completed, the recorded data were transcribed verbatim and organized for analysis. The researcher analyzed the data using the thematic analysis framework of Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke. The analysis followed six phases: familiarization with the data through repeated reading of transcripts, generating initial codes by identifying meaningful segments of data, searching for themes by grouping related codes, reviewing themes to ensure accuracy and consistency, defining and naming themes to capture their essence, and producing a final narrative report that presented the findings in relation to the study objectives.

Data Analysis

The study employed the thematic analysis framework of Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke to analyze the lived experiences of solo parents in dealing with the behavior of their children with special educational needs. The analysis focused on the study's sub-problems, namely: how solo parents described the behavior of their children with additional needs; how they described their personal experiences in facilitating behavioral challenges; how they narrated the difficulties and struggles they experienced in facilitating behavior; and how they coped with the demands of raising a child with additional needs. These sub-problems served as the guiding framework in organizing and interpreting the qualitative data into meaningful themes.

The analysis followed the six phases of Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis.

First, familiarization with the data was done by repeatedly reading and reviewing the interview transcripts to gain an overall understanding of how solo parents described their children's behavior, their management experiences, challenges, and coping mechanisms.



Second, generating initial codes was conducted by identifying significant statements related to the four sub-problems and labeling them accordingly.

Third, searching for themes involved grouping similar codes under broader categories that reflected patterns in perceptions, experiences, difficulties, and coping strategies.

Fourth, reviewing themes was done to ensure that the identified themes accurately represented the coded data and were consistent with the participants' narratives.

Fifth, defining and naming themes involved refining each theme to clearly reflect its meaning in relation to how parents understood behavior, managed challenges, experienced difficulties, and coped with parenting demands.

Lastly, producing the report involved organizing the final themes into a coherent narrative discussion that presented a comprehensive interpretation of the solo parents lived experiences based on the four sub-problems of the study.

Ethical Considerations

This study was reviewed and approved by the Research and Ethics Committee of the Graduate School, Cebu Technological University. All participants were fully informed about the purpose, objectives, and nature of the study before their participation. Informed consent was obtained through a signed consent form, which clearly outlined their voluntary participation. Participants were assured that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time without facing any form of penalty or consequence.

The confidentiality and privacy of all participants were strictly maintained throughout the research process. Personal information and collected data were treated as highly confidential and were stored securely by the researcher. Only the researcher had access to the raw data, which were used solely for academic purposes. Identifying details were removed or coded to protect participant anonymity in all reports and publications.

Findings

The findings of the study are organized around four core themes derived from the experiences of solo parents of children with additional needs.

Observable Behavioral Difficulties

Table 2. Observable Behavioral Difficulties

Main theme	Subthemes
Observable Behavioral Difficulties in Children with Additional Needs	Difficulty following routines Inattention and easy distractibility Dependence on adults for task completion

Difficulty following routines. The sub-theme described the experiences of solo parents in dealing with the difficulty of their children with special educational needs in following daily routines at home. Parents expressed that despite consistent reminders and established schedules, their children often struggle to comply with basic routines such as waking up on time, following meal schedules, doing school tasks, and observing daily household rules. This difficulty was often associated with behavioral challenges such as stubbornness, lack of focus, and refusal to follow instructions, which made routine implementation more demanding and emotionally draining for the parents. Some parents also shared that the need for constant supervision and repeated instructions sometimes led to frustration and reliance on stricter or more forceful approaches in order to ensure compliance. Overall, the narratives emphasized how maintaining structured routines becomes a daily struggle for solo parents raising children with additional needs. This was evident in the following responses of the participants:



“Nah..kung lisud kaayo na akong anak mo follow sa among routines. Gahi kaayo ug ulo. Makapungot kada adlaw!”
[My child really finds it difficult to follow our routines. He is very stubborn. It becomes frustrating every single day!]
— Parent 4

Inattention and easy distractibility. The sub-theme described the experiences of solo parents in managing the inattention and easy distractibility of their children with special educational needs. Parents shared that their children often struggle to maintain focus on tasks such as school assignments and daily activities, as they are easily drawn to surrounding stimuli like sounds, movements, or other interesting objects. Even when initially engaged in a task, their attention tends to shift quickly to something else, making it difficult to complete instructions or finish activities. This behavior often requires repeated redirection and constant supervision from the parents, which contributes to their fatigue and emotional strain. Parents also expressed frustration as they observed that even effortful strategies to gain attention are only effective for a short period of time. Overall, the narratives emphasize the persistent challenge of sustaining attention among children with additional needs, which significantly affects daily learning and routine completion. This was evident in the following responses of the participants:

