

Addressing Family Issues and Challenges: The Case of Parents with an Autistic Child

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Abstract

Background. Parents of autistic children may be facing different difficulties in rearing their kids. Thus, this study aims to explore how parents with autistic children address these problems. **Methods.** The research design utilized a qualitative single-case method. The participants were purposively chosen and interviewed with ethical considerations. Colaizzi's method of analysis was used in this study. **Findings.** The findings have shown the challenges and issues as well as the coping of the parents with an autistic child, namely; Stress-related Factors, Acceptance and Denial of the Child's Condition, Management and Modification, and Developing Support Networks. **Conclusion.** Research on family issues and challenges with autistic children revealed the necessity of significant attention and funding to improve the well-being of children with autism and their families. A child's quality of life and developmental outcomes can be considerably improved by early intervention services, specialized therapy, and individualized educational plans. Additionally, fostering resilience and lowering stress can be achieved by providing the entire family with emotional and social support. **Recommendation.** This paper advises future researchers to recruit more participants to generate a wider range of responses and should come from a variety of backgrounds to evaluate if all parents with an autistic child are comparable in terms of the replies they will shortly produce.

Keywords: Family Issues and Challenges; Coping, Parents with an Autistic- Child; Early Interventions; Support Networks; Management and Modification; Resilience; Responses

1. Introduction

Raising a child with autism may be both happy and challenging. Greeff and Watt (2010) stressed that one of the most difficult problems that family experience is looking for suitable therapies and support programs for their autistic child. This gives additional frustration that might lead to depression if not addressed (White and Davenport, 2021). Hence, this study aims to explore how parents with autistic-child address family issues and challenges.

Velayudhan (2010) in her research with the mothers of autistic- children in Chennai, a city in Southern India, highlighted that parents having this kind of kid experienced higher stress levels and lower psychological functioning levels than mothers of typically developing children. Likewise, Van Hecke et al (2012) cited that the stress level experienced by the parents raising children with autism varies and depends on their child's characteristics. Additionally, Simonoff et al (2019) presented several factors allied with increased parental stress, including the child's behavior problems, communication impairments, and co-occurring medical conditions.

In the Philippine context, Santos and Centeno's research (2017) underlined the emotional experiences of parents having ASD children, including anxiety, stress, and sadness, and their coping mechanisms. Seeking

support from family and friends, using adaptive cognitive strategies, and engaging in self-care activities are effective coping strategies used by the parent (Paterson et al, 2020).

Moreover, several universities in Region XI conducted research in line with this and reach out same answers. Parents with Autistic children are stressed and looking for further awareness, support, and interventions aside from their self-discovery aid.

In connection with this, the researchers are interested in exploring how the parents address the issues and challenges of having an autistic child. Their thoughts and experiences will help develop a support network or mechanisms for parents who are facing the same challenges and issues.

2. Review of Related Literature

2.1 Family Issues and Challenges

Parents of autistic children face numerous challenges in a variety of areas of their child's life. These difficulties may negatively affect the parents' well-being and increase their level of mental, physical, and emotional stress. (Juhasova, 2018). These may include the following:

Communication Impairment. According to Simonoff et. al. (2019), one of the challenges parents face is communication problems. Parents may find it challenging to understand the wants, needs, and emotional states of children with autism because these kids frequently struggle to express themselves vocally or nonverbally. Abdullah et al., (2022) emphasized that communication issues that arise as a result of a child's social skill impairments may cause parental tension. With the same citation, parents' stress may also be increased by autistic children's higher expectations and problems.

Behavioral Impairment. Maenner et. al., (2020) emphasized that parents may find it difficult to control the repetitive or agitated behavior that autistic children exhibit. Parents must therefore come up with appropriate strategies for handling such behavior given that they may interfere with daily activities and interests. Additionally, Shaw et. al. (2023) cited that increased parenting stress has been linked to a child's later development of undesired conduct and social interactions. According to an extensive study, parents of autistic children report higher levels of such behavior on days when they experience more parental stress or when their children engage in a lot of negative controlling behavior (Schiltz et. al., 2018). This increased negative control is associated with deteriorated parental functioning and child adjustment. (De Clercq et. al., 2019).

