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Peaks and Valleys of Parents of Children with Special Educational Needs

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Abstract

Parents with children with special educational needs play a pivotal role in providing support, advocacy, and care for their children. While numerous studies have explored the experiences of these parents, research focusing on those in rural areas is limited. Rural parents often face unique challenges such as inadequate funding, lack of access to trained special education teachers, financial constraints, and social isolation. This study aimed to explore the peaks and valleys of parents with children with special needs and examined the impact that these experiences have on the parent's mental health and quality of life. A phenomenological research design is employed. The study included five participants, all residents of Barangay Caucab, Almeria, Biliran. The findings revealed that while parenting a child with special needs is emotionally and physically demanding, it also offers moments of joy and fulfillment, particularly when parents witness their child's progress. However, these parents frequently struggle with financial burdens, social isolation, and communication barriers. Coping mechanisms such as seeking community support and practicing patience were crucial in maintaining their well-being. Although some government programs and social networks provide assistance, the study found a significant gap between the support needed and the support received. The study highlights the importance of improving resources, government programs, and community support for parents of children with special needs in rural areas.

Keywords: Peaks; Valleys; Parents of Children with Special Needs; quality of life; Philippines

Introduction

Parents of children with special needs play a crucial role in their child's life, providing essential support, advocacy, and care. They often function as advocates, participating in decision-making processes, making informed choices, and securing appropriate services and supports (Turnbull et al., 2019). Parental support, understanding, and nurturing have been found to be critical for children with special needs in building a positive self-image and coping with the emotional difficulties associated with their disability (Brown & Murray, 2010). Parents and caregivers are the most important providers of health and daily care to their children with disabilities (World Health Organization, 2021).

Thus, families are required to juggle multiple roles, including accessing resources and funding for therapies, adapting the home environment, and managing their child's behavior (Cidav et al., 2017). Parent-professional collaboration has been shown to improve child outcomes and enhance the effectiveness of interventions for children with special needs (Dunst et al., 2016). Thus, parents' involvement and support networks greatly contribute to positive outcomes for children with special needs.

Consequently, children with special needs encompass a diverse group of individuals who face unique challenges and require additional support. 'Disability' has been defined as a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more psychological or anatomical functions of an individual or activities of such individual (Senate and the House of Representatives of the Philippines (1992). Republic Act 7277 Magna Carta for Disabled Person Philippines: Congress of the Philippines). Because of such restrictions, the individual is not able to perform life roles normally expected for his age, consequently affecting his life.

In lieu, parents of children with special needs face unique challenges that can affect their mental and emotional well-being. Being a parent of a child who has special needs has been described as complicated, challenging, and frustrating (Gargiulo, 1985). As per a study published in the Journal of Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics, parents of children with special needs experience higher levels of stress, depression, and anxiety compared to parents typically developing children (Bristol, 2008). The study found that parents of children with special needs often face a higher burden of caregiving responsibilities, financial strain, and social isolation. These factors can contribute to feelings of overwhelm and burnout, which can have a negative impact on parents' mental and emotional health.

Despite these challenges, many parents of children with special needs also report experiencing moments of joy, pride, and fulfillment in their parenting journey. Based on the study published in the Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders found that parents of children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) often experience positive emotions related to their child's unique strengths and abilities (Orsmond, Seltzer, Krauss, & Hong, 2003). The study also found that parents who reported higher levels of positive emotions also reported lower levels of stress and depression. This suggests that finding moments of positivity and resilience in the parenting journey can have a

protective effect on the parent's mental health. The peaks and valleys of their experiences can be influenced by a variety of factors, including the severity of their child's condition, the availability of resources and support, and their own coping mechanisms.

Based on prior studies, it can be concluded that parents of special needs children have gone through highs and lows in their parenting. However, there are few studies that emphasize parents of children with special needs in rural areas which were observed by the researchers that are lack of funding, lack of financial, and social influence, lack of trained special education teachers, and isolation geographically and socially.

It is in this light that the researchers would like to investigate and explore the peaks and valleys of parenting a child with special needs, the support needed and their coping mechanisms in addressing the highs and lows they encountered as parents of children with special needs.

Statement of the Problem

This study aimed to explore the peaks and valleys of parents with children with special educational needs and examined the impact that these experiences have on the parent's mental health and quality of life.

