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Untold Stories of Parents Raising Children with Disabilities

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Abstract

Parents raising children with disabilities face a unique set of emotional, physical, social, and financial challenges that significantly shape their parenting experiences. This qualitative research aims to delve into the lived experiences of ten (10) purposively selected participants residing in Guiuan, Eastern Samar, to answer the research questions, unveiling their unique experiences and their coping strategies used to overcome the different challenges while aiming to contribute valuable knowledge and depth to the existing research in this area. The researcher also conducted in-depth, face-to-face interviews with key informants using a semi-structured questionnaire to collect information from participants. The participants were interviewed privately after obtaining their consent.

Employing the Colaizzis method of analysis, the gathered data were meticulously organized into thematic categories to identify commonalities and differences in the responses and were subject to interpretation. Four major compelling themes emerged from the responses, shedding light on the unique experiences of parents raising children with disabilities. These themes encompass sub-themes such as financial strain, faith in God, and re-framing misfortune as fortune, which shows that raising a child with a disability is a profoundly challenging yet meaningful journey for them. These strategies allow them not only to survive and face the challenges but also to find purpose and meaning in their situation. Through an in-depth exploration of these themes, it seeks to deepen our understanding of the life experiences of parents raising children with disabilities. It offers insights that can inform interventions, policies, and support systems to foster positive outcomes for these families.

Keywords— coping strategy; Guiuan ; parents raising children with disability; phenomenology (key words)

INTRODUCTION

Every parent plays a crucial role in raising their children, shouldering significant responsibilities for their children's well-being and development. The parents' joy is priceless at the moment of birth when they see their child for the very first time. Unforeseen, oftentimes their feelings of joy and eagerness abruptly fade when they discover their child has a disability. However, this discovery does not become an obstacle to taking good care of, loving, and supporting their child. On the contrary, it further strengthens their belief that they need to love and care for their child with special needs even more.

Numerous parents experience the unexpected birth of a child with a disability around the world. According to the World Health Organization (WHO) report in (2023), an estimated 1.3 billion people – about 16% of the global population – currently experience significant disability. In addition, according to a recent United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) report in 2021, nearly 240 million children aged from birth to 17 live with a disability, or 1 in 10 of all children worldwide. The report also notes that in Europe and Central Asia, East Asia and the Pacific, and South Asia, between 6 percent and 11 percent of children live with a disability. South Asia has the largest number of children living with a disability, 64.4 million, followed by East Asia and the Pacific, 43.7 million. In the Philippines, according to the National Council on Disability Affairs (NCDA) report in 2025, 1.9 million registered Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) represent approximately 1.6% of the country's population. With such a large population of people with disabilities, it means more than a hundred million parents are experiencing having a child with a disability.

Parents caring for a child with an acquired disability often report a negative impact on physical, psychological, emotional, and spiritual health associated with caregiver burden related to their child's complex needs (Philips, 2002). Several studies pointed out that parenting or raising a child with disabilities presents significant challenges.

According to the study of Lekholetova et al. (2023), parents of children with disabilities in Ukraine faced many challenges, making it more difficult. Firstly, emotional and psychological burdens, stress, anxiety, and potential for mental health issues. According to Smith (2002, cited in Thwala et al., 2015), parents of children with disabilities experience greater stress and a larger number of caregiving challenges, such as health problems, greater feelings of restriction, and higher levels of parental depression than parents of children without disabilities. Secondly, parents of children with special needs in Ukraine experienced a financial strain. The limited financial resources they have

hinder their ability to improve their living conditions, leading to a lack of funds to buy the necessary food, medicines, and technical aids for disability.

The study of Zechella and Raval (2015) explores the unique experiences and challenges faced by Asian Indian immigrant parents raising children with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDD) in the United States. The study highlights how cultural contexts and the migration experience shape the parenting journey of these families. These parents initially encountered difficulties with their local communities' acceptance of IDD, often rooted in religious interpretations of disability. The majority of parents self-identified as Hindu and reflected on ways in which extended family members provided religious explanations for the cause of the child's disability, which is the cause of the curse. As with the other parents from other cultural backgrounds, they found support in family, social awareness, acceptance, and access to resources. In contrast, the lack of these factors for each parent raising children with disabilities contributed to stress.

In Africa, a study by Tigere and Makhubele (2019) focused on the experiences of parents of children with disabilities at the Lehlaba Protektive Workshop in the Sekhukhune District. The study revealed significant hardships faced by these parents, including varied cultural understanding. Parents held diverse beliefs about the causes of their children's disabilities, ranging from witchcraft and curses to medical reasons and accidents. Some also believed that cures were available through medical, spiritual, or traditional African means. In addition, raising a child in this way is expensive, time-consuming, and emotionally straining for parents. The study highlighted a significant lack of support systems available to parents of children with disabilities in the Sekhukhune District. These parents faced challenges, including the lack of necessary resources, professional support, and protective legislation to safeguard and promote the rights of children with disabilities in the region (Tigere & Machubele, 2019).