Social Interaction and Inclusion. Children with autism may find it challenging to interact with people and form relationships with their peers. As a result, not only the child but also their parents, who might find it difficult to locate suitable opportunities and support in society for their child, could feel excluded and alone (Pickles et al., 2016). According to Maenner et. al. (2020), autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a complicated neurodevelopmental condition characterized by persistent challenges in the behavioral, social, and communication domains. As part of ASD treatment options, co-occurring developmental, psychological, neurological, and physical conditions that may affect everyday functioning and quality of life must also be addressed (Masi et al., 2017). However, it is very important to give value to the parents and families who are the primary caretakers of a child with autism.

A caring and supportive environment for an autistic child requires effective socio-communication between the family and the child. Families should educate themselves about ASD in order to better understand the unique requirements, abilities, and difficulties of their child (Lord et al., 2012). Learning about the symptoms of autism and good communication techniques will help family members modify their behavior and create a more tolerant environment (Solomon et al., 2018).

It's important for families to communicate honestly and openly. Creating open lines of communication and promoting open discussions will help family members convey their opinions, concerns, and feelings (Kasari et

al., 2014). It takes a lot of active listening to comprehend the perspective and needs of a child with autism. Family members should be gentle, sympathetic, and encouraging when speaking with their child to make the child feel cherished and understood (Dawson et al., 2014).

Financial and Logistical concerns. Due to logistical and economic issues, parenting can be challenging Masarik et. al. (2017) indicate that providing specialized care, therapies, and interventions for a child with autism can be costly. In addition, academic help is essential for autistic children but parents may find it challenging to navigate it. Finding appropriate educational environments, getting specialized support, and advocating for their children's needs within the educational system can be challenging for parents (Nevill et al. 2018).

2.2 Coping Mechanism

Coping mechanisms are modified behavior or strategies to manage and reduce internal or external stressful situations.

Greenlee, et. al. (2023) cited that parenting experiences with autistic children suffer from stress but it was discovered that those parents who used responsive and directive parenting techniques can ease their stressful issues. By being informed about the characteristics of autism and the communication methods that work best for their child, family members can alter their approach and promote a more inclusive and accommodating atmosphere (Solomon et al., 2018). Constantly encouraging parental support has an important effect on children's cognitive, social, and emotional development (Almasoud et. al., 2023).

Lord. al. (2012) emphasized that to understand their child's unique needs, skills, and challenges, families should educate themselves about autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Family members can modify their approach and foster a more inclusive and accommodating environment by being knowledgeable about the traits of autism and the communication techniques that are most effective for their child (Solomon et. al., 2018). Social support from family members can improve psychological well-being and decrease stress levels in parents of children with ASD (Lovell et. al, 2016).

According to Sheperd et. al. (2020), children with autism who have a wide circle of family, friends, and classmates to lean on can be more resilient. This support may involve social interaction, practical help, and emotional reassurance, all of which may aid the youngster to grow more resilient and adaptable to changing circumstances.

To lessen the stress parents of autistic children, engage in a variety of coping mechanisms, including respite care, problem-focused strategies, positive coping, and religious coping (Acharya et. al., 2021). Likewise, Holmberg et. al., (2018) stress that doing household chores reduce the anxiety felt by the parents specifically the mothers. The mother's mind-calming home duties acted as a diversion from her thoughts, especially when she felt lonely and isolated, according. Similar to how maintaining physical fitness through intermittent fasting improves cognitive function (Mattson, 2023).

Furthermore, Tan et. al., (2023) stressed that there is an edge for parents with strong spiritual beliefs to handle the challenges of having a child with autism. Aside from that, parent-to-parent support contributes a protective factor for parental resilience; since, it enables other parents of autistic children to get various support and share their own experiences and awareness that could lead to beneficial societal change, such as better acceptance and treatment, service improvements to benefit families living with ASD children (Ulofoshio, 2017).

3. Methods

3.1 Research Design

This study used a qualitative research design utilizing a single-case method. This method is inquiry-based that used to draw specific phenomena in detail (Hassan, 2022). This approach includes observations, open-ended in-depth interviews, and generating meaning out of the events (Bliss, 2016). The said design suited the

way we seek data collection on how parents with an autistic child address family issues and challenges.

3.2 Key Participants

We had the mother and the significant- others as our participants. The said participants were purposively chosen provided the following criteria: for the mother, (1) the mother of a diagnosed ASD child, and (2) four years of experience handling a child with autism; for the significant others, (1) having direct or indirect contact with the child either caretaking, performing therapies and living with the child.

