

# Parental Perspective on the Challenges and Coping Mechanisms in Raising a Child with Autism

Angel Fe D. Alas, LPT<sup>a</sup>, Disamae G. Aunzo, LPT<sup>b</sup>, Jecelle G. Darias-Behemino, LPT<sup>c</sup>, Precious C. Cadungog, LPT<sup>d</sup>, Wenefredo E. Cagape, EdD, PhD<sup>e</sup>, Christine Gay H. Catubig, LPT<sup>f</sup>, Joanna B. Lafuente, LPT<sup>g</sup>

<sup>a</sup>angelfe.alas@hcdc.edu.ph, <sup>b</sup>disamae.aunzo@hcdc.edu.ph, <sup>c</sup>jecelle.darias@hcdc.edu.ph, <sup>d</sup>precious.cadungog@hcdc.edu.ph, <sup>e</sup>wcagape@ccd.edu.ph,

<sup>f</sup>christinegay.catubig@hcdc.edu.ph, <sup>g</sup>[joanna.lafuente@hcdc.edu.ph](mailto:joanna.lafuente@hcdc.edu.ph)

<sup>a</sup>Davao Christian High School, Davao City 8000

<sup>b</sup>Specially Gifted Angels Learning Center Inc., Davao City 8000

<sup>c</sup>SoliDeo Gloria Christian Academy, Davao City 8000

<sup>d</sup>OIC-College President, City College of Davao City, Davao City 8000

<sup>f</sup>MSM SpedSchool of Panabo Inc., 8105

<sup>g</sup>St. Patrick Math-Sci School Inc., Davao City 8000

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## Abstract

This qualitative study delves into the lived experiences and challenges faced by parents raising children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in Davao City, Philippines. It examines parents' coping mechanisms to navigate these challenges, showcasing their resilience. Drawing on Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory and Goffman's Labeling Theory, the study seeks to understand the contextual influences on parents' experiences. The participants include five parents, primarily mothers aged between 30 to 40, from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. The study employed opportunistic and purposive sampling techniques to recruit participants. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the collected data with informed consent. The emerging issues include navigating understanding and awareness, accessing support and resources, and emotional and practical adjustment. Parents utilized coping mechanisms such as education, advocacy, and building support networks. The findings highlight parents' significant challenges due to societal stigma and educational limitations. However, the study also identifies positive outcomes, such as fostering supportive environments through open communication and strong support networks. This collaborative approach involving parents, professionals, and families is crucial for enhancing the well-being of both parents and children with Autism.

Keywords: Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), parents, challenges, coping mechanisms

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## 1. Introduction

Raising a child with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) presents unique challenges for parents, including psychological, financial, and social aspects. Parents frequently face the challenges of negotiating complex healthcare systems, obtaining specialized schooling, and keeping up with daily routines that may be interrupted by their child's unique needs. The path can be emotionally exhausting, as parents may feel isolated, guilty, or frustrated while trying to offer the best care for the child in their care. Financial pressure is another critical factor, with the price of treatments, actions, and extra assistance frequently putting a strain on families. Despite these hurdles, parents develop a variety of coping techniques, including seeking assistance from autism-specific networks, practicing self-care, and fighting for children's rights and inclusion. Parents of a child with autism handle these challenges with perseverance and drive, creating settings of acceptance, affection, and compassion within their households.

In Spain, a study conducted by Miranda et al. (2019) explored the factors influencing stress among mothers of children with ASD. Their findings revealed a significant correlation between parenting stress and both the severity of the child's ASD symptoms and their behavioral difficulties. Interestingly, the study also identified a negative correlation between stress and mothers who employed engagement coping strategies and had access to social support networks. This emphasizes the importance of promoting these coping mechanisms to mitigate stress for mothers raising children with ASD.

In the Philippines, a study conducted in General Santos City by Borro and Ceballo (2023) investigated the challenges parents of children with special needs faced during the COVID-19 pandemic. The research revealed that these parents encountered many obstacles, including heightened caregiving responsibilities, difficulties with virtual learning, social isolation, and financial strain. It also identified coping strategies these parents employ, such as establishing support networks, implementing structured routines, and cultivating optimism and acceptance. These findings highlight the resilience and adaptability of parents in navigating challenges.

Within the Davao Region, limited research has focused explicitly on parental perspectives on raising children with autism. However, a study by Canoy et al. (2022) explored the experiences of teachers and parents during the pandemic. This research aligns with the ongoing study on "Parental Perspectives on the Challenges and Coping Mechanisms in Raising a Child with Autism" by highlighting the difficulties parents face in supporting online learning for their children with ASD. It also emphasizes the importance of coping mechanisms employed by parents, showcasing their resilience and adaptability.