In the study of Joung (2023), he revealed the mothers' lived experiences of caring for pubescent children with Developmental Disabilities (DDs) in South Korea. According to the study, parents of children with (DDs) are not allowed to take delight in their child's growth due to an unbalanced growth rate. A child who hits puberty grows rapidly, suggesting they will not become independent. The mothers are perplexed when their children act like toddlers despite their size. A child's rapidly growing body adds to the mother's daily tasks.

In a study of Wang and Michaels (2009), some families of children with severe disabilities in China perceived the need for more community services, information, and family/social support. With respect to support systems, parents indicated that they primarily rely on their child's school, their spouse, and their extended families. Minor differences were found between mothers and fathers (with mothers perceiving a greater level of needs than fathers), and families of children with autism tended to report greater needs for information and support than parents of children with intellectual disabilities or physical disabilities. Moreover, the medical cost and caring cost of disabled children were significantly more than those of normal children, and the education cost, clothes cost, and amusement cost of disabled children were significantly less than those of normal children. Family income was only predicted by parents' education level. Families of disabled children received more economic assistance than families of normal children, except families of autistic children. More children the family had, less economic assistance the family had, less economic assistance the family acquired (Xiaong et al., 2011).

In a recent UNICEF (2016) report, it was stated that financial barriers are one of the major burdens in caregiving for a child with disabilities in Malaysia. Those barriers include transportation to services, medical bills, nutrition, supplements, diapers, and assistive devices. In addition, they received limited disability allowances, further increasing financial strain. According to Olsson and Hwang (2001), parents of children with disabilities are likely to experience a higher burden compared to parents of children who do not have disabilities. Some of the challenging aspects of caring for these children include excessive caregiving burden, less quality time with family members, handling sibling problems, educational and future concerns, and financial difficulties (Shirley et al., 2017).

In Cambodia, according to the Asian Development Bank (ADB) (cited in Cooperation Committee for Cambodia 2006), the presence of one member with disabilities in the country can lead to higher expenditures, which may push the family into debt or force them to sell their assets to pay for treatment. Besides, one of the parents cannot help generate income for the family due to the time dedicated to providing care (Carter, 2009). Consequently, health care and attention provided to people with disabilities become a lifelong burden, especially when families realize that their child cannot be treated adequately due to the lack of human resources specialized in this sector. In addition, social discrimination may lead the family and community to take some actions that affect the rights and the livelihood of children with disabilities. Asian Development Bank (ADB) (cited in Cooperation Committee for Cambodia, 2006) reports that the social status of persons with disabilities in Cambodia is so low as to be practically nonexistent in some cases. According to the report, people with disabilities represent the poorest group in Cambodia, completely dependent on the charity and compassion of others, including family. Such dependence reflects that they do not have the option to choose what they want but must rely entirely on their caregiver's will. As a result, according to the Cambodian Disabled People Organization (CDPO) annual report (2008), people with disabilities are still excluded from community development projects.

In Indonesia, according to Donley et al. (2018), children with special needs endure delays in receiving health

treatment when compared to children who do not have special needs. Parents are burdened by the presence of children with special needs, according to Widyatno et al. (2018). Parents find it difficult to care for their children when they exhibit difficult-to-control behaviors such as aggression, hyperactivity, difficulty concentrating, difficulty managing, tantrums, a tendency to hurt themselves, and frequent mood swings (Widyatno et al., 2018). Furthermore, one in three parents felt negative feelings (embarrassed, unhappy, and dejected) about their child's condition that was not as expected, according to Faradina (2016). The presence of children with disabilities triggers parental stress (Cuzzocrea et al., 2016). The results of the research by Pocinho and Fernandes (2018) show that the stress level of parents who have special needs is higher than that of parents who do not. The stress levels of parents with special needs also vary from low to high (Widyatno et al., 2018).

In the Philippines, a study conducted at San Roque, Peñablanca, Cagayan by Bartolome et al. (2025) found that parents of Persons with Disabilities (PWD) described their experiences in raising their children, which can be summarized as psycho-emotional complexity in caregiving. According to these parents, caring for and raising their children with disabilities involves a combination of physical exhaustion and emotional challenges. This complex caregiving role requires them to build resilience and manage the various aspects of their daily lives.