3.3 Data Collection

The main instrument in this study was the researchers. Wa-Mbaleka (2020) in his study entitled “The Researcher as an Instrument” stressed the role and ethical consideration of the researcher himself in doing research. The proper way of conducting interviews was highlighted. Prepared semi-structured guide questions were utilized after being checked by the experts. The interview questionnaires consist of introductory, transition, main, and probing questions.

Moreover, these were the things to be considered before, during, and after the conduct of the interview. Bracketing was done before the conduct of the interview. This was intended to avoid researchers’ biases toward the process and result of the research. The participants were given prior consent to be signed as per the agreement. During an interview, the purpose of the study was explained to the informant as the interview process. These include consent, time allocation for an interview, and audio or video documentation. In addition, the safety health, and interview guide protocols were also observed by the researchers. Maximum of forty-five (45) minutes for interview per informant. The recorded answers were transcribed and translated after the conduct of the interview.

3.4 Data Analysis.

Colaizzi’s method of analysis was used in this study. This aids the researchers to have deeper and more comprehensive outcomes from the perspective of the participants. Thoroughly following the seven steps of the said method. Reading and rereading the participants’ answers were where the analysis of data begins. Filtering the unessential from the essential statements and using it to formulate meanings. Then, arrange it in a thematic order. Additionally, cluster themes were desegregated into an exhaustion description. And follows the formation of the fundamental structure of the phenomenon of recognition. Lastly, the researchers returned the fundamental statements to the informant for validation.

3.5 Research Rigors

Multiple dimensions were observed aside from verbal to assess the congruency of the informant’s responses. These include their non-verbal gestures and facial expressions. In addition, credibility was considered in gathering information provided the criterion that checks the appropriateness of the informant; hence, the trustworthiness of this study is increased and secured (Mills et al., 2023).

3.6 Research Rigors

Prior consent was given to the Participants. This form contains relevant information about the study. They asked to sign and attach the date as well as the time to interview once they were accepted to be part of the study. Code names were given to them and used during the interview. This was to protect their privacy and confidentiality.

4. Results and Discussions

4.1 Results

Two ways were used for data collection. We had online and face-to-face interviews. And to protect participants’ confidentiality, we used code names.

During the interview, the questioning focused on the family issues and challenges of the parents with an autistic child. One hundred five (105) significant responses from the participants were collected. And out of these, five (5) themes were created and thirty (30) define meanings. The issues and challenges were (1) stress

related factors, (2) acceptance and denial of the child's condition, (3) socio-communication between the family and the autistic child, (4) management and modification and (5) developing support networks. These five (5) mentioned themes were sorted into two groups, the challenges and issues (themes 1 to 3) and the coping (themes 4 to 5).

Challenges and Issues of the Parents with an Autistic Child

Autism poses a number of difficulties and problems for parents, including financial strain, mental and emotional stress, communication problems, behavioral problems, a lack of support, and stigma. These difficulties can be daunting and hard to handle, but with the right tools and assistance, parents can provide their kids the care and support they require to succeed.

Stress-related factors

Having a child is a desire of every couple. There are couples granted to have a child with less effort. And there are also couples that really need to exert much effort to conceive a child due to some factors. As a matter of fact, the father said that he was struggling with his infertility and put effort into his medical assessment.

"... gusto na namo magka-anak because we are in age na ug natagbaw nami sa laag-laag. But I have a problem with my sperm mobility. So, I undergo consultation and medical-assessment." (Father)

"We really want to have a child; since we are of age and we were satisfied with our travel life. But I have a problem with my sperm mobility. So, I undergo consultation and medical-assessment." (Father)

Considering also her age, the mother said that she was conscious of the possible risk and very careful during her pregnancy.

"Syempre, first child so very excited! So, prepare gyudt me ato kay tigulang nako ato. I was 35 at that time so daghan possible ba simbako. Maong every month me nagapacheck-up sa OB..." (Mother)

"Of course, we are so excited to have our first child. So, we were really preparing at that time considering that I was 35 years old and a lot of possible risks. Hence, every month we visited our OB." (Mother)

Additionally, the mother also added that she in-take medicines for her skin allergy and runny nose aside from the typical medicine for pregnant women.