“Sa balay ug naay assignment kana akong bugoy ma’am linga kaayo na. Naa pay mata ana ay, sulirap lang agi. Dali kaayo na siya madani sa gamay ra gane nga kasikas ang ispirito ana nilagpot nas laing planeta.” [At home, whenever there are assignments, my child gets very distracted. Even the slightest movement catches his attention. He gets distracted so easily, even by the smallest noise, as if his mind suddenly flies off to another planet.] — Parent 3

Dependence on adults for task completion. The sub-theme described the experiences of solo parents in the strong dependence of their children with special educational needs on adults when accomplishing daily tasks and school-related activities. Parents shared that their children are often unable to complete assignments, routines, or simple tasks independently and require constant guidance, prompting, and physical assistance from adults. This dependence is commonly observed in both home and school-related activities, where children struggle with focus, initiation of tasks, and follow-through without support. As a result, parents often rely on other family members such as siblings or take full responsibility themselves to ensure that tasks are completed. While parents expressed understanding of their child’s condition, they also emphasized the continuous demand for assistance, which adds to their caregiving burden. Overall, the narratives emphasized the necessity of constant adult support in enabling task completion among children with additional needs. This was evident in the following responses of the participants:

“Masabtan raman sad nuon ma’am kay akong anak naay special needs mao nga dili jud niya mahuman ang assignment nga siya ra mao nga magkinahanglan jud siya ug lain nga taw nga motabang niya. Kung wala ko naa man sad iyang mga igsoon.” [I can understand it as well, ma’am, because my child has special needs, which is why he cannot finish his assignments on his own. He really needs someone to help him. If I am not around, his siblings are the ones who help him.] — Parent 1

Real-Life Parenting Adjustments

Table 3. Real-Life Parenting Adjustments

Main theme	Subthemes
Real-Life Parenting Adjustments in Managing Behavioral Challenges of Children with Additional Needs	Repeating instructions several times before the child follows Physically guiding or redirecting the child during emotional outbursts or refusal to cooperate Adjusting daily routines depending on the child’s mood or behavior Using a calm voice and silence to help calm emotional outbursts

Repeating instructions several times before the child follows. The sub-theme described the experiences of solo parents in repeatedly giving instructions before their children with special educational needs are able to comply. Parents shared that they often need to repeat reminders and directions multiple times before their child



understands and follows them. This repetitive process is frequently accompanied by resistance, delay in response, or lack of immediate comprehension, which makes daily caregiving more demanding. Parents also expressed emotional exhaustion and frustration as they consistently find themselves “repeating like a broken record” just to ensure that tasks are done or instructions are followed. Despite understanding their child’s condition, they emphasized the ongoing challenge of communication and the need for continuous patience and persistence in instruction-giving. Overall, the narratives emphasize how repetition becomes a necessary but tiring part of guiding children with additional needs. This was evident in the following responses of the participants:

“Normal nalang jud ng ka lima o labaw pa naku balik balikon ang instructions una motuhop sa iyang huna-huna una niya mabuhat.” [It has already become normal for me to repeat instructions five times or even more before they finally sink into my child’s mind and before he is able to do the task.] — Parent 15

Physically guiding or redirecting the child during emotional outbursts or refusal to cooperate. The sub-theme described the experiences of solo parents in physically guiding or redirecting their children with special educational needs during emotional outbursts or moments of refusal to cooperate. Parents shared that when their children become angry, have tantrums, or resist instructions, they often use gentle physical guidance such as holding the child’s hand or leading them to a quieter space to help them regain calmness. In addition, some parents redirect the child’s attention to alternative activities as a way to prevent escalation of behavior and reduce emotional distress. This approach is commonly used as an immediate intervention to manage behavior in both home and public settings. Parents emphasized that patience, calm guidance, and environmental redirection are essential strategies in handling difficult situations and helping their children regain self-control. Overall, the narratives emphasize the practical use of physical and behavioral redirection as coping strategies in managing emotional and behavioral challenges. This was evident in the following responses of the participants:

“Kung magsugod na gane na ug kasuko o magwala akong anak, akong hinay-hinay nga kuptan ang iyang kamot ug dad-on sa hilom nga lugar aron mokalma siya.” [When my child starts to become angry or has emotional outbursts, I gently hold his hand and bring him to a quiet place so he can calm down.] — Parent 1