A study conducted in the province of Eastern Samar by Simbulan (2013) focused on Children with Disabilities (CWD) in Philippine society. It described the socio-economic conditions of children with disabilities and their families, and the nature and extent of the problems they experienced. The findings from seven municipalities in Eastern Samar revealed that children with disabilities come from big and poor agricultural families with low levels of education. Hearing, mental, physical, and visual disabilities were the common forms of disabilities of children in the said province. Most families were unable to meet these needs due to economic difficulties and the accessibility of programs and services. As stated in the study of Simbulan (2013), it is urgent to capacitate families of children with disabilities to address their needs and develop positive coping behaviors through family-centered programs and services that will help alleviate their conditions and problems.

Despite the challenges they experienced, parents have their own various ways of addressing their problems (Di Giulio et al., 2014). Developing effective coping mechanisms is essential. Appropriate coping strategies to address these challenges greatly assist them in raising their children with disabilities. It is observed that parents having children with special needs are affected in many ways, which may persist throughout their lives. Therefore, understanding various coping strategies is important, as it helps parents choose effective coping strategies that significantly impact their child-rearing process (Borah, 2021).

Beyond studying the lived experiences, challenges, and coping mechanisms, it is also important to discover and understand the unique needs of parents raising children with disabilities. Furthermore, it is necessary to determine the kinds of support systems these parents require. This study is also expected to provide new evidence for the need to develop solid support systems for parents of children with disabilities in Guiuan, Eastern Samar.

This phenomenological study aimed to determine and understand the lived experiences, challenges, and coping mechanisms of parents raising a child with disabilities. This study has the potential to contribute valuable insights across various fields within the social sciences, including psychology, sociology, economics, and education, particularly concerning parenting children with disabilities. This study is relevant to the Social Studies Program because it would uncover and discuss a social issue that people often neglect. This would be an eye-opener for everyone to see and understand the challenges faced by parents raising children with disabilities. Also, it would serve as a tool for advocating social change and inclusion. Through this study, students can learn to develop empathy and respect diversity, working towards a more inclusive society for all. Furthermore, the researchers believe that this study is relevant and important to society, government, and education. This paper highlights the lived experiences, challenges, and problems they encountered in raising their children with disability, as well as their coping mechanisms and recommended programs that would serve as support systems and assistance for these parents in raising their children with special needs. The insights gained from their experience could be used to help other parents overcome their own challenges and focus on the development of their own, regarding parenting children with disabilities.

Methodology

This chapter discusses the methods and procedures to be used in this study. It includes research design, research locale, research participants, research instruments, data-gathering procedures, data analysis, and ethical considerations.

Research Design

The researchers employed a qualitative method and used a phenomenological research design to gather information from the parents of children with disabilities in Guiuan, Eastern Samar. It aimed to describe the experiences, challenges, and coping mechanisms of the parents raising a child with disabilities in order to gain an in-depth understanding of their actual experiences as parents of children with disabilities. In other words, phenomenology is an approach to qualitative research that focuses on the lived experiences within a particular group. The fundamental goal of the approach is to arrive at a description of the nature of the particular phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). Similarly, according to Davison (2013), phenomenological research aims to answer the researcher's questions descriptively through interviews or the observation of those people closest to the phenomenon.

There are two types of Phenomenology: Descriptive phenomenology and Interpretative or Hermeneutic phenomenology. Descriptive phenomenology (also known as transcendental phenomenology) was founded by Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) (cited in Ayton, 2023). According to Husserl (2007), this type of Phenomenology should be free of assumptions and theories, thereby allowing for phenomenological reduction. Phenomenological reduction refers to the process of putting aside all judgments, beliefs, and biased opinions about the specific experience or phenomenon (Husserl, 2007). It leads to a practice called 'bracketing', which is a method of acknowledging the researcher's assumptions, experiences, and 'knowing' of a phenomenon. Furthermore, this is an attempt by the researchers to encounter the phenomenon in as 'free and as unprejudiced a way as possible so that it can be precisely described and understood'. The second phenomenology, interpretive or hermeneutic phenomenology, was founded by Martin Heidegger (1889-1976). This type of phenomenology focuses on the nature of being and the relationship between an individual and their life world.

The researchers used transcendental phenomenology to obtain an unbiased description of the raw data. They excluded all personal opinions or biases regarding the informants' experiences in the study.

Since the researchers aimed to determine the lived experiences of parents raising children with disabilities, the qualitative and phenomenological research designs were the most suitable approaches for this study, as they provide the necessary data and access to the phenomena through the interview process.

Research Locale

This study was conducted in Guiuan, Eastern Samar, where parents raise children with disabilities.