Overall, literature from global, national, and local perspectives underscores the multifaceted nature of the challenges faced by parents raising children with autism. Parents navigate a complex landscape, dealing with emotional burdens and practical obstacles. Various coping mechanisms and support systems play a crucial role in mitigating these challenges and enhancing the well-being of both parents and children.

Despite the wealth of autism research globally, there remains a notable gap in literature explicitly focusing on parental perspectives within the Davao Region. This study seeks to address this gap by providing insights tailored to the local context, thereby informing the development of targeted interventions and support services. However, it is essential to acknowledge the limitations of this research, including potential biases in participant selection and the subjective nature of self-reported experiences. Nonetheless, the urgency of understanding parental perspectives on raising children with autism cannot be overstated, as it directly informs efforts to improve the quality of life for affected families.

### 1.1 Purpose of the Study

This qualitative study explores the lived experiences of five (5) parents, aged 30 to 40 and from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds, raising children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in Davao City, Philippines.

Firstly, the study seeks to comprehensively understand the myriad experiences and challenges encountered by parents in the journey of raising a child with autism. This objective acknowledges the diverse and complex nature of the obstacles faced by parents, ranging from navigating the healthcare system to managing daily routines and societal perceptions. Secondly, the research aims to uncover and explore the various coping mechanisms parents adopt to address these challenges effectively. By identifying and analyzing these coping strategies, the study intends to shed light on the resilience and adaptability of parents in mitigating the stressors associated with raising a child with autism. Lastly, the study aims to gather invaluable insights and advice directly from parents with firsthand experience raising a child with autism. It mainly targets those who have grappled with initial reluctance or denial regarding their child's diagnosis. By amplifying the voices of these parents, the research aims to provide guidance and support to others facing similar circumstances, thereby fostering a sense of community and empowerment within the autism parenting community. Overall, the study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of parental perspectives on autism, ultimately informing the development of more holistic and inclusive support systems for families raising children with autism.

### 1.2 Research Questions

Specifically, the study aims to shed light on the following questions:

1. What are the experiences of parents raising a child with autism?
2. What coping mechanisms in addressing your experiences?
3. What guidance might you offer to parents who are reluctant to acknowledge that their child has autism?

### 1.3 Related Literature

#### Lived Experiences and Challenges of Parents Raising Child with Autism

Several studies explore the challenges faced by parents raising children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). For instance, a study by Acharya and Sharma (2021) addressed the increased stress and difficulty parents experience compared to those raising typically developing children. Mothers, in particular, often face significant challenges due to the diverse ways a child's autism can manifest. These challenges can strain not only the mother but the entire family. Common stressors include feelings of loss, depression, limited opportunities for family activities and outings, changes in relationships leading to reduced social support, and personal sacrifices. The initial period after diagnosis can be particularly difficult for mothers, who may experience denial,

confusion, sadness, guilt, and even depression. Additionally, mothers often grapple with a deep sense of loss as they are forced to adjust their dreams and expectations for their child's future. The child's socially challenging behaviors can further restrict the family's ability to participate in enjoyable activities, leading to isolation, decreased social support, and potentially worsening stress. Furthermore, many parents are forced to leave their careers to provide full-time care, manage treatment plans, and secure quality resources for their child.

Papadopoulos (2021) offers valuable insights from mothers in Greece raising children with ASD. The study reveals that these families experience various consequences across emotional, family, social, and financial aspects. Mothers reported that their children's behavior and their parenting role were the primary sources of stress and caregiving burden. Additionally, they experienced significant social stigma from their communities related to autism. These challenges had a considerable and wide-ranging impact on their own lives.

Gobrial's (2018) study conducted in Egypt sheds light on the experiences of mothers caring for children with ASD. The findings highlight a range of negative effects associated with caregiving, including financial strain, emotional strain, personal sacrifices by mothers, and social isolation. A lack of awareness, inadequate access to education and healthcare, and social stigma were identified as the main challenges faced by mothers of children with ASD in Egypt.

### **Coping Mechanism of Parents Having a Child with Autism**

According to the study by Al-Oran H, Khuan L, Ying LP, Hassouneh O. (2022), The evident coping mechanisms of parents when caring for their child with ASD include support from family, friends, social support groups, other parents of children with ASD, service providers, advocacy, and religion. Furthermore, a parent's ability to deal with a high stress level depends on the effectiveness and quantity of the coping mechanism they employ in managing the demands of stressors associated with a child with ASD. This review provides an overview of the evidence for coping mechanisms used by parents with children with ASD.