"... katong sixth week akoang tiyan my doctor prescribed Duphaston, help with my early pregnancy symptoms. Nag-inum lang ko ato for a month. Pero naga-take na gyudt ko ug supplements such as ferrous up until the ninth month. Aside ana, nag-take ko ug Antihistamine for my skin allergies and Neozep for my runny-nose pero in a short time lang to." (Mother)

"During my sixth week of pregnancy, my doctor prescribed Duphaston for my early pregnancy symptoms and I took that for just a month. Up until my ninth month of pregnancy, I took various supplements such as ferrous. Aside from that, in a short time, I took Antihistamine for my skin allergies and Neozep for my runny nose." (Mother)

Apart from that, her father's death was also considered the most stressful scenario faced by the mother during her pregnancy.

"... katong pagkamatay sa akoang papa... explain nako, akoang papa man gud naa siya kuan sa iyang lungs unya diri siya nagpa-confine sa Davao. Then, kami nag-alaga sa iyaha...after sa iyang surgery ok na iyang condition. Unya ana siya, gusto niya malugwayan pa iyang kinabuhi kay gusto niya makakita sa iyang apo namo... until nabuntis ko. Then, shock kayo ang panghitabo..." (Mother)

"The death of my father caused me a lot of stress. My father's lungs had a defect. He was confined here in Davao. And we took care of him. Everything was fine after his surgery. He said he wants to live long for him to see his grandchildren from us. Until I got pregnant, then a shock scenario came." (Mother)

Moreover, the family also encountered a financial crisis not during pregnancy but after birth. The father said that they were not struggling at first when it comes to money because they had a business. But when their business went to misfortune, a financial crisis struck.

"Not to boast, financially, wala mi naglisud that time na buntis pa siya kay naa man gud mi business, 80,000 minimum per month ang ma income namo that time aside from my regular job. But when our business went to misfortune unya ako ray naay work karon so didto na nag-start..." (Father)

"Not to boast, financially at that time, we are stable because we had business. We gained 80, 000 pesos as our minimum income per month aside from my regular job. A financial crisis starts when our business went to misfortune and only me have a job." (Father)

Acceptance and denial of the child's condition

Every family had an autistic child experiences overwhelming challenges either to embrace or deny the conditions of having an autistic child. It is worth noting some factors of fear for the child's functional literacy in terms of behavioral, social, and communication skills. The emotion experienced by the family gives an additional impact on the level of burden in embracing the challenges or just denying manifestation. Stressed out by the mother, that the present society is not fully aware of this condition.

"...labi na ang society karon kay very complex. Dili ta kabalo sa mga situation nga possible sya mabully. Dili pa kaayo accepting sa mga naay in-ani na case. kulang pa og information sa inclusion." (Mother)

"I see modern society as being extremely complicated and still resistant to the idea of inclusion. I worry that my child will experience bullying at any point because society has not yet accepted the existence of people with special needs." (Mother)

In connection, the mother said it is not that easy to embrace the child's condition. But instead, she was hoping that the child is like a typical child with delayed abilities.

"As a mother, siguro I was just being hopeful then nga typical delay lang ang tanan, but, at the back of my mind, kay naa sab baya ko background sa early childhood education, nakulbaan na ko. Somewhat, denial gyud tu na part." (Mother)

"As a mother, perhaps I was initially in denial and skeptical in a way of the signs our son manifested even if I have a background in early childhood education. I was hoping then that it was just a typical delay." (Mother)

In contrast, the father expressed his side of easily accepting the child's condition due to the fact of having a background from his personal knowledge and colleagues.

"Graduate man ko diri (USeP), BEEed man ko diri. Naagihan ko man na, kabalo ko unsay mahitabo sa bata... I know some colleagues kasi that are having children in the spectrum too...so, wala na ko nakuratan kay maybe I was exposed to the idea na nga nagastorya sila sa office about their children's condition..." (Father)

"I am a BEEed graduate here in USeP too. Perhaps, I have the knowledge already of such cases and what implications it will bring... I know some colleagues having children in the spectrum too and this exposed me to be familiar in dealing with children in the spectrum." (Father)

Socio-communication between the family and the autistic child

Communication is important as we have our daily engagement in our society. However, in the case of the family having a child with autism, there is communication impairment or a gap between them. As a matter of fact, the father said that there were times when he cannot understand what his child wants and do guessing.