Fig. 1. *Map showing Guiuan, Eastern Samar*

Research Informants and Sampling Method

This phenomenological study focused on the lived experiences of parents raising children with disabilities. The selection of participants was carried out using purposive sampling, a nonprobability sampling technique in which participants are selected based on specific characteristics relevant to the study. Participants are central to the research process, especially in qualitative studies where their experiences, opinions, and perspectives form the core of the data (Stewart, 2025). According to Nikolopoulou (2023), purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling technique in which units are selected because they possess characteristics needed for the sample. In other words, units are selected "on purpose" in purposive sampling. The participants in this study were parents, either mothers or fathers, of children diagnosed with physical, developmental, or intellectual disabilities. These parents reside in Guiuan, Eastern Samar, and have actively taken part in their child's care and development.

TABLE 1. *Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria*

INCLUSION CRITERIA	EXCLUSION CRITERIA
Parents who have resided in Guiuan, Eastern Samar, for the last 5 years.	Parents from different parts of the Philippines residing in Guiuan, Eastern Samar, with children below 5 years old.
Biological parents, adoptive parents, or legal guardians of a child with diagnosed disability.	Individuals who are not biological or legal guardians of the child with a disability.
Parents of children with a formal diagnosis of a physical, intellectual, developmental, or sensory disability.	Parents of children without a formal diagnosis of physical, intellectual, developmental, or sensory disability.
Parents who are 25-60years old.	Parents aged 25 to 60 years.
Actively involved in the care and development of their child.	Parents who are not primarily involved in caregiving responsibilities.
Parents' household income must be between P10,000 and P15,000 per month.	Household income of parents above P10,000 and above P15,000 a month.

Research Instrument

In this study, the researchers conducted an in-depth interview with the participants. The purpose of in-depth interviewing is to obtain detailed information that sheds light on an individual's perspective, experiences, feelings, and the meaning derived from a particular topic or issue (Rutledge & Hogg, 2020). To extract the desired information from a participant, an interview may be conducted at various locations, such as schools, colleges, markets, homes, and other settings (Showkat & Parveen, 2017). According to Taherdoost (2022), interviewers need to be good listeners. Since the final transcript from an interview primarily reflects participants' answers, interviewers need to listen attentively and not miss any points. In addition, in the study by Lavee and Itzchakov (2023), to a lesser extent, qualitative scholars also note the importance of the interviewer's listening skills in securing the interviewee's cooperation.

According to Smith and Osborn (2003), two types of interviews are identified for collecting data for phenomenological studies. The first type of interview is the

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semi-structured interview. This type of interview is similar to Patton's interview guide approach in that semi-structured interviews allow the researchers to build rapport with participants while giving the interviewer the freedom to probe, ask questions, and follow up on participants' areas of interest or concerns. The disadvantages of semi-structured interviews include reduced control by the investigator over the interview, longer interview duration, and greater difficulty in analysis. The second type of interview, according to Smith and Osborn (2003), is the structured type of interview. The structured type of interview described by Smith is similar to Patton's standardized open-ended interview and to the closed, fixed-response interview. According to Smith and Osborn (2003), researchers either create questions that elicit answers that correspond to or are easily included in predetermined groupings or provide participants with a set of possible answers to choose from. The advantages of a structured type of interview are the researcher's control over what happens during the interview, reliability of the interview since questions are all asked in the same order and exact manner, and the fact that multiple Interviewers can be used since the interviewer will have minimal effect on the responses due to the standardization of the interview. One of the main disadvantages of this type of interview is that responses are limited to those the interviewer predicted, and complex issues are unlikely to be explored, since the interviewer may not deviate from the pre-formed questions.

For this study, the researchers conducted semi-structured interviews to collect data from participants. All questions have been made clear and precise, easily understood by the participants.

Data Gathering Procedure

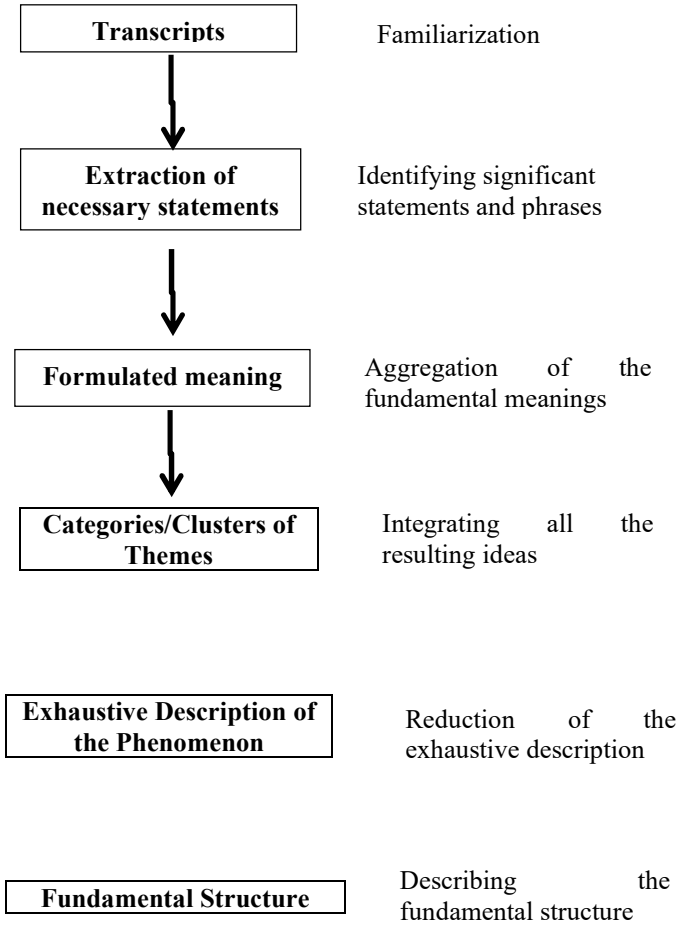
The data collection for this study consisted of open-ended questions and face-to-face interviews designed to explore further and deepen understanding of the lived experiences of parents raising children with disabilities. The researchers used purposive sampling to identify the study's informants. The selection of the informants was guided by specific characteristics essential for the study.

