Parent's Love and Acceptance of their Children with Autism: A Phenomenological Study

Antonina Liza S. Castro, LPT [a], Vinefe Gorgonio, LPT [b], Nova Joy B. Lagdamen, LPT [c], Joan M. Luy, LPT [d], Wenefredo E. Gacape, EdD, PhD [e]

[a]antoninaliza.santos@hcdc.edu.ph, [b] vinefe.gorgonio@hcdc.edu.ph , [c] novajoy.lagdamen@hcdc.edu.ph, [d] joan.luy@hcdc.edu.ph, [e] wcagape@ccd.edu.ph

[a] *Bolton Elementary School, Davao City 800*
[b] *Ubalde Elementary School, Davao City 8000*
[c] *Bambad Central School, Sultan Kudarat 9805*
[d] *Personal Tutor, Digos City 8002*
[e] *OIC-College President, City College of Davao City, Davao City 8000*

Abstract

The present qualitative phenomenological study explores the experiences of parents raising children with autism in Davao City and the surrounding areas of Mindanao, Philippines. By employing in-depth interviews and analyzing the data through the lens of the Framework of Six Types of Involvement (Epstein, 2001), the study provides valuable insights into the challenges, coping mechanisms, and perspectives of parents navigating the journey of accepting and supporting their children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). The findings reveal the emotional impact of receiving an autism diagnosis, the multifaceted challenges parents face in adjusting to their child's unique needs, and the resilience and commitment they demonstrate in supporting their child's development and well-being. The study also underscores the importance of parental acceptance, involvement, and unconditional love in fostering positive outcomes for children with autism, while highlighting the need for greater awareness, empathy, and understanding among individuals who do not have children with special needs. The insights gained from this study contribute to the existing body of knowledge on parental experiences and acceptance in the context of autism, particularly within the cultural setting of Davao City and Mindanao, Philippines, and offer important implications for practice, policy, and future research aimed at creating a more inclusive and supportive environment that promotes the well-being and inclusion of individuals with autism spectrum disorder.

Keywords: Autism spectrum disorder (ASD), Parents, Challenges, Coping, Mechanisms, Awareness, Emotional impact, Acceptance, Unconditional love, Cultural setting, Inclusive environment

I. Introduction

Children diagnosed with autism often encounter various challenges in their daily lives, ranging from difficulties in academic performance to struggles with effective communication of wants and feelings, which can manifest as irritability and behavioral issues. Each child with autism possesses unique interests, strengths, and personalities, deserving equal opportunities for learning, development, and goal achievement. Providing them with adequate resources and support is paramount to facilitating their growth and success. Parenthood,

a journey often underestimated until experienced firsthand, becomes exceptionally demanding when raising a child with special needs.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO) and the American Psychiatric Association (APA), Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a neurodevelopmental condition that significantly impacts cognitive functioning and behavior. ASD manifests as developmental challenges in communication, social interaction, and repetitive behavioral patterns, typically emerging in early childhood (Haputhanthri et al., 2019).

The prevalence of autism continues to rise globally, with Indonesia reporting a significant increase in the number of diagnosed cases annually (Center for Disease Control [CDC], 2020). WHO estimates indicated a prevalence rate of 1 in 160 children with ASD in 2019, projected to rise to approximately 68.75% by 2021 (WHO, 2019; WHO, 2021). In Indonesia alone, the annual number of children diagnosed with autism reached around 500 cases (Kementerian Pemberdayaan Perempuan dan Perlindungan Anak [Kemenpppa], 2018).

Parental reactions to having an autistic child vary across cultures. In Turkey, for instance, parents often experience shock, confusion, anger, and depression upon receiving the diagnosis, accompanied by pessimism about the child's future prospects (Girli, 2018). Similarly, research in Indonesia has highlighted the stressors faced by primary caregivers of autistic children, including financial strain and marital discord (Jiu & Rungreangkulkij, 2019). Mothers, in particular, report elevated levels of stress compared to parents of children with other disabilities (Jose et al., 2021; Cuzzocrea et al., 2016; Amireh, 2019).