Usually, pag magwhine sya mag-guess ra mi unsa iyang pasabot kay katu lagi nagregress na iyang speech. From “mama”, “papa”, “aa” na lang iyang ginasulti then magwhine na dayon. (Father)

“He usually whines when he wants something, and in that case, we tend to guess what he wants to convey since his speech regression was noted.” (Father)

The father added his son is not aggressive when he had his tantrums.

Though, dili hinuon sya violent type nga manakit sa iyang self ug sa uban... (Father)

“However, when whining, he’s not the violent type who inflicts pain on himself and others.” (Father)

Aside from this, the mother stressed that her son is also having difficulty with his social play.

And when it comes to playing, usually, dili sya makig-play sa amoa even sa iyahang age-mates. Iyang functional play kay very low samut na iyang social play. (Mother)

“When playing, he’s into solitary play even surrounded by adults and age-mates.” (Mother)

Coping Mechanisms of Families to the Issues and Challenges of Having an Autistic Child

A coping mechanism is a strategy used by families to address stressful conditions they experienced as they nurture a child with autism. It can help family members cope or reduce the factors related to distress.

Management and Modification

Being a parent of an autistic child is difficult yet fulfilling. Each day offers fresh opportunities and challenges that will alter the holistic view of parenthood. With this modification, it is worth knowing the importance of self-assessment and applying possible interventions to support coping mechanisms. In fact, our participants affirmed that raising an autistic child affects the social, emotional, physical, intellectual, and spiritual aspects.

“Usahay pag-pray jud. Ay! dili usahay, mag-pray gyud! Kanang usahay muingon ko sa iyaha; Pa naghilak ko ganinang kadlawon. Ginasulti nako sa iyaha kay katong post-partum depression nako. Tapos ana gyud, mag-pray lang ko mura kog tanga kay... Lord kaya nako ni ha? Ana gud. Akong husband gani, gina-pray nako ang tanan, sa akong husband, sa akong mga anak nya kanang mga favors ba, mga provisions.” (Mother)

“Prayer! Yes, prayer as always. I even pray in the middle of the night and at times that I feel down because of my post-partum depression. I will reach out to God and convince myself that I can do this! I surrender to Him everything even my partner in life, my children, the favor, and daily provisions.” (Mother)

This testimony was witnessed by both parents of the child with autism. The father of the child also shared the same faith as his spouse.

“...kana lang, pray lang jud! Lahi naman gud among pag-ampo gud. Kuan more on pasalamat man gyud lang. Dili na pangayo kay miski ako dili kayo ko ganahan mangayo. Pasalamat lang ko buhi ko karon, at least makapanginabuhì pako. Pasalamat mi sa blessings ba kay miski muna-muna namo, makatabok gihapon mi karong adlaw, sunod adlaw. Salamat, salamat Lord. Thank you kayo Lord.” (Father)

“I think that’s it! Just pray! Pray for blessings. Nowadays, our prayer is more on giving thanks instead of asking God for anything. We are thankful for the life that He gave to us and our daily survival.” (Father)

Hence, both parents can really testify that the life of their child with autism is a great blessing and there is no single moment for them that take as a burden for having an autistic child instead they embrace their son’s condition with full of courage and grateful hearts.

“Ang Ginoo dili muhatag sa imong pangayuon. Lahi, lahi man gud. The Lord gives us strength or something man gud na ginapangayo nato is through tests man gud parehas anang kung mangayo ka kay Lord ug; Lord, tagai ko ug pasensya. Mao na gihatag sa imoha si Franco kay para mutaas among pasensya. Mao na, pasalamat lang gyud. Just pray, it gives us more...Para sa akoo, it gives us strength.” (Father)

“I realized the way Lord gives strength is through tests. Just like we ask for more patience. Maybe that’s the reason why He gave Franco to us. God indirectly gives our desire to have long patience through our son, Franco. In, we are forever grateful for it.” (Father)

Besides this, the mother said that diverting her attention is one of her coping mechanisms. She likes to watch Netflix and recall happy thoughts or experiences.