Specifically, it seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What are the peaks and valleys experiences of parents of children with special needs?
2. What are the coping mechanisms employed in addressing the peaks (highs) and valleys (lows) encountered?
3. What is the possible support needed by the parents of children with special needs?

Literature Review

This section presents the various literature and studies considered in this comprehensive form as part of the due course of its proceedings.

Disability interferes with an individual's ability to engage in activities expected for his functioning throughout the lifespan. Various authors have described how such disability can affect a child's quality of life, requiring special attention to their unique needs. It is imperative to note that although disability affects the individual, attention should also be given to its effects on the people around them, particularly their parents. The problems they face and the issues they address are different from parents with regular children.

Previous studies attempted to describe the stresses, issues, and problems that a child's disability places on their families. The literature describes parental psychological issues, physical stresses, socioeconomic roadblocks, to name a few, as co-morbid conditions to raise a child with special needs. Although this is beneficial in planning individual programs that address parental issue specific problems, a more dynamic and holistic framework should be considered to show how these issues are related to one another.

Moreover, children affected by disabilities experience difficulty in their ability to live a normal life, most of the time requiring special care and assistance (Azaula, Msall, Buck et al, 2000; Leonard, Johnson & Brust, 1993). This places a great deal of stress on the family, most especially, their parents. Lazaru & Folkman (1984), Hill & McCubbin (1958, 1984) proposed two models of family stress, both of which cite the birth of the child who has special needs as the stressful factor.

Thus, stress has been a common topic among scholars who look into the effects of a child's disability on the family, especially the parents. Stress starts when a child is diagnosed as having a disability. It is as if the parents attain a "symbolic death" of their dream to see their child live a normal life (Lerner, 1995). These stresses continue on to include prolonged dependency and demands for special care (Howard, 1978), disappointments with delayed developmental milestones (Bentovim, 1972) and worry regarding future self-sufficiency (Wing, 1985; Wolf & Goldberg, 1986). Stress has been linked to psychological distress, emotional anxiety, physical strain, and economic burden to name a few.

Corollary to this, parenting children with special needs may have an adverse effect on their general well-being (Cummings, Bayley & Rie, 1966; DeMyer, 1979). Boyd (2002) states that if support is not sought, development of depression and anxiety was postulated for mothers. Mothers of children with autism (CWA) and children with behavior disorders are at risk of experiencing dysphoria, which seems to be linked to the stresses brought on by parenting a child with special needs (Dumas, 1991). Stress and health are related (Serafino, 2005). The daunting task of caring for a CWSN requires special parenting skills which can be detrimental to the physical health of their parents.

As per Raina, O'Donnel, Rosenbaum, Brenhaut, Walter, Russel, Swinton, Zhu & Wood (2005) found that the most important predictors of these children's caregivers were the behavior of their child, the demands of the task, and the

family function. Murphy, Christian, Caplin & Young's (2007) study findings show that caregiver health worsens due to the consequent lack of time, a lack of control, and decreased psychosocial energy brought about by their roles.

In addition, financial concerns further exacerbate their situation. With the perceived lack of financial support from the Philippine government (Joaquin, 2002), parents are more inclined to be financially supportive to their children's needs (Binoya, 2003).

Seltzer and Greenberg (2003) noted that parents of children with developmental disabilities from larger families had lower rates of employment. In a similar study conducted in the Philippines, half of the maternal subjects reported to have given up their careers and devoted their time and energy to the caring of their child (Liwag, 1987). Single parents of CWSN also find themselves at an additional disadvantage as discussed in Foronda's study (1998).
The 24/7 demands can impact how parents relate to their spouses and to other members of the family (Licuan, 2007). The lack of public knowledge and understanding regarding the true nature of autism creates stigma (Foronda, 1998). There is a tendency for parents to perceive themselves as stigmatized by their child's condition, with stronger affinities to mothers than fathers (Gray, 2008).

Communication and relationship problems are usually seen between the parents of a child with special needs. This can cause marital distress, if not an eventual separation between them (Sabbeth & Laventhal, 1984). The incidence of marital conflict is not uncommon (Farber, 1959) in families that have a child with mental retardation. In contrast, there are actually some families of CWSN who experience no more than the same problems in marital relationships in comparison with regular families (Bernard, 1974; Dorner 1975; Martin 1975; Patterson, 1991; Weisbren, 1980), with marriages being reported to have improved after the birth and diagnosis of the child as having a disability (Schwab, 1989; Klein & Schive, 2001).