Adjusting daily routines depending on the child’s mood or behavior. The sub-theme described the experiences of solo parents in adjusting daily routines based on the mood and behavioral condition of their children with special educational needs. Parents shared that they often modify planned activities when their children show signs of irritability, stress, fatigue, or refusal to participate. Instead of strictly following structured schedules, they prioritize flexibility by delaying tasks, simplifying routines, or focusing only on essential activities to prevent emotional outbursts. This adaptive approach allows children to calm down first before being guided back to tasks, which helps improve cooperation and reduce behavioral difficulties. Parents also emphasized that allowing rest, choosing preferred activities, and avoiding forceful instruction are important strategies in maintaining emotional balance at home. Overall, the narratives emphasize the need for flexible routines as a coping mechanism in managing behavioral challenges and supporting the child’s emotional regulation. This was evident in the following responses of the participants:

“Kung dili maayo ang mood sa akong anak, usbon gyud nako among adlaw-adlaw nga routine aron dili siya ma-stress. Pananglitan, kung makita nako nga sapoton siya o dili ganahan makig-interact, dili nako siya pugson dayon sa mga activities. Hatagan nako siya ug oras nga makalma una kay mas dali siya makacooperate kung relaxed na iyang pamati.” [When my child is in a bad mood, I really adjust our daily routine so he will not feel stressed. For example, if I see that he is irritated or does not want to interact, I do not force him to do activities immediately. I give him time to calm down first because he can cooperate better when he is already relaxed.] — Parent 2

Using a calm voice and silence to help calm emotional outbursts. The sub-theme described the experiences of solo parents in using a calm voice and strategic silence as a way to manage and de-escalate the emotional outbursts of their children with special educational needs. Parents shared that instead of responding with anger or shouting, they deliberately use a soft and calm tone when their children become upset or start to scream. In some situations, they



also choose silence or minimal response, allowing the child time and space to gradually regulate their emotions before engaging in conversation. This approach is seen as more effective in preventing escalation of tantrums and reducing aggressive behaviors. Parents emphasized that although it is emotionally challenging and requires self-control, maintaining calmness helps create a more stable environment where the child can eventually relax and become more receptive to communication. Overall, the narratives emphasize calm voice modulation and silence as important coping strategies in managing emotional outbursts. This was evident in the following responses of the participants:

“Kung magsige ug syagit akong anak, ako ra siyang estoryahan ug hinay. Mokalma raku. Nakatabang ni para dili mosamot iyang kasuko. Usahay kapoy naman mag sigig yawyaw, mohilom nalang ko unya taud-taud ana mokalma siya ug andam na makigstorya.” [When my child keeps on shouting, I just talk to him softly. I also try to calm myself. This helps so that his anger will not worsen. Sometimes I get tired of talking repeatedly, so I just stay quiet, and after a while he calms down and becomes ready to talk.] — Parent 4

Daily Parenting Challenges

Table 4. Daily Parenting Challenges

Main theme	Subthemes
Daily Parenting Challenges in Managing Behavioral Difficulties of Children with Additional Needs	Feeling exhausted from constant supervision and monitoring of behavior Difficulty controlling child's behavior when outbursts happen in public or school Financial pressure affecting access to therapy or support services Emotional stress when discipline strategies do not work

Feeling exhausted from constant supervision and monitoring of behavior. The sub-theme described the experiences of solo parents in feeling physically and emotionally exhausted due to the constant need to supervise and monitor the behavior of their children with special educational needs. Parents shared that they are required to provide continuous attention to ensure the safety of their children, especially during instances of impulsive behavior, emotional outbursts, or lack of awareness of danger. This constant vigilance often limits their ability to rest, work, or engage in personal activities, as they must always remain within close proximity to their child. Some parents also reported disrupted sleep patterns and persistent worry about possible incidents when they are not fully attentive. Overall, the narratives emphasize the heavy caregiving burden and emotional strain experienced by solo parents who are solely responsible for managing their child's behavior on a daily basis. This was evident in the following responses of the participants:

“Kapoy kaayo para nako nga pirmi nakong bantayan akong anak adlaw ug gabii. Bisag naa ko'y buhaton sa balay o trabaho, dili gyud ko ka-relax kay kinahanglan nako siyang tutokan pirmi aron dili siya makasakit sa iyang kaugalingon o sa uban. Usahay bisan tulog nako putol-putol tungod kay sige ko kabalaka kung unsay iyang buhaton.” [It is very exhausting for me that I always have to watch my child day and night. Even if I have house chores or work, I cannot really relax because I need to closely supervise him so he will not harm himself or others. Sometimes even my sleep is interrupted because I keep worrying about what he might do.] — Parent 3

Difficulty controlling child's behavior when outbursts happen in public or school. The sub-theme described the experiences of solo parents in managing their children's behavioral outbursts in public places and school settings. Parents shared that when their children exhibit sudden tantrums, aggression, or refusal to follow instructions in crowded or formal environments, it becomes very difficult to control or calm them immediately. These situations are often intensified by the presence of other people, leading to feelings of embarrassment, anxiety, and fear of judgment. In school settings, parents also reported being called by teachers due to behavioral incidents, which adds pressure especially when they are unable to respond immediately because of work or other responsibilities. Despite



efforts such as relocating the child to a quieter place or using calming strategies, some children still take a long time to settle, making the situation more stressful. Overall, the narratives emphasize the emotional strain and situational difficulty experienced by solo parents in managing behavioral challenges in public and institutional settings. This was evident in the following responses of the participants:

“Lisod kaayo para nako kung magwala akong anak sa public place sama sa mall o eskwelahan kay daghan kaayo tawo nga mutan-aw. Usahay dili nako siya dayon mapakalma bisan unsaon nako ug storya. Makabati ko ug kaulaw ug kakulba kay basin husgahan mi sa ubang tawo.” [It is very difficult for me when my child has outbursts in public places like the mall or school because many people tend to look at us. Sometimes I cannot calm him down immediately no matter how I talk to him. I feel embarrassed and anxious because we might be judged by other people.] — Parent 1

Financial pressure affecting access to therapy or support services. The sub-theme described the experiences of solo parents in dealing with financial constraints that limit their access to therapy and other support services for their children with special educational needs. Parents shared that the cost of therapy sessions, intervention programs, and related services is often beyond their financial capacity, making it difficult to sustain regular attendance or consistent support. As a result, some parents prioritize daily household expenses over therapeutic needs, leading to interrupted or limited access to professional interventions. This financial limitation also causes emotional distress among parents, as they recognize the importance of these services in their child’s development but are unable to afford them consistently. In response, some parents resort to home-based strategies to compensate for the lack of formal support. Overall, the narratives highlight how economic hardship becomes a major barrier in providing adequate developmental support for children with additional needs. This was evident in the following responses of the participants:

“Dako kaayo nga problema para nako ang kwarta kay mahal ang therapy ug uban pang support services nga kinahanglan sa akong anak. Usahay dili nako siya mapaadto pirmi sa therapy sessions tungod kay kinahanglan pa nako unahon ang among adlaw-adlaw nga gastohan.” [Money is a very big problem for me because therapy and other support services needed by my child are expensive. Sometimes I cannot bring him regularly to therapy sessions because I still need to prioritize our daily expenses.] — Parent 2

Emotional stress when discipline strategies do not work. The sub-theme described the experiences of solo parents in feeling emotional stress when their discipline strategies fail to effectively manage the behavior of their children with special educational needs. Parents shared that despite consistent patience, explanation, and application of different behavioral approaches, their children’s tantrums or refusal to cooperate often persist. This lack of visible progress leads to feelings of frustration, emotional exhaustion, and self-doubt regarding their effectiveness as parents. Some parents also expressed emotional vulnerability, including crying and feelings of helplessness, especially when their efforts do not yield immediate results. Additionally, comparisons with other children who appear more compliant further intensify feelings of inadequacy and emotional strain. Nevertheless, parents continue to persevere in their caregiving role despite these challenges. Overall, the narratives emphasize the emotional burden experienced when discipline strategies do not produce the desired behavioral changes. This was evident in the following responses of the participants:

“Naay mga panahon nga gibuhay na nako tanan nga akong nahibaw-an aron matul-id iyang behavior pero murag walay epekto kay special ma gud siya ma’am. Tungod ana, usahay magduha-duha ko sa akong kaugalingon kung sakto ba akong ginabuhay isip ginikanan.” [There are times when I have already done everything I know to correct his behavior, but it seems to have no effect because he is special, ma’am. Because of that, I sometimes doubt myself if I am doing the right thing as a parent.] — Parent 10