The researchers sent a request letter to the Barangay Captain where the informants reside, subject to his approval, to allow the researchers to conduct the study in the Barangay. After receiving permission, the researchers first asked the informants for consent to an interview on a date that was convenient for them. Upon obtaining consent, the researchers introduced themselves and explained the study's purpose. Next, the researchers begin to interview the informants. The researchers employed a semi-structured interview, which involves a series of open-ended questions designed to cover the areas the researchers want to explore. The participants were informed that the interview would be audio recorded and assured that the data collected would be used only for the study's purposes and would remain confidential. Lastly, the data will be transcribed and translated for coding and analysis.

Data Analysis Procedure

This study employed Colaizzi's (1978) phenomenological method of inquiry. The data obtained from key informants were organized into themes using Colaizzi's method of analysis to identify commonalities and differences in respondents' lived experiences of raising children with disabilities. The application of Colaizzi's seven-step method will enable the researchers to understand participants' experiences and ensure the authenticity and credibility of the results. Using this method, the researchers will be able to identify emerging themes and their interconnected relationships. The Colaizzi's method of analysis consists of seven steps. First, each transcript was read and re-read to get a general sense of the content as a whole. Second, significant statements that pertain to the phenomenon under study should be extracted. Third, meaning should be formulated from these significant statements. Fourth, the formulated meanings were organized into theme clusters and categories. Fifth, the study's findings were incorporated into a detailed description of the phenomenon under investigation. Sixth, the fundamental structure of the phenomenon should be described. Seventh, validation of findings should be sought from the research participants to compare the researcher's descriptive results with their experiences.

Colaizzi's Method of Phenomenological Inquiry



Validation of Exhaustive Description and its fundamental structure	Returning the results to the participants

Figure 2. *The process of descriptive phenomenological data analysis, espoused by Colaizzi (1978)*

Ethical Considerations

After purposively selecting participants, the researchers sent a letter to the identified parents of children with disabilities to confirm their willingness to serve as informants in this study. Informed consent was highly valued, especially in conducting individual interviews. Each participant was respectfully encouraged to sign an informed consent form, with the assurance that they could withdraw from the study at any time without consequences.

All recorded interviews and collected information were securely stored. Confidentiality was strictly maintained; the researchers used assigned codes to protect each informant's identity. Prior to the final presentation of findings, the researchers returned the transcribed data to the participants for validation and review, ensuring accuracy and credibility of the results.

All gathered data were managed with great secrecy. Only the researchers and the research adviser would have access to the data. Upon completion of the study, all records obtained from participants were securely destroyed to protect their privacy.

To enhance the trustworthiness of this research, the researchers reported the informants' statements truthfully and objectively.

Results and Discussion

This chapter presents, analyzes, and interprets the data found on the objectives of this study. This involves the shared experiences of parents in raising children with disabilities, the coping strategies they use in times of challenge, and how they make sense of their experiences.

4.1. Shared Experiences Of Parents Raising Children With Disabilities

The shared experiences of parents of children with disabilities determine the risks and challenges they face in raising their own children. These experiences reflected the way they handle the difficulties they encounter in times of challenges as a parent of children with disabilities.

4.1.1. Behavioral Challenges

Parents who are raising children with disabilities sometimes struggle to handle the different behaviors of their children. According to Walsh (2018), before interacting with a child with disabilities, one needs to build a relationship first. It needs to first make the child feel at ease and comfortable before you can earn their trust. Furthermore, children with disabilities often show behaviors that distract others. However, these children can teach them how to behave well. Once they are told what things and practices are right to do, they will be retained in their memory and eventually become part of their habit. Parents faced difficulties with their children's unpredictable actions and mood swings. The parent observed the child's actions, which were often driven by their own desires rather than by others' expectations or commands. These cause stress for parents because they cannot control their child's emotions and behavior.