Wolf, Noh & Fishman (1989) gave a brief report on the psychological effects of parental stress on the parents of autistic children and included isolation from family and friends as an important life stressor on these types of parents. Dunn, Burbine, Bowers & Dunn (2001) strengthened this claim by looking at how lack of social support contributed to negative outcomes of depression, social isolation, and spousal relationship problems.

Quality of Life has been described in literature as a person's dynamic appraisal of his life in relation to various domains as it relates to his environment (World Health Organization, 1997). A person's QOL is not a single phenomenon but rather an interplay between and among several dimensions. Health-care professionals generally agree on four QOL dimensions: physical, psychological, social, and spiritual (Hilderley, 2001).

The Impetus on research concerning the quality of life of individuals with disabilities has been seen for the past twenty years (Hughes & Hwang, 1996; Schalock, 1997, 2000), but not until recently has there been more focus on parental QOL. Yilmaz, Cetinkaya & Caglar (2005) found that the mothers of children with cerebral palsy are more at risk for depression compared to mothers with regular children. Eker and Tuzun (2004) conducted a similar study, and results show significantly lower scores, except the physical subscale of these mothers compared to the control comparison group. They also noted significant correlations between the child's motor disability and the QOL scores of their mothers. O' Lafur, Gudmundsson and Masson (2002) noted that mothers of children with mental disorders reported a poor quality of life, with high prevalence for mental disorders themselves. Using the WHOQOL-BREF, Leung & Li-Tsang (2003) and Rotor (2006) conducted similar studies on the QOL of parents who have children with disabilities. Both studies confirmed that caring, raising, and parenting a CWSN compromised parental QOL, similar to the idea proposed by Evans, Dingus & Haselkorn (1993).

Research in the past has pointed out that the more intensive the level of assistance given to the disabled child, the lower the QOL of the caregiver (Unalan, Gencosmaoglu, Akgun, Karamehmetoglu, Tuna & Ones, 2001 cited in Leung and LiTsang, 2003 and Rotor, 2006). Moreover, the quality of life of these special families is changed as the family and its members experience the dynamics of life. The domains of the family are interrelated and affect each other as well (Park, Turnbull & Turnbull, 2002).

The initial literature review is significant in realizing the present study because it explained classroom conditions, instructional activities, and pupils' performance.

Methodology

The qualitative design of the study that best aligned with the researcher's goal is phenomenological research design. A phenomenological approach is appropriate because the process attempted to explore the life story, beliefs, experiences, and constructs and assigns meaning to the phenomenon by creating common themes (see Saldana, 2015). The process allowed us to identify the peaks and valleys of parents who have specific experience of their children with special needs and align with SI theory. A phenomenological approach requires an emergent design that allows participants to describe their lived experience, moments, stories, and anecdotal accounts, so the researchers can capture the essential, consistent, shared structures of the phenomenon (Hopkins et al., 2017). This method is

appropriate because it allows individual and contextual responses that are unique to the participant, eliciting the most in-depth and rich information.

Moreover, this study was conducted in Caucab, Almeria, Biliran for the School Year 2022-2023. Purposive study method was used in this study. The participants in this study are parents who have children under the age of 18 with special needs.

In order to attain the objective of the study, an interview guide sheet with open-ended questions were used as a method to gather data. This method was appropriate because it allowed for individual and contextual responses that are unique to the participant, eliciting the most in-depth and rich information. Furthermore, the research question speaks to the need to find the essence of what experience means to these individuals. Seidman (2012) noted that interviewing as a form of data gathering is time consuming and costly, but necessary if the true meaning is to be identified in phenomenological research.

This study utilized an interview guide sheet as one way in data gathering procedure. Before the researcher conducted this study, a letter asking permission was sent to the participants. After which, the interview followed.

In analyzing the data, the researcher utilized Colaizzi's Method Data Analysis which follows certain steps to obtain a valid and reliable results of the study.

The anonymity and confidentiality of the participants was preserved by not revealing their names and identity in the data collection, analysis and reporting of the study findings. Before conducting the interview session with the participants, they are informed through letter requesting they are one of the participants on this study. Each interview was conducted individually in a private and quiet room without access by outsiders. The researcher personally made sure that she was the only one who could identify the participants and voice recordings. Informed consent is essential, with researchers obtaining explicit and informed consent from participants, explaining the purpose, procedures, and potential risks involved in the study (Smith & Osborn, 2007). Upholding these ethical considerations ensures the integrity and well-being of participants involved in qualitative research.