Ah...magtan-aw tag Netflix bi! Ana gud. Kanang gina-divert nako ba kay basi matiriring nako. Lisod na! Ana gud. Oo, kana jud! *Ug kanang happy thoughts. Ug kanang kuan...yaga-yagaon man gud ko sa una gyud unya nagminyo na seryoso. Gina-recall nako akong childhood na kanang akoang kagara sa una sa high school nya murag gina recall sakong friends na garaon kayo ko. Kana lang! Happy memories ba kay para dili gud ko ma-OA.”* (Mother)

“At times when I get emotional, I will just break down and divert my attention by watching Netflix and recalling back my childhood memories. Because way back then, I was too bubbly and most of my high school friends remind me how lively I am. And it makes me happy.” (Mother)

She added that she does not have any physical activities but doing household chores makes her feel good and renewed every day.

“Wala kayo koy physical kay mahurot akong time sa akong mga anak. Manglaba! Kanang manglaba ko ug kadlawon? Lami kayo akong pamati. Muingon ko; Pa, mugawas sako Pa kay muadto sako sakong mga labhunon. Kanang murag therapeutic sa akoo na nga manghinlo gani.” (Mother)

“I don’t have any physical activities because most of my time was spent with my kids except doing the laundry even in the early morning. It gives me relief. Even cleaning the house was very therapeutic for me.” (Mother)

She also shared that chatting with parents and friends in the same family situation keeps her stable and relieved.

“Tapos kuan pud diay, naga-chat pud ko sakong friends na tong naa pu’y condition iyang anak...” (Mother)

“And of course, I chat with those friends who have the same condition as my child.” (Mother)

Aside from these, the mother maintained her fit by having a healthy diet by practicing intermittent fasting and eating low-carb foods.

“Wala nakoy time ana. Breastfeeding papud baya ko until now. So, wala nakoy time ana. Kaon! Intermittent fasting and low-carb.” (Mother)

“I don’t have time any time for that especially now that I am still at the breastfeeding stage. But I eat. I do intermittent fasting and a low-carb diet.” (Mother)

Self-learning and new intervention techniques are considered the best modifications that a parent could ever offer to their child with autism. Likewise, the parents said that they engage themselves in both online and traditional materials just to equip their learning in regard to their son’s condition.

"Naa man gud sa online, youtube. Kung kanang mag tiyaga lang jud ba. Maningkamot jud ma-educate."
 (Mother)

"We strive hard to educate ourselves as a parent aside from the therapist's assessment and recommendation." (Mother)

"Sa first jud, grabe jud! Grabeng tan-aw sa YouTube labaw na sa basa-basa about ana. Murag, partly nega ba. Na, ahhh wala lang lagi ni pero at some point mura mag sink-in man gud imoha na mao gyud diay ning dapat nilang buhaton. Dili, dili najud siya mawala. Wala man jud sya'y cure pero ma-correct lang siya ba. Kana lang gyud!" (Father)

"Since then, we used to watch YouTube videos and read articles with concern for our child's condition. Even if sometimes, we are in denial in the process of accepting but keep reminding ourselves that we need to address this because we believe that this is a lifetime responsibility." (Father)

Developing Support Networks

One coping strategy for raising an autistic child is to join a support group. They are able to lend a hand, encourage, and console the other group members by sharing their experiences, and they also receive support in return.

"...Sa akoo, dili kayo siya foreign sa akoo kay technically...by education, graduate man ko dri... BEED man ko dri, so naagihan ko gud nan oh, unsay mahitabo sa bata, unya kanang naa pu mga anak sa akong mga kauban sa Davao City water district, sa office pa lang daan murag nay duha kabook, si Kuya Noni and kuya Jepoy and si Allan iyang apo as kuan under spectrum pud, dili kayo bag-o sa ako." (Father)

"It is not new for me (referring to the condition of his son), by education, I graduated here, took up BEED, so I have some knowledge of what are the manifestations of my child. Also, I have learned that two or three of my co-workers in Davao City Water District are in the same spectrum as Kuya Noni, Jepoy and Allan's grandson." (Father)

Further, relatives and friends can also provide more consideration in giving support through emotional and even financial struggles.