In the Philippines, Filipino parents encounter unique challenges in detecting autism early in their children's development, often experiencing feelings of guilt and regret for not recognizing the signs sooner (Roxas et al., 2022). Despite these challenges, Filipino parents emphasize the importance of treating their children with autism as special gifts and stress the significance of continuous familial support.

Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, Filipino parents have adapted to the circumstances by homeschooling their children with autism. A recent study highlighted various themes emerging from this experience, underscoring the importance of familial support and the resilience of families facing these challenges (International Journal Developmental Disabilities, 2022).

In Marawi City, an Islamic community where the prevalence of mental disorders, including ASD, is rarely addressed, there is a lack of comprehensive studies on the challenges faced by parents of children with ASD. This study aims to fill this gap by examining the experiences of parents raising children with ASD in Marawi City and surrounding areas (Alawi et al., 2023). Parents of children with disabilities, including ASD, often experience heightened levels of stress, both financial and emotional. These stressors can impact various aspects of parents' lives, including their work and overall well-being. Identifying ASD in children and understanding the challenges faced by families affected by the disorder is crucial, given that autism is a lifelong condition.

This study aims to shed light on the experiences of parents raising children with autism and to explore the psychological, emotional, and social dimensions of parent-child relationships in such families. By identifying factors influencing parent-child interactions, this research seeks to inform interventions that promote the well-being and development of children with disabilities, ultimately aiming to empower parents and improve outcomes for their children.

1.1 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study on parental acceptance of children with autism is twofold: first, to explore the experiences of parents and families regarding the variables influencing parental acceptance and the strategies utilized to overcome obstacles; and second, to promote acceptance and inclusion in society by deepening our understanding of the acceptance process among these parents. By enhancing our comprehension of parental acceptance, the study aims to advance the rights and dignity of individuals with autism and improve the well-being of parents raising children with autism.

Additionally, this study seeks to describe and analyze parental education programs designed to enhance parents' acceptance of children with disabilities. It will investigate various acceptance-related issues within the context of students with impairments, including the level of acceptability of their participation in inclusive activities, the use of inclusive terminology, and parental attitudes toward these learners.

The decision to investigate the intersection of parental education programs and the placement of learners with disabilities in mainstream classrooms is based on the interdependence highlighted in existing

research. Scholars such as Harry and Kalyanpur (1999) emphasize the importance of full inclusion and collaborative partnerships among educators, parents, and students. Furthermore, Turnbull and Turnbull (2001) stress the role of family support systems in nurturing environments for learners with disabilities, contributing significantly to students' acceptance within mainstream educational settings.

Moreover, the legal and ethical responsibility placed on states by the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) underscores the importance of investigating the role of parental education programs in fulfilling international commitments to inclusion. This research aims to bridge the gap in understanding how parental education programs can enhance acceptance levels for learners with disabilities within mainstream schools. By conducting empirical research, engaging stakeholders, and examining existing literature, the study aims to provide valuable insights into best practices for empowering parents and fostering an inclusive educational environment beneficial to all students.

1.2 Research Objectives

The main goal of this study is to give a thorough understand the parents love and acceptance of having children with autism. Specifically, this study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are your experiences of having a child with autism spectrum disorder?
2. What are the struggles encountered by the denial and acceptance of the parents of their child with an autism spectrum disorder?
3. What do you like people know about having a child with autism spectrum disorder?
4. What are your coping mechanisms /insights of having a child with autism spectrum disorder?

1.3 Review of Related Literature

Parental love and acceptance play a crucial role in the well-being and development of children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Recent research has explored various aspects of parental acceptance, experiences, and interventions aimed at promoting the mental health and well-being of parents and their children with ASD.