Practical Coping Strategies

Table 5. Practical Coping Strategies

Main theme	Subthemes
Practical Coping Strategies in Managing Children's Behavioral Challenges	Taking short breaks to manage personal stress during behavioral incidents Seeking help from teachers Talking calmly to the child after emotional episodes to correct behavior Setting simple daily rules and reminders for consistency at home

Taking short breaks to manage personal stress during behavioral incidents. The sub-theme described the experiences of solo parents in taking short breaks as a coping mechanism to manage personal stress during their children's behavioral incidents. Parents shared that when their children exhibit tantrums, aggressive behavior, or emotional outbursts, they sometimes need to temporarily step away from the situation to regain emotional control. This includes going to another room, taking deep breaths, or pausing silently for a few moments to prevent escalation of anger or frustration. Parents emphasized that these short breaks are important for maintaining self-control and ensuring that their responses remain calm and appropriate. In some cases, they also make sure their child is in a safe place before stepping away briefly. Overall, the narratives emphasize self-regulation and brief withdrawal as essential strategies for managing emotional and physical exhaustion during challenging behavioral episodes. This was evident in the following responses of the participants:

"Kung magsugod na ug tantrums akong anak ug mabati nako nga taas na akong stress, usahay moadto ko sa pikas kwarto sulod sa pipila ka minuto aron makalma usab ko. Importante para nako nga makapahuway gamay kay kung sapoton pud ko, basin ug unsay akong mabuhat nga dili mao." [When my child starts having tantrums and I feel that my stress is already high, I sometimes go to another room for a few minutes to calm myself. It is important for me to have a short break because if I also get angry, I might do something wrong.] — Parent 2

Seeking help from teachers. The sub-theme described the experiences of solo parents in seeking guidance and support from teachers in managing the behavioral challenges of their children with special educational needs. Parents shared that teachers serve as important partners in understanding their child's behavior and in identifying effective strategies used in the classroom that can also be applied at home. Through open communication, parents are able to discuss behavioral incidents, gain insights into their child's needs, and coordinate consistent approaches between home and school. This collaboration helps them better understand how to respond appropriately to difficult behaviors and reduces uncertainty in handling behavioral situations. Overall, the narratives emphasize the crucial role of teachers as support systems in strengthening parents' capacity to manage and guide their children's behavior effectively. This was evident in the following responses of the participants:

"Dako kaayo akong pasalamat sa mga teachers sa akong anak kay usahay sila gyud akong duolan kung dili na nako masabtan unsaon pag handle sa iyang behavior. Mangayo ko nila ug advice unsa nga strategies ang effective sa classroom aron akong masunod usab sa balay." [I am very thankful to my child's teachers because they are the ones I approach when I can no longer understand how to handle his behavior. I ask them for advice on what strategies are effective in the classroom so I can also apply them at home.] — Parent 1

Talking calmly to the child after emotional episodes to correct behavior. The sub-theme described the experiences of solo parents in using calm communication after their children's emotional episodes to correct and guide behavior. Parents shared that they usually wait until the child has fully calmed down before initiating any conversation, as immediate correction during heightened emotions is often ineffective. Once the child is calm, they engage in gentle discussions to help the child understand what happened, why the behavior is not appropriate, and what better actions can be done next time. This approach emphasizes patience, emotional regulation, and guidance rather than punishment during moments of distress. Parents also emphasized that calm conversations help children become more receptive and gradually learn appropriate ways of expressing emotions without harming others. Overall, the



narratives reflect the importance of post-incident communication in shaping behavior and promoting emotional understanding among children with special educational needs. This was evident in the following responses of the participants:

“Human mokalma akong anak gikan sa iyang sapot, ako siyang estoryahan sa hinay ug kalmado nga paagi. Pasabton nako siya nga dili maayo ang pagsyagit o pagpanakit ug tudluan siya unsa ang sakto nga behavior.” [After my child calms down from his anger, I talk to him in a soft and calm manner. I explain to him that shouting or hurting others is not good and I guide him on what the proper behavior should be.] — Parent 4

Setting simple daily rules and reminders for consistency at home. The sub-theme described the experiences of solo parents in establishing simple daily rules and consistent reminders at home to guide the behavior of their children with special educational needs. Parents shared that they implement structured routines such as fixed schedules for eating, studying, and sleeping, as well as clear household rules to help their children understand expected behavior. Regular reminders are also used to reinforce these rules and support the child’s ability to follow instructions consistently. This approach helps reduce confusion, minimize tantrums, and promote better discipline and responsibility. Despite the challenges and effort required, parents emphasized the importance of maintaining consistency in order to support their child’s behavioral development and daily functioning. Overall, the narratives highlight structured routines and repetitive reminders as essential strategies in managing behavior at home. This was evident in the following responses of the participants:

“Nagbutang ko ug simple nga house rules sama sa sakto nga oras sa pagkaon, pagtuon, ug pagtulog aron naanad akong anak sa routine. Pinaagi sa pirmi nga reminders, mas dali niya masabtan unsay expected nga behavior sa balay.” [I set simple house rules such as proper time for eating, studying, and sleeping so my child can get used to a routine. Through constant reminders, it becomes easier for him to understand what behavior is expected at home.] — Parent 3

Output of the Study

The Parenting Workshop in Strengthening Solo Parents’ Skills in Facilitating Their Children’s Behavior is developed in response to the findings of the study, which revealed that solo parents of children with additional needs experience persistent behavioral challenges such as difficulty in routine compliance, inattention, and dependence on adult support. These challenges require continuous supervision, repeated instructions, emotional regulation, and flexible caregiving adjustments, which often lead to emotional exhaustion, stress, and financial strain.

The study further showed that while solo parents actively employ coping strategies such as seeking help from teachers, taking short breaks, using calm communication, and establishing simple routines, they still experience difficulties in consistently managing behavioral outbursts and discipline-related concerns. Hence, this workshop is designed to provide practical, simple, and accessible parenting strategies that can strengthen their confidence and competence in handling behavioral challenges. It aims to enhance their skills in positive discipline, emotional regulation, routine management, and home–school collaboration, ultimately supporting both the well-being of solo parents and the behavioral development of their children with additional needs.

Discussion

The data revealed that solo parents consistently described their children with additional needs as exhibiting observable behavioral difficulties particularly difficulty following routines, inattention and easy distractibility, and dependence on adults for task completion. These challenges do not occur in isolation; rather, they form a repeating cycle that amplifies parental strain over time.



The data revealed that solo parents consistently described their experiences in facilitating the behavioral challenges of their children with additional needs as real-life parenting adjustments characterized by repetition, physical redirection, routine flexibility, and calm emotional regulation. In terms of repeating instructions, parents reported persistent repetition before compliance, as reflected in Parent 5's statement: "mag sigi ra gyud ko ug balik balik sa akong pahimangno before akong anak mosunod" [I really have to keep repeating my reminders before my child follows] and Parent 15's expression: "Normal nalang jud ng ka lima o labaw pa naku balik balikon ang instructions" [It has become normal for me to repeat instructions five times or more], showing emotional exhaustion and communication fatigue due to constant non-compliance. For physically guiding or redirecting the child, parents emphasized immediate intervention during emotional escalation, as shown in Parent 1's statement: "akong hinay-hinay nga kuptan ang iyang kamot ug dad-on sa hilom nga lugar aron mokalma siya" [I gently hold his hand and bring him to a quiet place so he can calm down], reflecting urgency and protective response during behavioral outbursts. In terms of adjusting daily routines, parents highlighted flexibility based on the child's emotional condition, as reflected in Parent 2's statement: "dili nako siya pugson dayon sa mga activities. Hatagan nako siya ug oras nga makalma una" [I do not force him to do activities immediately. I give him time to calm down first], showing adaptive caregiving to prevent escalation of behavior. For using a calm voice and silence, parents emphasized emotional restraint as a de-escalation strategy, as shown in Parent 4's statement: "mo hilom nalang ko unya taud-taud ana mokalma siya" [I just stay quiet, and after a while he calms down], indicating self-control and patience during emotional outbursts. Overall, these responses show that solo parents rely on continuous adjustment, patience, and emotional regulation in managing their children's behavioral challenges. During the interview, participants generally exhibited visible emotional strain, including tired and heavy facial expressions, sighing, furrowed brows, and occasional silence when recalling difficult experiences. Some also showed tearfulness when discussing repeated struggles, while others maintained brief composure when expressing acceptance of their situation. Overall, their demeanor reflected emotional exhaustion, stress, and deep concern for their children.