According to Key Informant 10*:*

"Ada asya iton kakaiba hiya, diri mo hiya masusugo. May time masusugo mo may time di gud hiya nasugot basta waray la niya." (He is unique; you cannot order her. Sometimes he will listen to you, other times he just won't, especially if he does not feel like it.)

4.1.2. Financial Strain

One of the continuous significant challenges faced by parents raising children with disabilities is financial strain. According to Webber (2024), all parents find it challenging to plan financially. Having a child with disability in the family is difficult, since it needs more money to buy all necessary things such as medicines, food, and other related costs that sometimes families find it difficult to purchase.

Key informant 3 expressed that they faced an overwhelming financial burden, made even more acute for their family to support their child with disability due to the specialized and ongoing care required in an already challenging economic environment. According to her:

"Challenges, ah damo, will first and foremost be financial kasi nga…ahh… being poor is expensive talaga nowadays, especially hit aton ekonomiya ngahin it raising of PWD is very, very ano din kay it maintenance, kuan hit iton mga… iton iya…checkups diba." (There are many challenges, truly. The primary and biggest one is financial, because indeed... being poor is expensive nowadays, especially with our economy. Therefore, raising a PWD is also very difficult due to the costs of maintenance, and for the... for the... check-ups, right?)

4.1.4. Social Challenges

Parents who have children with disabilities face social challenges, especially in their community where they belong. Additionally, in a study by Shahali et al. (2024), Many parents felt socially isolated and marginalized, particularly when faced with financial strain and social isolation due to caregiving demands. Similarly, key informant 6 experienced being discriminated against by other people due to asking for help with financial assistance for her child's medication. According to her:

"It nga pagpinangaro hin financial assistance, damot akon naeenkwentro, sa halip nga bubuligan ka, ikaw pa lugod hin tatamayon, di ngani igdidiskrimasyon ka nira." (When asking for financial assistance, I've encountered

many things, instead of helping you, they will look down on you, and you will even be discriminated).

4.2 Coping Strategies of Parents Raising Children with Disabilities

Parents raising children with disabilities tend to cope with the difficulties of raising their children. According to Algorani and Gupta (2023), coping is defined as the thoughts and behaviors individuals mobilize to manage internal and external stressful situations. Hence, key informants shared their valuable insights on how they used their coping strategies to overcome the challenges they face as parents of children who need special care. The following were divided into themes: Perseverance and resilience; Faith in God; external support, such as government support, acceptance, or finding purpose; and redirection or distraction. These themes are arranged into categories: emotion-focused coping and problem-focused coping.

4.2.1. Perseverance and Resilience

Parents raising children with disabilities face unique challenges, such as financial, emotional, and social challenges. However, despite these struggles, many parents continue to persevere and go on with all of their strength every day for their child. The statement, "giving up should never be an option," is applied to parents raising children with disability.

According to Key Informant 1:

"In nga, sumurender ngani waray gud kinahanglan sering pa makikigbiso ka gud hit kakurian ngan kon anu it aada di na magdidinamo." (If you surrender, then you really have nothing. Just like what they say, you need to fight with poverty, and you just have to accept whatever is there without expecting more.)

4.2.2. Faith in God

The struggles in raising children with disabilities are challenging for parents, especially for those families with lower incomes. By this, many parents emphasize and rely on the power of their faith, praying to God to help them endure the struggles they face, often finding comfort, peace, and hope in it. They believe that without God, they could not survive the journey from the start.

Key Informant 2 highlighted how prayer gives her strength in her journey. She stated that:

"Asya iton an akon talaga prayer was more makakuan ako hin strength, acceptance and didto ko talaga na experience an akon na learn from that experiences, kun magtawag ka talaga kan Lord never ka babayaan…" (My prayer was to have strength, acceptance and it was through those experiences that I truly learned that if you call on the Lord, He will never forsake you.)

4.2.3. Government Support

One of the main challenges of parents raising children with disability is financial problems due to the significant cost associated with their care. Medical expenses, specialized therapies, and assistive devices can be costly, and many families struggle to afford these necessities. For this reason, the government offers support to these families to lessen the burden they are carrying, such as the 4P's program and medical assistance. As stated in RA 8972 (Solo Parent Act) and RA 11908 (Parent Effectiveness Service Program) also provide support to families, especially solo parents and those with children with disabilities. This support coming from the government is a big help for parents raising children with disability.

Key Informant 9 and 1 stated how being a beneficiary of 4P's helps them financially, especially with educational and everyday needs.