"Kauban nko sa ABA kay murag igsoon na pud nako, mao wala me napresyuhan kayo ug mahal, murag muayad dili lang pud me ana, so thankful kayo me. Unya ninang siya sa akoang anak...only the family lang man jud amo na share.ran kay maglagot ko... dili man sa ginatago namo ang kuan ni F____o, pero kanang privacy nalang pud ba" (Father)

"The ABA worker is like a sister to me, she gave us a great discount on consultation fees or almost for free, that is why we are really grateful. She is my son's godmother...we choose to expose our son's condition only to our family and very close friends; it is not like we are ashamed of him but rather just for our son's privacy." (Father)

Moreover, to the coping mechanisms, it is very helpful to seek help from other health care providers. As they are more knowledgeable about the child's condition so they are most likely to suggest and recommend helpful strategies on how to cope with the emotional stress of having an autistic child. The father shared that it is good to have an early intervention for his child.

"Sa akoo, kay ipa assess jud ang bata kay nothing to lose man. So, mao to after na assess, nag sink dayon sa akoo nga ingon ana. Mao na karon, sugod naga therapy na siya kay na minimize ang tantrums, kanang upset siya makuan na jud nako ang iyang kuan.... Unlike sa una nga dili jud niya ma verbalize ang iyahang gusto." (Father)

"For me, I wanted him to be assessed because there is nothing to lose. After what I have learned, it naturally sunk into me what is my son's condition...after the therapy, we observed that tantrums started to minimize. If he is upset, I learned how to handle it, unlike before when he is not able to verbalize what he wants." (Father)

The mother added the progress of her son when he started to have therapy. She also said that there are extended home activities for his son as a follow-up to his therapy.

"...kadtong nag ABA siya, nakahibalo na dayon siya mag speech, murag two years and a half jud. Nakabalo na dayon siya mubasa, wala me kabalo nga kabalo na diay siya mubasa, like hillsong sa praise and worship, cocomelon, mubasa na siya ug enormous. Mao to nakuan jud sa ABA, kay kanang mag wine siya, makuan man ma intervene man dayon...kung unsa ang intervention sa therapist, syempre gina update man me, so gina istorya man me, mao pag abot sa balay, gina follow up jud namo sa balay unsay makaya namo e kuan ... aron nay continuity ang tyang kuan At the same time." (Mother)

"When he is in ABA, he knows how to read, we did not even know that he knows how to read just like the Hillsong praise and worship, the Cocomelon, even the word enormous. We are grateful for the ABA because when our son wine, they can intervene immediately. ABA always shared their updates, and suggest we continue the intervention in our house, that is why we also do it to sustain good outcomes." (Mother)

4.2 Discussions

The participants who work with the autistic child disclosed the information acquired to manage interventions based on the problems and difficulties experienced. The participants' responses to a few specific questions were carefully noted by the researchers in order to demonstrate the need for a practical and successful intervention that will enhance the quality of life for both the family raising the child with autism spectrum disorder and the child themselves.

Stress-related factors

Parents encounter particular challenges as they handle every aspect of their autistic child's development, education, and overall well-being (Juhászová, 2018). This may comprise communication difficulties (Simonoff et al., 2019); behavioral challenges (Maenner et al., 2020); social interaction and inclusion (Pickles et al. 2016); education support (Nevill et al. 2018); and financial and logistical considerations (Masarik et al., 2017). All of these may cause physical, mental, and emotional stress to the parents (Abdullah et al., 2022).

Acceptance and denial of the child's condition

Autistic children need nurturing to be useful members of society. Salleh, N. S., et. al. (2020) emphasized that societal stigma and criticism can have a big impact on whether or not the child's condition is accepted or denied. Specific aspects of self-stigma experienced by families of people with autism spectrum disorder and the circumstances that give birth to self-stigma in these families are discussed. (Deguchi, et. al., 2021). It is clear that receiving an autism diagnosis presents both emotional and practical difficulties for parents and professionals, including instances of denial and hesitation (Fairhurst, 2020).

Socio-communication between the family and the autistic child

Effective socio-communication between a family and the child is vital in order to provide an autistic child with a nurturing and supportive environment. Lord et. al. (2012) stressed that in order to understand the unique needs, skills, and challenges of their child, families should educate themselves about autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Knowing the characteristics of autism and the best communication methods for their child can help parents change their approach and create a more accepting and inclusive atmosphere for their children. (Solomon et. al., 2018).