A study was conducted by Smith L.E. et al. (2008), to assess and examine the coping mechanism of parents with ASD the result of the study revealed that among the (153) mothers of children with ASD used a problem-focused coping strategy meaning taking a break for self-care.

Also, Kiami S. R. and Goodgold S. (2017), conducted a study to identify the coping mechanisms of mothers with ASD the authors found that communication with other parents of children with ASD and seeking support from others were the most frequently used problem-focused coping mechanisms among mothers.

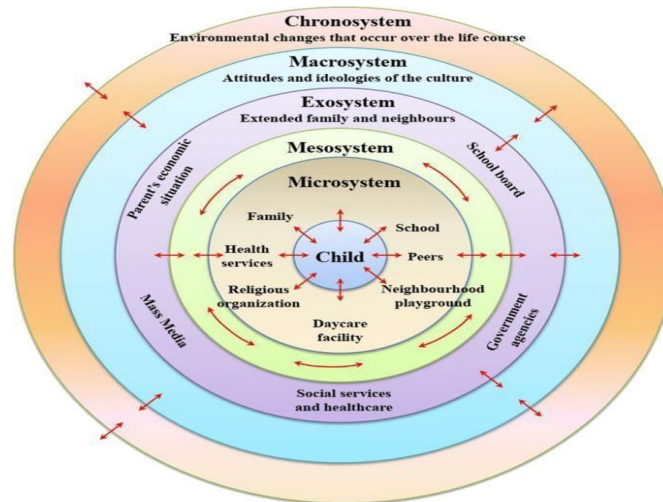
A considerable amount of qualitative literature was available on coping mechanisms among parents of children with ASD. In a qualitative study by Gray D.E. (2006), on 28 parents of children with ASD (mothers, n = 19 and fathers, n = 9), the author summarized that the parents used a problem-focused coping strategy like social withdrawal, family support, and reliance on service providers.

Lin C. R. et al. (2008), conducted a qualitative case study to investigate the coping mechanism among 17 parents of children with ASD. In contrast, the authors found that seeking support, adjusting to self-change, and developing treatments for their children were problem-focused and emotion-focused coping strategies used by the parents. Furthermore, a qualitative study by Luong J. et al. (2009), reported that parents used nine coping mechanisms, including spiritual coping, acceptance, redirecting energy, empowerment, social withdrawal, denial, rearranging relationships, changing expectations, and changing the focus. In a recent study, Gona J. K. et al. (2016) used qualitative methodology based on in-depth interviews and focused group discussion to identify the coping mechanisms of parents with ASD. They found that the parents avoided certain foods to control their children's behaviors.

### **1.4 Theoretical Lens**

Even though numerous theoretical frameworks exist for organizing the examination of parents' experiences with their child with ASD, we primarily anchor our research study to Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory and Goffman's Labeling Theory. In the 1950s, Bronfenbrenner (1979) insinuated an innovative conceptual framework aimed at achieving a rigorous understanding of the context encompassing the early stages of child development and the impact of various ecological factors on this process. This framework highlights the immensity of environmental effects on child development, presenting them as a sequence of association on ecological systems. The assistance a parent bestows for their child's development can be influenced, positively or negatively, by various ecological factors. Child development is interlaced into the complexity of social, economic, and cultural settings, touching both the child and the family unit. Some factors employ instant effects, while others employ more nuanced, indirect influences. Emphasizing the ecological viewpoint underscores the essentiality of investigating the potent reciprocation between environmental elements and individual development. By the organism-environment paradigm, autism is regarded not as a constant condition innate to the individual, but rather as a developmental progression shaped by the corresponding relation between the individual and their surroundings (Loveland, 2001).

Figure 1 Represents these processes and describes a multitude of factors that impact a child's developmental trajectory.



**The Ecological Systems proposed by Bronfenbrenner**

Labeling theory is another theoretical framework to be considered in this research. According to Hacking (2004), labeling theory asserts that the social structure is governed, regulated, or even counterfeited through the application of labels to individuals, actions, and societal groups. Erving Goffman, an eminent sociologist, considerably examines the complexity of labeling theory in his seminal work "Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity" (1963). Goffman, within this text, examines the notion of stigma, presenting it as a complex phenomenon defined by a shaming characteristic that others recognize as a deviation from societal norms. The author presents a varied range of examples, encompassing phenomena such as homosexuality, involvement in sex work by women, substance addiction, individuals with past histories of psychiatric hospitalization, and members of minority religious groups. Furthermore, the author affirms that stigma associated with psychiatric diagnoses can destroy one's social identity, as individuals considered "normal" may dismiss them with reduced seriousness.