Key Informant 9:

"Nagkukuan nala ako kay bulig mat hiyat 4ps. Naabot ngani it iya pay out, renereserbahan ko it hiya hit iya pan gasto ha iskuylahan sugad hit iya mga uniform, asyat it ak ginkukuanan ha iya." (I just manage since he's part of the 4Ps. Whenever his payout comes, I set aside some money for his school needs, like his uniforms. That's what I usually provide for him.)

4.2.4. Family Support and Inspiration Towards Family

From government support, acceptance, and faith in God, family support is crucial for parents raising children with disability. In the article by Matejek (2019), the author emphasized that the family is vital as a support system for parents of children with disabilities in difficult circumstances. This enables them to continue the battle for their child, making them feel they are not alone on the journey.

Key Informant 7 stated:

"Madanay naaro bulig hit kabugtoan." (Sometimes, I ask for help from my other siblings.)

4.2.5. Acceptance/ Finding Purpose

Many parents raising children with disabilities often deal with hardship in caregiving with their child. However, despite these struggles, parents believe that their child has a purpose, not just for themselves, but for their family and future generations, giving their child's life meaning. A study by Simbulan (2013) discovered that the parents of children with disabilities practiced a passive coping strategy, where they learned to accept the situation; they did not treat their children differently from other normal children; instead, they treated their children like any normal child. Parents accept their children's condition as God's will. This belief fosters acceptance and helps them find strength in their child's existence.

Key Informant 3 stated:

"Natuod liwat ako na may purpose talaga, may pagbubuhaton kan otoy kun kay ano nasugad hiya, dire man ha akon, aw dire manla para ha akon para liwat hit kanda… hit ak pamilya dida hit side kanda nanay sugad hit iya family." (I also believe that there is a purpose, that is, my child has a purpose for why she is like this, not only for me but also for my family and my child's family.)

4.2.6. Redirection/Distraction

There is one of the informants who stated that she tries to look for an alternative way to deal with the child's health issue. The parent tries to reassure the child and divert

her attention from wanting to go to the hospital. Instead, the mother uses herbal remedies for treatment, which may be due to the financial burden faced by the parent. The response of the parent is categorized as "Redirection and distraction which is a psychological coping mechanism. This suggests that the parent is not directly addressing the underlying health problems but is instead using a strategy to manage the child's emotional response. According to her:

"Karuyag niya kumadto ha hospital asya iton amon nala gin lilibang nga diri iton, okay la iton, waray hiton gin kikinuan nala ni nanay hin herbal asya iton." (She wants to go to the hospital, but we just divert her attention by saying, 'It is nothing, it is okay,' and her mother just treats it with herbal remedies.)

4.3. Parents Make Sense of their Experiences in Raising Children with Disabilities

It is truly vital to understand the experiences of parents in raising children with disabilities. These parents show compassion and unwavering love, demonstrate empathy, and unconditional love. Their journey as parents revolves around the initial difficulty, deep acceptance, and reframing the situation.

4.3.1. Parents Value Parental Empathy and Understanding

Key Informants highlighted ideas they have learned to make sense of their experience raising children with disabilities. It helped them survive the challenges they have encountered in their daily lives as parents of these children. Key informant one has learned that in raising children with disabilities, parents must show empathy with their children for them to feel that their parents are there to support them emotionally and understand them genuinely.

According to Key Informant 1:

"Ada asya iton pareho na kunta ha mga nanay ada iintindihon nira it ira mga anak nga paron may-ada kapansanan sering pa man diri man nira tinuyuan." *(To the mothers, understand your child with disability, because just what they said, they didn't do it on purpose*.)

4.3.2. Parents Value the Essence of Acceptance Towards Children's Situation

The journey of raising a child with disabilities starts with the challenging but crucial step of acceptance. The hardest part of being a parent of a child with disabilities is being able to accept their child's situation. However, once you surpass this challenge and begin to gain this acceptance, it becomes easier to focus on the child's needs and deliver quality care. Key Informant 3 expressed that:

"Wag lang madiscourage, take heart talaga pag accept hiton kay dida ak hiton kinurian; pag accept talaga an sitwasyon han bata, kay later on pag inaccept mo mas masayon mo na i-focus kun hain ka ma priority hit pag focus pagbantay hin bata ngahin later on makuan na laiton kun ano it kinahanglan." *(*Don't be discouraged, really take heart in accepting it because that's where I had a hard time, in truly accepting the child's situation, because later on when you accept it, it will be easier to focus on where to prioritize the care of the child, and later on, you'll just be able to get what's needed.)