Findings

Based on the interpreted responses of the participants experiences, coping strategies, and support needed, researchers categorize the themes sought, namely, peaks or positive experiences, valleys or negative experiences, emotional stress, financial burdens, constant need for caregiving, coping strategies, support needed, and support desired but not received.

Peaks or Positive Experiences: Parents of children with special needs in study expressed moments of joy and happiness in their role. They found fulfillment in providing care, witnessing their child's understanding and responsiveness, and appreciating their child's unique abilities. These positive emotional experiences were rooted in love, acceptance, and pride. Despite the challenges they faced, these parents derived happiness from the special moments they shared with their children.

For the Valleys or negative experiences, Parents of children with special needs in the study also shared the challenges they face in their role. These challenges include the physical and emotional demands of caregiving, financial difficulties, and the frustration of not being able to effectively communicate with their child. The participants expressed that these challenges can be emotionally draining and heartbreaking for them. They acknowledged the negative experiences that arise from these difficulties and the impact they have on their well-being and family dynamics.

Also, Emotional stress raising a child with special needs presents emotional challenges for parents, including increased stress, anxiety, and emotional exhaustion. The demands of caregiving and the unique needs of their child can take a toll on their emotional well-being. Understanding and addressing these emotional challenges is crucial to support parents in their caregiving journey.

Also, Financial burdens Parents of children with special needs often experience significant financial burdens, as they encounter various expenses related to medical care, therapy, and specialized equipment. These financial pressures can add to the existing stress and strain on the family's resources. Adequate support and resources are necessary to alleviate the financial challenges faced by these parents, enabling them to provide the best possible care for their children.

And constant need for caregiving, caring for children with special needs can be physically and mentally draining for parents, as it requires constant attention and vigilance. The demanding nature of caregiving can restrict parents' personal time and freedom, leaving them with limited opportunities for self-care and relaxation. It is crucial for

parents to have access to respite care and support services that can provide them with occasional relief and assistance in order to prevent burnout and maintain their well-being.

On the other hand, despite those experiences and challenges they encountered as a parent of children with special needs, the participant also showed coping mechanisms on dealing with those challenges, the support they needed and the support they wished to come. The researchers categorize the theme sought, coping strategies, support needed, and support desired but not received.

Coping strategies, parents of children with special needs employ various coping mechanisms to navigate the challenges and joys of parenting. The study identified several prominent strategies: relying on personal strength and resilience, seeking support through faith and spirituality, prioritizing proper care and nutrition, and practicing patience and understanding. These coping mechanisms reflect the parents' determination, unwavering commitment, and adaptability in meeting their children's unique needs. Through their resilience and resourcefulness, these parents demonstrate their ability to navigate the highs and lows of parenting children with special needs.

Also, Support needed, parents of children with special needs employ various coping mechanisms to navigate the challenges and joys of parenting. The study identified several prominent strategies: relying on personal strength and resilience, seeking support through faith and spirituality, prioritizing proper care and nutrition, and practicing patience and understanding. These coping mechanisms reflect the parents' determination, unwavering commitment, and adaptability in meeting their children's unique needs. Through their resilience and resourcefulness, these parents demonstrate their ability to navigate the highs and lows of parenting children with special needs.

Along with support desired but not received, participants expressed a strong desire for increased financial support and assistance to address the challenges they face as parents of children with special needs. They specifically highlighted the need for better access to healthcare services, financial aid, and specialized services tailored to their children's specific needs. Participants expressed frustration with the lack of support from specific organizations or agencies they reached out to for assistance. They emphasized the need for financial support to ensure their children's basic needs are met and expressed disappointment with the lack of accessible healthcare services and unresponsive organizations. The findings underscore the importance of comprehensive support systems, including financial aid, accessible healthcare, and responsive government programs, to alleviate the burdens faced by parents of children with special needs and enhance their overall well-being.

Discussion

The Peaks and Valleys Experienced by the Parents of Children with Special Needs

The highs and lows experienced by parents of children with special needs are well-documented based on the responses during the conduct of the interview. Thus, the researchers able to develop a series of themes to further discuss the subject.