Both theories underscore the considerable impact of social and cultural environments on individuals' lives. The academic literature offers extensive evidence of the influence of culture and knowledge systems on parents' understanding of their child's disability and their selection of suitable interventions. To fully grasp the experiences of parents caring for a child with autism, it is crucial to take into account the social and cultural contexts in which they are situated, as cultural norms and expectations significantly shape their beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors. Additionally, ecological systems theory posits that the development of children, including those with developmental disabilities such as ASD, is significantly influenced by the interplay between diverse social and ecological factors. As a result, these factors are likely to impact the experiences of parents raising children with ASD.

In parallel, Labeling Theory suggests that societal labels, particularly those attributed to children with ASD, can negatively affect their mental and behavioral well-being, as well as the dynamics within their caregiving families. Therefore, examining parental care for children with autism through both the lenses of Ecological Systems Theory and Labeling Theory can offer insights into how socio-ecological factors, including beliefs, values, and actions, shape parenting practices and the experiences of individuals with autism and their families in everyday life.

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1 Research Design

This study used a qualitative research design utilizing a single-case study method. This method is inquiry-based and describes a specific phenomenon in detail (Hassan, 2022). This approach includes observations, open-ended in-depth interviews, and generating meaning out of the events (Bliss, 2016). The design suited the way we sought data collection on how parents with a child with autism address family issues and challenges.

## 2.2 Research Participant

The current study aimed to explore how parents of children with autism manage the stressful parts of their child's impairment. Therefore, it was considered useful. It's crucial to collect firsthand data from the parents themselves through a qualitative design. Parents who participated in the study were between 30 and 40 years old. Five of the participants were mothers. All participants were recruited by one of the researchers using a specialist center. The study utilized opportunistic sampling. As well as purposeful sampling. All of the participants were Davao City citizens. From diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. Participants were only excluded were under the age of eighteen or did not have a child with autism. Children with autism are between 10 and 16 years old. Given the conditions, a modest sample size was deemed necessary. I was gathering raw data from in-depth interviews. Face-to-face interviews may lead to large volumes of data being collected from each participant, which enhances the data amount management required for the study. Under these conditions, are limited.

## 2.3 Data Analysis

The acquired data will be analyzed using thematic analysis techniques, in addition to Braun and Clarke (2006) describe this technique as systematically discovering, organizing, and interpreting patterns or themes in interview transcripts. Initially, all interview transcripts would be read and reread to familiarize the researchers with the data. The researchers will next code pertinent data segments to find recurring thoughts and experiences. These codes will then be grouped into bigger themes, which will be polished and developed through iterative evaluation and discussion by the research team. Constant comparison and reflexivity will improve the rigor of the analysis, ensuring the findings' legitimacy and trustworthiness.

## 2.4 Ethical Considerations

Prior consent was given to the participants. This form contains relevant information about the study. We respect the privacy of the respondents and maintain the standards of honesty, responsibility, competence, and credibility. All the data are kept secret between the researcher and the participants.

## 3. Results

### Thematic Analysis

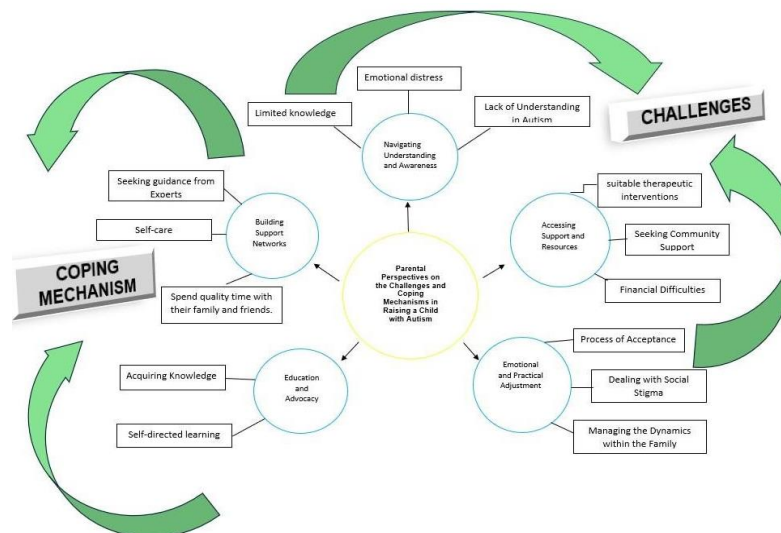


Fig.1 . Parental Perspective in Raising a Child with Autism



The diagram shows (5) categories in Parental Perspective in Raising a Child with Autism: Navigating Understanding and Awareness, Accessing Support and Resources, Emotional and Practical Adjustment, Education and Advocacy, and Building Support Networks.