4.3.3. Parents Value Social Inclusion and Family Responsibility

Parents of children with disabilities understood that social inclusivity, attention, and love are not just optional acts of kindness but are fundamental necessities for the child's well-being. These children should be treated with unconditional love from the family, deliberate social shame, and a commitment to their full inclusion in all aspects of life. Key informant 2 expressed that:

"Kailangan diri nira ikaawod, tapos dad on nira kun ngain kamo, tapos anu pa, nga kailangan hin atensyon ngan pagmamahal bisan usa ka la nga tita anu kailangan talaga nira itun." (They shouldn't be ashamed, and they should bring them wherever you go, and what else, they need attention and love, even if you're just an aunt, they really need that.)

4.3.4. Importance of Good Parenting and Discipline

Throughout the journey of parents raising and caring for children with disabilities, they found that instilling good parenting and discipline is important, so that children become well-mannered individuals and become aware of the actions they may take. Hence, love and empathy are essential; parents also work to create a disciplined and safe environment for their kids to grow. Key Informant 7 emphasized that parents of children with disabilities must employ effective parenting, which involves intentionally delaying the fulfillment of the child's request to teach them patience and to prevent a cycle of entitlement and feeling taken advantage of. According to him:

"Bali, it akon la pakakuan hiton diri kun ano it ira pag-aaruon ayaw ihatag layon nga 3 to 2 days, syempre inaaro niya ayaw ihatag kay pag-once inaro niya yana ta maaro-aro na daman aabusuhon kana nira." (So, my take on that is, whatever they ask for, do not give it right away, like in 2 to 3 days. Of course, when they ask, do not give it, because once they ask for it now, they will keep asking, and they will take advantage of you.)

4.3.5. Re-framing Misfortune as Fortune

Though these parents raising children with disabilities experienced different struggles, they still believe that their child's situation is not bad luck for them. Instead, it is a blessing from God. This sentiment is empowered by the quotation that "everything happens for a reason," and that is what these parents are holding on to. To support this claim, Key Informant 5 expressed that:

*"Diri ba sawaan it anak kay diri kamo maaram nga asya ngayan it swerte, sugad hit tyana asya tak upod upod dinhi ha balay kun ginpabay an hiya adtu pala nga pera ka adlaw siguro gintuyo han ginoo nga masugad hiya kay kun na normal waray ko upod kay nag aasawa man, kaburut-on han ginoo nga may ko upod-upod labi na yana nga damo na tak inaabat." (*Do not neglect your child because you do not know that maybe that is your luck, just

like this one, this is my companion here at home. If I had neglected her in those few days, maybe it was God's intention for him to be like that, because if he had been normal, I would not have a companion, since he would have gotten married. Maybe it was God's will for me to have a companion, especially now that I feel many things.)

Conclusion

This phenomenological study conducted among parents residing in Guiuan, Eastern Samar, concludes that raising a child with a disability is a profoundly challenging yet meaningful journey for them. Parents encounter financial, emotional, physical, social, and behavioral difficulties that often strain their well-being and family resources.

Despite these hardships, they continue to endure through different coping strategies and senses such as perseverance, resilience, faith in God, and unconditional love for their children.

The findings show that parents develop a variety of coping mechanisms, such as acceptance, which they lean into wholeheartedly, and accept the child's situation, not as a failure but as a starting point for becoming a parent who will provide genuine love and care to children with disabilities. Secondly, the redirection where parents find ways to redirect their energy and focus on what they can provide and control. Most importantly, they understand that they cannot take care of their child with disability alone, so they realized the importance of social support, which starts with family. Their support is truly helpful because it helps these parents to be strong enough to endure the difficulties they face as parents of children with special needs. Also, these parents wisely rely on government programs, recognizing and utilizing the resources that are available to them that can help them to sustain the needs of their children with disability. And yet, it draws strength from prayer and faith, which are the most important coping mechanisms. A profound faith is their most powerful tool, offering solace and strength through prayer, providing them with emotional support and hope. These strategies not only help them survive the challenges but also find purpose and meaning in their situation.

Parents make sense of their experiences by reframing hardships into opportunities for growth and by valuing empathy, discipline, social inclusion, and family responsibility. Many also view their child not as a misfortune, but as a blessing from God and a source of strength. This meaning-making process enables parents to navigate their journey with courage and determination while continuing to prioritize their children's well-being and dignity.

Based on the results and findings of this study, the following recommendations are drawn.

1. The municipal government should provide such livelihood opportunities, social pensions, incentives, and medical support to help parents sustain the needs of their children with disabilities.

2. The Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) should formulate and implement programs that directly support parents in raising children with disabilities, particularly in terms of financial, emotional, and social assistance.

3. Department of Education (DepEd) should strengthen its Inclusive Education and Special Education (SPED) programs, ensuring that children with disabilities, especially those in remote areas, have access to quality education.

4. Future researchers may use this study as a reference and are encouraged to focus further on the coping strategies and mechanisms employed by parents raising children with disabilities. Also, this study can be used to have a comparison and contrast of the coping strategies of parents raising children with disabilities in the region across the country.

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