Families must maintain open lines of communication on a regular basis. By establishing open lines of communication and encouraging honest conversation, family members can effectively communicate their opinions, concerns, and feelings. Active listening makes it much simpler to understand a child with autism's perspective and needs (Kasari et al., 2014). In order to make their child feel appreciated and understood, family members should speak with their children gently, sympathetically, and usefully. (Dawson et. al., 2014).

Management and Modification

Parents of autistic children can utilize a range of coping techniques to reduce their stress levels, including respite care, problem-focused techniques, positive coping, and religious coping. (Acharya et. al., 2021). Likewise, Holmberg et. al., (2018) Stress that doing domestic duties helps parents, especially mothers, feel

less anxious. When the mother felt lonely and alone, her mind-calming household responsibilities served as a distraction. In the same way that intermittent fasting helps also to parents stay in shape physically, it helps to perform more cognitively. (Mattson, 2023).

Parents with strong spiritual beliefs were more confident in their ability to handle issues with their children (Tan et.al., 2023). Aside from this, Schachter (2023) that regular connection and intervention make children feel loved and supported. Lee et. al (2023) affirmed that peer assistance from other parents of children with autism receives a variety of supports and has a protective effect on parental resilience.

Developing Support Networks

According to Sheperd et. al. (2020), children with autism who have a large support network of family, friends, and peers may be more tenacious. This support could take the form of emotional comfort, practical assistance, and social engagement, all of which could help the child become more resilient and adaptive to changing circumstances.

Almasoud et. al. (2023) emphasized that parental support has an effect on a child's growth over the course of their lives. Their research revealed that parental encouragement had a significant impact on children's cognitive, social, and emotional development. It stressed the significance of a child's healthy development in a supportive home environment. The psychological health and stress levels of parents of children with ASD can be improved by social support from family members (Lovell et. al, 2016)

In order to succeed, family, friends, and experts like teachers, therapists, and doctors must be involved. Collaboration between professionals and the child's support network can be used to organize care, provide access to resources, and enable the adoption of evidence-based therapies.

5. Conclusion

This research on family issues and challenges with autistic children shows, the experience of parenting and nurturing a child with autism varies and is unique to each family. One significant result is that enormous attention and resources are required to improve the general well-being of autistic children and their families. Early intervention services, specialized therapies, and educational plans tailored to each child can improve a kid's quality of life and developmental outcomes significantly. Furthermore, promoting resilience and lowering stress by providing emotional and social support to the entire family unit.

6. Recommendations

The researchers believe that the result raises several premises that merit further research about the insights or perspectives on how parents with autistic children address their family issues and challenges. In particular, based on the results and its discussions, the researchers offer the following recommendations:

Conduct a longitudinal study. It is advised to carry out a longitudinal study to better understand the ongoing difficulties and coping strategies faced by parents of autistic children. This would entail tracking a group of parents over an extended period of time and recording their experiences during their child's developmental process. Longitudinal data can give important insights into how the demands and methods of parents change over time.

Explore cultural and socioeconomic aspects. Future studies should take into account individuals from a variety of backgrounds to better understand the effects of cultural and socioeconomic factors on the experiences of parents of autistic children. This will enable researchers to ascertain whether difficulties, coping mechanisms, and social networks differ across various cultural and socioeconomic circumstances. To have a more thorough grasp of the subject, it can be helpful to compare the replies of parents from various socioeconomic backgrounds.

Examine the efficacy of support interventions. Building on the coping strategies and networks of support that have been found, future research might concentrate on assessing the efficacy of particular support interventions for parents of autistic children. In order to improve the well-being of parents and children, this may entail developing and evaluating interventions including support groups, counseling services, and educational programs. These therapies' effects on resilience, stress reduction, and general family functioning should be evaluated.

Include the viewpoints of autistic people. Although this study concentrated on parents' experiences, it is crucial to include the viewpoints of autistic people. Future studies should conduct surveys or interviews with autistic people to learn more about their needs, experiences, and recommendations for helping their families. The obstacles faced by families parenting autistic children can be better understood if their voices are taken into consideration.

Collaborate together with policymakers and healthcare professionals. Collaboration with healthcare professionals, politicians, and other key stakeholders is essential to ensuring the translation of study findings into actionable support measures. By including these stakeholders in the study process, it will be easier to determine the most important areas for intervention, modify policy, and provide families with autistic children with evidence-based support services.

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