## Parents' Challenges of Raising Autistic Children

Children are often cherished as symbols of hope and love, eagerly awaited by many couples. Yet, parenthood can take unexpected turns when a child defies societal norms. In these moments, parents may confront unique challenges and experience profound shifts in perspective. However, these challenges offer opportunities for growth, understanding, and deepening parental love. Embracing each child's uniqueness fosters empathy and acceptance, enriching familial bonds with diversity and resilience.

### Navigating Understanding and Awareness

Raising children with autism is a complex and ever-evolving journey for parents. From the moment they first realize their child's condition to their ongoing pursuit of knowledge about autism spectrum disorder, parents are faced with constant challenges that require them to continuously learn and adapt. Participant 1 shared her struggles in caring for her child, attributing them to her limited knowledge and understanding of autism.

*Lisud jud sa first kay wala ka kabalo unsaon siya kay sige nalang man ug hinilak, mahadlok sa mga tao, gina head bang ang sarili. Nag search jud ko unsa dapat buhaton ...” (P1)*

*“It's really tough at first because we don't know how to handle it; our child often cries, is afraid of people, and bangs their head. I really searched for what should be done.” (P1)*

Likewise, participant 3 is still experiencing emotional distress concerning the state of her child, despite being a nurse who was already aware of the condition.

*“Nang nalaman ko na may Autism si R\* parang na werla talaga ako, kasi ako una nakapansin eh, kasi iba yung development niya compare sa kanyang ate ma compare ko kasi since I'm a nurse by a profession so alam ko yung growth and development of a child so iba talaga, so after knowing at he has a problem yun pina OT ko siya...” (P3)*

*“I was surprised when I discovered that R\* has autism since I was the one who initially noticed. His developmental progress appeared distinct from his older sister, and I could discern this due to my nursing background, which has familiarized me with child growth and development. Once I became aware of his condition, I promptly arranged for him to receive occupational therapy.” (P3)*

Furthermore, participant 4 shared the same sentiment as the others. She lacked any understanding of how to effectively care for her child.

*“Sa first jud wala jud ko kabalo kung asa ko moadto kay wala jud koy alam ana na condition kay first time jud ko ka encounter ana. May nalang jud naa koy friend na teacher sa SPED school she advises me what are the things to do.” (P4)*

*“Initially, I was unsure of where to seek guidance as I had limited knowledge about the specific ailment. It was a completely new experience for me. Thankfully, I have a close acquaintance who works as an educator in a school specializing in special education (SPED). She provided valuable advice on the necessary actions to be taken in such situations.” (P4)*

### Accessing Support and Resources

Parents who have children with autism encounter significant obstacles when it comes to obtaining the required assistance and resources. These difficulties involve navigating educational settings, searching for suitable therapeutic interventions, and seeking community support. Regrettably, these tasks are frequently met with refusals and restrictions. Participant 2 emphasized the challenges she faced in finding a long-term school for her child.

*“...no permanent school for the child, sa regular kay napatanggal kay nag cause na ug commotion ang bata, enroll to Montessori, wala gidawat, were incapable. another rejection, naay sped pero public...” (P2)*

*"The child did not have a stable school arrangement. He was taken out of a conventional school because of his disruptive behavior. We attempted to enroll him in a Montessori school, but they declined, citing their inability to accommodate him. It was another rejection. There is a public SPED (Special Education) school available, but it is public." (P2)*

She also mentioned that while there are private special education schools in Pakistan, only those with Pakistani nationality are given priority. As a result, she decided to return to the Philippines.

*"Nag decide jud ko na mo uli me dri sa Pilipinas kay didto man gud sa Pakistan kay dili ginadawat ang dili fully in blood na Pakistani half lang baya akong anak kay Filipino ko, naa sila school for special needs pero para lang sa mga fully blood, so no choice me mo uli jud. Until now, sacrifice me mag asawa na LDR para sa among anak." (P2)*

*"I decided to go back to the Philippines because, in Pakistan, they do not welcome children who do not have full Pakistani ancestry. My child is only half-Pakistani because I am Filipino. There are schools available for children with special needs, but they are exclusively for those who are fully Pakistani, leaving us with no other option but to return. Up until now, my partner and I have been making sacrifices and enduring a long-distance relationship for the well-being of our child." (P2)*

In addition to the restricted availability of resources, the participants also faced financial difficulties. Participant 1 specifically mentioned the high cost of therapies and medications.