Peaks or Positive experiences: Parents often experience moments of joy and pride when their child with special needs achieves milestones or demonstrates progress in their development (Lounds Taylor et al., 2017). These positive moments can bring immense happiness and a sense of fulfillment to parents. Hence, the participants claimed that they also experience a positive experience with his/her children. Researchers' quote the participant response:

P1: "It's very easy to handle, oh-ohm…"
P2: "I will be happy because that's how we take care of each other, right?"
P3: "I'm happy even if he has disabilities."
Researcher's quote: Participant 3 expressed genuine happiness despite their child's disabilities, indicating a positive and accepting attitude towards their child's unique needs.
P4: "We still rely on how she is… She… whatever I say to her, she still listens."
P5: "I have a positive outlook because… ideally, he should be able to manage on his own… but I still need to assist him."

The researcher found out that the participants expressed moments of joy and happiness in their role as parents of children with special needs. They found fulfillment in providing care, witnessing their child's understanding and responsiveness, and appreciating the progress their child made, even if it was limited. Their positive emotional experiences stemmed from acceptance, love, and a sense of pride in their child's unique abilities. Literature supports the idea that parents of children with special needs can experience positive emotions and find meaning in their caregiving role. Research has shown that parents often develop resilience, derive satisfaction from their child's achievements, and experience personal growth as a result of raising a child with special needs (Baker-Ericzén, Jenkins, & Haine-Schlagel, 2013; Hastings & Taunt, 2002).

Valleys or Negative Experiences: Existing literature highlights the various challenges faced by parents of children with special needs, including increased stress levels, social isolation, financial burdens, and the need for continuous caregiving (Hastings et al., 2005; Norizan et al., 2015). These challenges can negatively impact parents' emotional well-being and overall quality of life. The researchers quote the participants responses.

P2: "You know… with my child, my experience giving birth, taking care of them, raising them, and sending them to school, it was not easy at all, it was tough, really tough! Especially for us parents"
P3: "Sometimes it's frustrating and it makes me sad."
P4: "It's hard and it's heartbreaking"
P5: "There are many challenges. You really have to be patient with him because he doesn't know how to speak and express things directly. And his grammar is always incorrect."

The researcher found that some of the parents also shared the challenges they encounter, such as the physical and emotional demands of caregiving, financial difficulties, and the inability to communicate effectively with their child. These challenges can be emotionally draining and heartbreaking for parents. Hence, the participants claimed that they also experience a negative experience with his/her children.

The implication of parents sharing their challenges and negative experiences while caring for their children underscores the importance of supporting parents in their caregiving roles (Smith & Clark, 2019). By providing resources, improving communication strategies, addressing financial difficulties, fostering strong support system, and implementing supportive policies, society can help alleviate the emotion burden on parents and promote healthier parent-child relations.

The Impact of the Experiences they encountered as Parents of Children with Special Needs

Raising a child with special needs has a profound impact on the lives of parents and their family members. Research suggests that parents experience both positive and negative effects on their well-being. While some parents exhibit resilience and adaptability, finding meaning and fulfillment in their caregiving role (Hastings et al., 2016), others report increased levels of stress, anxiety, and emotional exhaustion (Baker-Ericzén et al., 2017). Siblings and other family members may also experience unique challenges and adjustments in their relationships and daily lives (Hastings, 2003). Understanding the impact of special needs parenting on the entire family is crucial for providing appropriate support and interventions.

Emotional Stress: Raising a child with special needs can be emotionally challenging for parents. They may experience heightened levels of stress, anxiety, and emotional exhaustion due to the constant demands of caregiving (Baker-Ericzén et al., 2017). Coping with the unique needs and challenges of their child can take a toll on their emotional well-being.

P3: "Sometimes it's frustrating and it makes me sad."
P4: "It's hard and it's heartbreaking."
P5: "It's really challenging… That negativity makes us sad… When will he become normal like other children?"
Financial Burdens: Parents of children with special needs often face increased financial burdens due to medical expenses, therapy costs, and specialized equipment (Baker-Ericzén et al., 2017). These financial pressures can create additional stress and strain on the family's resources.
P4: "I haven't received anything... Oh, the PWD (Persons with Disabilities) assistance of 3000... That's it."
P5: "Support from relatives... It would be good if we had someone who can always be there for him because we are the only ones here... It's good for us, but our companions here, some of them have jobs."