Sarrett (2015) conducted an ethnographic study comparing parental experiences of autism in Kerala, India, and Atlanta, GA, USA. The study identified two types of home environments: custodial homes, which focus on basic needs, and therapeutic homes, which aim to change the child's autistic traits. The type of home environment was found to be influenced by cultural practices and reflective of parental acceptance. Sarrett (2015) proposed that fostering neurodiverse notions can encourage autism acceptance among parents, highlighting the significance of cultural context in shaping parental experiences and acceptance.

Hu et al. (2020) investigated parental acceptance of silver diammine fluoride (SDF) in children with ASD. The study found no differences in parental acceptance of SDF between children with and without ASD, although children with ASD experienced higher levels of dental fear. The findings suggest that parental attitudes and decision-making may be affected by factors beyond the child's ASD diagnosis, highlighting the complexity of parental acceptance (Hu et al., 2020).

Di Renzo et al. (2020) explored the associations between parental attunement during play, insightfulness, and acceptance of their child's ASD diagnosis. The study revealed that parents who showed greater acceptance of their child's diagnosis and were more able to see things from their child's perspective were also more likely to demonstrate attunement during play interactions. These findings underscore the significance of parental acceptance and insightfulness in fostering positive parent-child relationships (Di Renzo et al., 2020).

Paz et al. (2018) examined maternal adjustment to having a child diagnosed with ASD, identifying three dimensions of adjustment: acceptance, self-blame, and despair. The study found that acceptance was associated with lower depressive symptoms, while increasing levels of self-blame and despair were associated with worsening mental health and satisfaction with life. The findings highlight the importance of promoting acceptance among mothers of children with ASD (Paz et al., 2018).

Lee et al. (2021) investigated the role of acceptance during the transition to adulthood among autistic young adults, parents, and practitioners. The study identified themes such as self-advocacy and self-acceptance among youth, lack of understanding and acceptance experienced by youth and parents, community openness

as perceived by practitioners, and finding personal support through acceptance. The findings suggest that promoting self-acceptance and acceptance of autism is essential for fostering well-being and positive outcomes (Lee et al., 2021).

Several studies have explored the effectiveness of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) interventions for parents of children with ASD. Corti et al. (2018) evaluated an ACT-oriented parent-training intervention, finding a paradoxical reduction in mindfulness awareness and a trend towards decreased stress in the group receiving the intervention. The authors highlighted the complexities involved in promoting parental acceptance and psychological well-being through targeted interventions (Corti et al., 2018).

Hahs et al. (2019) conducted a randomized controlled trial examining the effect of a brief ACT-based intervention on the psychological well-being of parents of children with ASD. The findings revealed significant improvements in acceptance, cognitive fusion, mindfulness, depression, internalized shame, and personal values in the treatment group, providing evidence for the efficacy of brief ACT-based interventions (Hahs et al., 2019).

Marino et al. (2021) evaluated the efficacy of the ACT matrix behavioral protocol in comparison to a conventional Parent Training program for improving psychological well-being in parents of children with ASD. The study found significant improvements in psychological flexibility, awareness states, personal values, and parental stress, as well as reduced scores in perceptions of their child's disruptive behaviors in the ACT protocol group (Marino et al., 2021).

Juvin et al. (2021) conducted a systematic review investigating the effectiveness of ACT interventions for parents of children and adolescents with ASD. The review found that ACT interventions can be helpful for parents, but highlighted the need for future research to establish standard procedures and conduct larger randomized controlled trials to strengthen the evidence base (Juvin et al., 2021).

Andrews et al. (2021) examined the effects of ACT combined with Behavior Parent Training (BPT), delivered via telehealth, on parental implementation of behavioral strategies, experiential avoidance, stress, and the subsequent effects on their autistic children's behaviors. The findings showed that ACT+BPT resulted in high levels of parental implementation, decreased experiential avoidance and stress in most parents, and a reported decrease in children's challenging behaviors (Andrews et al., 2021).