*"Medyo pricey gyud...among gipa check sa Neurologist gi check iyang activities sa brain so gi resetahan me ug tambal." (P1)*

*"The cost is a bit high... we took our child to see a neurologist to evaluate his brain functions. As a result, we were given a prescription for medication. (P1)*

Similarly, participant 4 conveyed that she and her family underwent not just psychological and emotional distress, but also faced financial hardships.

*"Pagkabalo nako na naay autism akong anak grabe nahugno among kalibutan wala me kabalo sa akong husband asa me magsugod. Naka affect jud siya sa amo mentally, emotionally ug financially." (P4)*

*"Our world was completely devastated upon discovering that our child had autism. My spouse and I felt lost, unsure of how to proceed. This revelation had a profound impact on us psychologically, emotionally, and financially." (P4)*

## **Emotional and Practical Adjustment**

Parents who are raising children with autism often find themselves facing a multitude of emotional and practical challenges. These challenges include navigating the complex process of acceptance, dealing with social stigma, and managing the dynamics within the family.

Participant 1 said that it is not easy to embrace the child's conditions.

*"Pagkabalo namo na naay autism of course dili dayun daw, worry about sa future basig ma bully ana." (P1)*

*"Upon discovering autism, it was met with initial resistance before eventual acceptance. Concerns about the future arise, primarily surrounding the potential for bullying." (P1)*

Correspondingly, participant 2 emphasized feeling a sense of despair upon learning about her child's autism diagnosis.

*"Pagkabalo nako na naay autism akong anak shut-down ko, wala ko kasabot unsa na siya, nganong naay ing ana." (P2)*

*“When I found out that my child had autism, I was overwhelmed with confusion and distress. I struggled to comprehend the concept and underlying causes of autism, which left me feeling bewildered.” (P2)*

In addition, parents who have children with autism face the additional difficulty of conforming to societal norms and overcoming the negative perceptions associated with the condition. Participant 1 mentioned that some individuals perceive their children as a consequence of their parents' negligence or lack of desire.

*“Yes, naa jud labaw na tao na wala kasabot ug walay disiplina...gingnan ko sa tiguwang wala ba daw nako gi-attempt ug pakuha nganong na ing-ana daw...” (P1)*

*“Yes, there exist individuals who possess a deficiency in comprehension and self-control. I was approached by an elderly individual who inquired whether I had made any efforts to rectify the circumstances that led to such an outcome.” (P1)*

Participant 2 also recounted her encounters with people's reactions to her child's behavior while they were at the shopping center.

*“Yes, naa jud changes labaw nag mag adto meh ug mall then tan awon me I dont care, not once, I educate them pero pinamaldita style. there is one time, naghilak ug taman ang bata, gipangutana ko nila when mo hunong ug hilak. ah no reaction, akoo silang gi ingnan, bag o baka sa kalibutan? Kay kung wala ka kablo special child baya na sya”. Kung wala ka kabalo sa behavior sa mga bata.” (P2)*

*“Indeed, within the shopping center, there exist individuals who are unaware of my child's condition. However, I choose not to engage with them extensively. On one occasion, my child was crying excessively, and they inquired about when it would cease. Instead of reacting, I simply made them aware that my child has unique needs.” (P2)*

Furthermore, individuals opt to become actively involved parents to their children. They make sacrifices in their professional lives for the betterment of their children. Participant 3 mentioned that she decided to cease her nursing job to prioritize her child.

*“I’m a nurse by a profession ... and I even sacrifices my work so that I can fully take care of R\* kasi hindi ako mapanatag kapag iba yung nag aalaga sa kanya I have this trust issues to everyone that how they deal to my child. Kaya sinabi ko talaga sa husband ko na I really need to focus kay R\*.” (P3)*

*“I work as a nurse, and I am willing to make sacrifices in my profession to ensure that I can personally care for R\*. It makes me uncomfortable to have someone else take care of him because I have trust issues when it comes to others looking after my child. That is why I have communicated to my husband that it is important for me to prioritize R\* and give him my full attention.” (P3)*

Similarly, participant 1 also opted for the same course of action, which was to dedicate herself full-time to parenting her child.

*“Ning undang jud ko work para lang maasekaso lang akong anak, tanan attention time naa sa iyaha...” (P1)*

*“I quit my job just to take care of my child, all attention and time are devoted to him.” (P1)*

### **Coping Mechanisms of the Parents**

Parents of children with autism frequently utilize various strategies to navigate the distinct difficulties they encounter. These coping mechanisms assist in effectively managing stress levels and meeting their child's specific requirements.



## Education and Advocacy

Parents frequently manage by acquiring knowledge about autism spectrum disorder (ASD), its attributes, and how it affects their child's growth. This comprehension assists them in better understanding their child's behaviors and requirements.