Constant Need for Caregiving: Children with special needs often require continuous caregiving, which can be physically and mentally exhausting for parents. The constant need to attend to their child's needs can limit their own personal time and freedom (Baker-Ericzén et al., 2017).

P5: "There are many... You really have to be patient with him because he doesn't know how to speak and express things directly... And his grammar is always incorrect."

The researcher found out that the parents of children with special needs face numerous challenges in their daily lives. These challenges encompass both practical and emotional aspects. The practical challenges include the constant need for assistance in various activities, such as feeding and bathing, as well as communication barriers due to language and grammar difficulties. These challenges lead to feelings of frustration, sadness, and heartbreak among parents, as they witness their children's limitations and slow progress. Additionally, social and emotional impacts are evident, with instances of bullying and isolation mentioned by the parents. Furthermore, the financial burden of medical care and support adds to the difficulties faced by these parents. Overall, these findings highlight the complex nature of

the challenges faced by parents of children with special needs and emphasize the need for comprehensive support systems and interventions to address their unique needs.

The Coping Mechanisms Employed in Addressing the Peaks and Valleys Encountered by the Parents of Children with Special Needs

Coping Strategies: To address the highs and lows of parenting a child with special needs, parents mentioned several coping mechanisms. These include striving hard to provide daily care, entrusting their problems to a higher power, seeking social support, and practicing patience and understanding.

Coping mechanisms play a crucial role in helping parents manage the stress and challenges associated with raising a child with special needs. Research suggests that adaptive coping strategies, such as seeking social support and finding meaning in caregiving, can improve parents' psychological well-being and resilience (Gray, 2006; Hastings et al., 2005). Researchers would like to quote participants' response:

P1: "That's really all, we strive hard so that... we don't rely on anyone else but provide for them on a daily basis, just like that."
P2: "I entrust all my problems to the Lord, asking him to grant me grace... my difficulties are resolved... he won't forsake me. It's just one destination... there's no other... as long as I am like this... I won't complain or worry."
P3: "I just said, I prayed to the Lord... to give me good health so that I can survive for them, for him."
P4: "Feeding her properly... I give her whatever vegetables I can to improve her condition."
P5: "Because, of course... you need to be patient with him, be understanding, be flexible."

The researcher found out that the participants in the study employed a range of coping mechanisms to address the highs and lows associated with parenting children with special needs. One prominent coping strategy observed was the participants' reliance on their personal strength and resilience. They strived hard to meet their children's daily needs and took on the responsibility of providing them without relying on external assistance.

Another coping mechanism highlighted by the participants was the role of faith and spirituality in their lives. They entrusted their problems to a higher power, seeking support through prayer and placing their trust in divine intervention. This spiritual connection provided them with a sense of comfort and helped them navigate the challenges they faced as parents.

Furthermore, the participants recognized the importance of providing proper care and nutrition for their children with special needs. They acknowledged the impact of maintaining a healthy diet and took the initiative to offer their children the necessary nutrition, even in the face of financial limitations.

Additionally, the parents demonstrated the importance of patience, understanding, and flexibility in their parenting approach. They recognized the unique needs and limitations of their children and adapted their expectations and behaviors accordingly. This flexibility allowed them to navigate difficult situations and respond with compassion and understanding.

These coping strategies employed by the parents reflect their determination, resilience, and unwavering commitment to their children's well-being. By drawing upon their own inner strength, seeking support through faith, providing proper care and nutrition, and practicing patience and understanding, these parents demonstrate their ability to navigate the challenges and joys of raising children with special needs.

The Support needed and Support Desired but not Received by the Parents of Children with Special Needs

Research emphasizes the importance of comprehensive support for parents of children with special needs. Adequate financial assistance, access to healthcare and educational services, respite care, and social support networks are vital for parents to cope effectively (Cohen & Warren, 2015; Hastings & Taunt, 2002). Furthermore, raising awareness and promoting inclusivity within society can contribute to a more supportive environment for families with children with special needs.

Access to support networks and services is crucial for parents of children with special needs. Research shows that social support, whether from family, friends, or support groups, can alleviate stress, provide practical assistance, and enhance parents' well-being (Hastings et al., 2005; Norizan et al., 2015). Government programs and community initiatives that offer financial, emotional, and educational support can significantly benefit families.