The data revealed that solo parents consistently experienced daily parenting challenges in managing the behavioral difficulties of their children with additional needs, particularly feeling exhausted from constant supervision and monitoring, difficulty controlling behavior during public or school outbursts, financial pressure affecting access to therapy, and emotional stress when discipline strategies do not work. Parents described intense caregiving demands as seen in Parent 3's statement: "Kapoy kaayo para nako nga pirmi nakong bantayan akong anak adlaw ug gabii" [It is very exhausting for me that I always have to watch my child day and night], and Parent 8's expression: "nahurot na gyud akong kusog tungod sa sige'g monitor" [I have already run out of energy from constant monitoring], showing physical and emotional exhaustion. In managing public and school outbursts, parents expressed embarrassment and stress, with Parent 1 stating: "Makabati ko ug kaulaw ug kakulba" [I feel embarrassment and anxiety], and Parent 9 noting: "dili gyud nako makontrol dayon iyang behavior" [I cannot immediately control his behavior], reflecting situational pressure and helplessness in social settings. Financial constraints were strongly emphasized, as Parent 7 shared: "lisod gyud i-budget ang sweldo kay daghan kaayo bayranan" [It is very difficult to budget my salary because there are many expenses], showing economic strain that limits access to therapy and intervention services. Emotional distress was evident when discipline strategies failed, with Parent 4 stating: "Makastress kaayo para nako kung akong mga pamaagi dili successful" [It is very stressful when my strategies are not successful], and Parent 15 expressing emotional exhaustion and comparison with others, indicating frustration and self-doubt. During the interview, participants generally showed visibly tired and stressed facial expressions, including furrowed brows, teary eyes, and frequent sighing, with some appearing emotionally overwhelmed when recalling daily struggles; their physical appearance reflected fatigue such as slumped posture and minimal eye contact, while their overall attitude shifted between calm acceptance and emotional distress, indicating both resilience and deep emotional burden in their caregiving experiences.

The data revealed that solo parents employed practical coping strategies in managing the behavioral challenges of their children with additional needs, particularly taking short breaks to manage personal stress during behavioral incidents, seeking help from teachers, talking calmly to the child after emotional episodes to correct behavior, and setting simple daily rules and reminders for consistency at home. Parents described the need to temporarily withdraw from stressful situations to regain emotional control, as reflected in Parent 2's statement: "moadto ko sa



pikas kwarto sulod sa pipila ka minuto aron makalma usab ko” [I go to another room for a few minutes to calm myself], and Parent 6’s “magkuha ko ug short break pinaagi sa pagginhawa ug lawom” [I take a short break by breathing deeply], showing self-regulation and emotional management. In seeking help from teachers, parents emphasized collaboration and guidance, with Parent 1 stating: “sila gyud akong duolan kung dili na nako masabtan” [they are the ones I approach when I can no longer understand], highlighting reliance on school support systems. For talking calmly after emotional episodes, parents stressed patience and post-incident correction, as seen in Parent 9’s “hulaton nako nga mokalma siya una, dayon makigstorya ko niya” [I wait for him to calm down first, then I talk to him], reflecting controlled emotional response and guidance. In setting simple rules, Parent 3 shared: “Nagbutang ko ug simple nga house rules... aron naanad akong anak sa routine” [I set simple house rules so my child can get used to a routine], indicating structured but flexible parenting strategies. During the interview, participants generally showed mixed emotional expressions such as tired and concerned facial appearances when describing behavioral struggles, but appeared calmer and more composed when discussing coping strategies; some displayed sighing, soft speech, and reflective pauses, while others showed subtle relief and slight smiles when explaining successful strategies, indicating both emotional burden and resilience in managing their children’s behavior.

Conclusion

The study concluded that solo parents of children with additional needs experience continuous behavioral, emotional, financial, and caregiving challenges that require constant adjustment and high levels of resilience. Their children are commonly characterized by difficulties in following routines, inattention, and dependence on adult support, which demand persistent supervision and structured guidance. In response, solo parents adopt various real-life parenting adjustments such as repetition of instructions, physical redirection, flexible routines, and calm communication to manage behavioral episodes. Despite these efforts, they still encounter exhaustion, stress, and difficulties in managing outbursts, especially in public settings and when discipline strategies are ineffective, compounded by financial limitations in accessing support services. However, the study also concluded that solo parents demonstrate strong adaptive capacity by employing coping strategies such as seeking assistance from teachers, taking short emotional breaks, and maintaining simple and consistent home routines. Overall, the study emphasizes that while solo parenting a child with additional needs is highly demanding, it is also characterized by perseverance, adaptability, and sustained parental commitment in managing behavioral challenges.

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