Participant 5 emphasized the significance of self-directed learning. She utilizes social media as a resource for acquiring information, such as watching YouTube videos, to gain insights on effectively interacting with children who have autism.

*"...ano lang mag-syempre sa google mag search ka, then sa youtube kanang for example kanang how to handle kanang mag kuan ug bata calming strategy ana, naa mana sa youtube, mag google lang." (P5)*

*"If you need calming strategies for children, a simple search on Google or YouTube can provide you with the information you're looking for." (P5)*

Additionally, she mentioned that her child serves as her inspiration to pursue a Master's degree in Special Education.

*"...kanang naa koi anak nga autism gud, dili muabot pud ang time nga magkuha ko ug special education sa masteral kay even in my in life wala man jud ko naga dream nga mag masteral ko sa special education..." (P5)*

*"I made the decision to pursue a Master's degree in Special Needs Education when I became a parent to a child with autism. This was not something I had planned on doing previously." (P5)*

## Building Support Networks

Parents with children on the autism spectrum actively seek support from a variety of sources. They connect with other families who are going through similar experiences, seek guidance from therapists, and rely on extended family members for assistance. These support networks play a crucial role in providing both emotional and practical help, enabling parents to navigate the unique challenges of raising a child with autism with determination and fortitude.

Participant 2 highlighted the importance of seeking guidance from experts. She revealed that apart from that, she seeks therapy from professionals and has enrolled her son in a specialized school and therapy programs

*"I seek professional help, you know gi-therapy akong anak, pati ako gina therapy ..." (P2)*

*"I seek assistance from professionals. You see, my child is receiving therapy, and I am also engaging in therapy sessions myself." (P2)*

Also, participant 3 expressed a similar sentiment, emphasizing the valuable role that professional advice plays in her journey as a parent. She believes that such guidance is instrumental in equipping her with the necessary skills to effectively handle and care for her child.

*"Yung mga therapist in R\* sila na rin yung nagiging help sa akin how to deal the struggles kasi sila yung expert paano e handle si R\*. Kaya sa kanila na rin nagiging panatag yung loob na ah kung gagawin ko to may progress para kay R\* at gagaan yung mga gagawin ko. Thankful talaga kasi dahil sa kanilang advices may improvement to my child for myself also how to be more good parent for him." (P3)*

*"The therapists of R\* provide valuable assistance in navigating the challenges, drawing on their expertise in handling R\*. This reassures me that by following their guidance, there will be positive developments for R\* and the tasks will become more manageable. I am sincerely grateful for their advice, as it has resulted in improvements for my child and has also enriched my parenting skills." (P3)*

Besides this, participants also discover personal relaxation as a means of self-care. Participant 2 mentioned that she allocates time for herself by visiting a beauty salon, getting massages, and going to the beach.

*"...kanang mag adtu parlor magpa massage magpa manicure tas maligo ug dagat." (P2)*

“..visit the salon, indulge in a relaxing massage, treat yourself to a manicure, and enjoy a refreshing swim in the ocean.”  
(P2)

Likewise, participant 1 also gives time for self-care activities such as indulging in K-dramas and savoring delectable treats.

*“...mag unwind, me time, mag k-drama, then mokaon atung pagkaon na dili makaon kung naa akong anak kay bawal man like ice cream, junkfoods ug chocolates.” (P1)*

*"It's all about relaxing, enjoying some personal time, indulging in K-dramas, and savoring treats that are off-limits when my child is present, such as ice cream, junk foods, and chocolates." (P1)*

Furthermore, participants have found it beneficial to spend quality time with their family and friends who are facing similar circumstances. Participant 5 expressed that engaging in physical activities provides an opportunity for parents of autistic children to connect, share challenges, and exchange strategies.

*“Every Friday naa mana’y PE day. So, naa diha ang mga parents, magduladula man ang bata so naa poy time nga mag istorya istorya ang parents sa mga status sa ilang anak na naai condition nga autism. Sharing of story, sharing of ug kuan mga problems in life especially handling a child with special needs.” (P5)*

*“Every Friday, we have our Physical Education (PE) day. During this time, parents gather while the children play, providing an opportunity for parents to talk and share stories about their children who have autism or other special needs. It's a chance for them to share their experiences, discuss the challenges they face in life, especially in raising a child with special needs.” (P5)*

Participant 1 also mentioned that sharing your challenges with other parents facing similar situations can provide valuable learning opportunities.