Support Received: Participants mentioned various forms of support they have received, such as assistance from government programs like Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino, Person with Disabilities (PWD), Social Amelioration Program (SAP) and Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD). Some participants also mentioned support from relatives and the community. The researchers' quoted the participant response:

P1: "It seems like it, < I really haven't received>… nothing."
P2: "Support from the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Programs, Yes, that's what I have received."
P3: "You know SAP (Social Amelioration Program)… and also those who… those… You know, those from DSWD (Department of Social Welfare and Development)… ohh, they give assistance and (0.5) there's also the ^^TUPAD^^ program, right?"
P4: "I haven't received anything… oh the PWD (Persons with Disabilities) assistance of 3000… That's it…"
P5: "Support from relatives, like his parents, because they are not here [ohh, they're always out ^^just kidding^^], so we need someone who can consistently help him because his parents are not here, it's just us… it would be good if we have someone who can always be there for him because we are the only ones here… it's good for us, but our companions here, some of them have jobs [what happened, Peppa? Are you still sleepy?]."

The researcher found out that the participants in the study mentioned various forms of support they have received or wished to receive for their children with special needs. One participant acknowledged receiving support from government programs such as the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program, which aims to provide financial assistance to low-income families. Another participant mentioned benefiting from the Social Amelioration Program (SAP) and assistance from the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD). These programs are designed to provide aid and resources to individuals and families facing economic hardships.

Additionally, one participant mentioned receiving assistance through the Persons with Disabilities (PWD) program, which offers support specific to individuals with disabilities. However, it is worth noting that not all participants reported receiving support, with one participant expressing a lack of assistance. Another participant emphasized the importance of support from relatives in the absence of government support. These findings highlight the significance of government programs and familial support networks in providing much-needed assistance to parents of children with special needs.

Support Desired but Not Received: The gap between desired and received support is a common concern for parents of children with special needs. Studies highlight the need for comprehensive and accessible support services, including financial aid, respite care, and inclusive educational programs (Norizan et al., 2015; Turnbull et al., 2007). Bridging this gap can alleviate the burden on parents and improve their ability to care for their child effectively.

P1: "What I really want? ...oh, it's to be able to support them so they can eat well... that's how I can provide what they ask for... that's it."
P2: "That's what I've been hoping for, that she would say, 'I wish I had support... But it still came, yes... It still came and we received it, this year, 6000... I received the support, right? It's different. Oh, for her, I wish that my wish for her would come true, that she would be kind-hearted, she, of course, being disabled. My wishes are not just about receiving assistance for my child's illness so that I won't have to worry... Yes, because we are poor, that's why my wish, the one I prayed for to the Lord, is for it to come to me and grant us good health, that's all, what else could we wish for to become rich."
P3: "I actually wanted to support him, so... Financial support {from the Government}, huh? Yes?"
P4: "Oh, if there is any help available... Because only the government can provide assistance to us, there's no one else."
P5: "Support from the government because we've mentioned that we need assistance so they can understand what can be provided to him, we sent his picture to [Norphil], oh, Norphil, but still no response until now [Max], and we need assistance as soon as possible while he is still young so that they can understand his weaknesses and provide appropriate support [baby crying]."

The researcher found out that the participants in the study expressed a strong desire for increased financial support and assistance to address the challenges they face as parents of children with special needs. They specifically highlighted the need for better access to healthcare services, financial aid, and specialized services tailored to their children's specific needs. The participants expressed their frustration with the lack of support from specific organizations or agencies they reached out to for assistance.

For instance, some participants mentioned the desire for financial support from the government or other sources to ensure that their children receive proper nutrition and can fulfill their basic needs. They also mentioned the need for accessible healthcare services and expressed disappointment with the lack of response or assistance received from organizations they contacted for help. These findings emphasize the importance of providing comprehensive support systems and resources to parents of children with special needs, including financial aid, accessible healthcare services, and responsive government support programs. By addressing these gaps in support, policymakers and organizations can help alleviate the burdens faced by these parents and enhance the well-being of children with special needs and their families.

Conclusion

Parenting a child with special needs is a complex and emotionally demanding journey. Despite the challenges faced, parents find moments of happiness and fulfillment in their child's progress and the unique bond they share. However, they also encounter various difficulties, including financial burdens, social isolation, and communication barriers. The coping mechanisms employed by parents, such as seeking support and practicing patience, play a vital role in maintaining their well-being and resilience. While some support is available through government programs and social networks, there is still a significant gap between the desired and received support.

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