*“Open up ka sa imong mga struggles sa imong anak kay dako kaayo ug tabang na maka learn ka sa uban parents na the same condition the same sa ako naga share ug ideas ug strategies na maka help sa imong anak sa iyang progress ug development.” (P1)*

*“Open your challenges to your child, as doing so can provide valuable insights from fellow parents facing similar circumstances. Through exchanging ideas and approaches, you can gain knowledge from others and discover effective methods to support your child's growth and advancement.” (P1)*

## DISCUSSIONS

The conversations revolving around the obstacles confronted by parents of children who have been diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) emphasize the complex and diverse nature of the challenges they face in raising their children with Autism. One key issue that is brought to attention is the all-encompassing stress that these parents go through, which arises from different sources like overseeing their child's progress (Paterson et al. 2020), navigating through educational systems (Nevill et al. 2018), and dealing with financial limitations (Masarik et al., 2017). According to Abdullah et al. (2022), these stressors frequently result in physical, mental, and emotional exhaustion for parents, greatly affecting their general state of health and happiness.

Additionally, the way society views and thinks about Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) has a substantial impact on how parents of children with ASD experience their journey. The negative perception and judgment associated with autism can determine whether or not society accepts the condition, which in turn amplifies the emotional and practical difficulties that parents encounter as they come to accept their children's diagnosis (Santos et al., 2017). Additionally, Deguchi, et al. (2021) stated that parents themselves may also struggle with self-stigma as they navigate the intricate process of accepting and comprehending their child's condition.

Creating a supportive atmosphere for children with Autism relies heavily on effective communication. It is essential to educate family members and friends about Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and utilize customized communication strategies to better comprehend and address the specific requirements of these children (Lord et al., 2012). By promoting inclusivity

within familial and social networks, open and sincere communication, coupled with empathy and active listening, nurtures a supportive environment that enhances the well-being of the child (Solomon et al., 2018).

To reduce the stress experienced by parents, various methods of managing and dealing with it are examined. These include taking breaks for self-care, problem-solving approaches, and incorporating spiritual beliefs. Parents need to prioritize their own physical and emotional health by implementing these practices (Acharya et al., 2021). In addition, Lee et al (2023) cited that the significance of peer support from other parents and working together with experts are highlighted as valuable resources to enhance parental resilience and provide holistic care for the child.

Support networks are essential in promoting resilience and flexibility in children with autism (Shepherd et al., 2020). Likewise, Almasoud et al., 2023 said that these networks involve the participation of family, friends, and experts to facilitate growth. Parents have a crucial role to play in creating a nurturing environment for their child with autism, as well as collaborating with professionals to ensure proper care and access to resources. It is important to address sources of stress, encourage supportive communication, and utilize strong support systems to improve the well-being of both parents and children (Lovell et al, 2016). By increasing awareness and understanding, tailored interventions can be implemented, ultimately enhancing the quality of life for families impacted by autism.

## Conclusions

This study focuses on the typical challenges faced by parents of children with Autism, as well as their coping strategies. The beginning of the parent experience began when the condition of the child was discovered. The challenges a parent faces as the child grows up. Parents face difficulties as they accept reality; they undergo an emotional and practical adjustment, an emotional outburst. Denial, confusion, fury, fear, remorse, and hopelessness. Insufficient support and resources, identifying remedies, and acquiring knowledge to acknowledge the circumstances. To overcome these obstacles, parents adapt and grow in their advocacy and education, building support networks to promote resilience and flexibility in children with autism (Shepherd et al., 2020). as a means of coping. This research offered knowledge that will help other parents in similar situations to accept a child and gain a deep and precise intuitive understanding of the obstacles and acceptance from their parents.

When parents embrace their children with Autism, they can then overcome obstacles and develop coping mechanisms for raising children with Autism.

## Recommendations

Based on the researcher's theoretical framework, participant response, discussion, and conclusion. This study can be expanded upon in the future for more research, questions, and discussions. For instance, learning more about the details of how a parent's involvement and everyday life are affected by having a child with autism would be further, as would comprehending their opinion and decisions regarding those effects.

Furthermore, the study's findings may be applied to improve parent-child interactions by fostering a deeper awareness of the difficulties and coping strategies that parents of children with autism face. These findings also offer acceptance.

The researcher also recommended that even though the parents in the research have the means and initiative to acknowledge and acquire knowledge and look for resources to care for their child with autism. The researcher further recommended conducting a seminar for the parents to give further information about the intervention they can facilitate at home, a forum for the parents of children with autism to meet people who have the same situation to share their knowledge and strategy on how they cope up with the challenges and give opportunities to other parents to address further questions and help accept the situation.

Researchers can improve this study in the future. This research ought to be done again in different regions of the Philippines and with a bigger sample size of participants. It is also possible to repeat this study using different categories of disability.

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