In conclusion, the reviewed literature highlights the importance of parental acceptance and well-being in the context of raising children with ASD. The studies provide valuable insights into the factors that influence parental acceptance, the impact of acceptance on parent-child relationships, and the effectiveness of interventions aimed at promoting parental acceptance and mental health. The proposed phenomenological study aims to build upon this foundation by delving deeper into the subjective experiences of parental love and acceptance, contributing to a more nuanced understanding of this crucial aspect of family dynamics in the context of ASD. By combining the insights from both quantitative and qualitative approaches, researchers and practitioners can develop more comprehensive and effective strategies to support parents and families of children with ASD.

1.4 Theoretical Lens

This research study will be grounded in the Framework of Six Types of Involvement by Joyce Epstein. This theoretical framework, often referred to as the "School-Family-Community Partnership Model," has demonstrated enduring significance in the realm of school, family, and community engagement. This encompasses the types of involvement such as parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating with the community. Though subject to revisions over the years, the foundational elements of this framework have consistently emphasized the multifaceted nature of involvement, recognizing that successful educational outcomes are contingent upon collaborative efforts among schools, families, and communities.

2. Methodology

This chapter presents the research procedure of the study; it includes research design, participants and sampling, ethical considerations, role of the researchers, data collection, and data analysis.

2.1 Research Design

This study will employ a qualitative phenomenological research design to explore the experiences of parents raising children with autism in Davao City and surrounding areas. Phenomenological research aims to understand and describe the lived experiences of individuals who have encountered a specific phenomenon, in this case, parenting a child with autism.

The qualitative approach is particularly suitable for this study as it allows for an in-depth exploration of the subjective experiences, perceptions, and meanings that parents ascribe to their journey of raising a child with autism. This approach recognizes the complexity and diversity of human experiences and seeks to capture the richness and nuances of the participants' narratives.

The phenomenological design will involve the following key elements:

1. Purposive sampling: Participants will be selected based on their direct experience of parenting a child with autism. The sample size will be determined by data saturation, which occurs when no new themes or insights emerge from the collected data.
2. In-depth interviews: Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with the participants to gather rich, detailed accounts of their experiences. The interviews will be guided by open-ended questions that allow participants to freely share their thoughts, feelings, and reflections on their parenting journey.
3. Data analysis: The collected data will be analyzed using thematic analysis, a method that involves identifying, examining, and reporting patterns or themes within the data. The analysis will be an iterative process, moving back and forth between data collection and interpretation to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the participants' experiences.
4. Trustworthiness: To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, the researchers will employ strategies such as member checking (seeking participant feedback on the accuracy of the interpretations), prolonged engagement with the data, and triangulation of data sources (e.g., interviews, field notes, and reflective journals).

By adopting a qualitative phenomenological approach, this study aims to provide a rich, contextualized understanding of the experiences of parents raising children with autism in Marawi City and surrounding areas. The findings will contribute to the existing body of knowledge on parental acceptance and inform the development of interventions and support services tailored to the unique needs of these families.

2.2 Key Participants

The key participants in this study will be parents of children with autism spectrum disorder in Davao City, Philippines. The selection of participants will be based on specific inclusion criteria to ensure that the sample is representative of the target population and can provide rich, relevant data.

To be eligible for the study, participants must be either the mother or father of a child formally diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). The child with autism should be between the ages of 3 and 18 years old, and the parents should be the primary caregivers of the child. Additionally, the parents should have been residing in Davao City or the surrounding areas of Mindanao for at least one year prior to the study and be willing to share their experiences and insights related to parenting a child with autism.

Purposive sampling will be employed to recruit participants who meet the above criteria. The researchers will collaborate with local autism support groups, special education schools, and healthcare professionals to identify potential participants. Snowball sampling may also be utilized, where existing participants refer other eligible parents to participate in the study. The sample size will be determined by data saturation, which is the point at which no new themes or insights emerge from the collected data.

The inclusion of both mothers and fathers in the study will allow for a comprehensive understanding of parental experiences, as gender differences may influence the way parents cope with and accept their child's autism diagnosis. The age range of the children (3-18 years) will capture the various stages of parenting, from early diagnosis to the challenges of adolescence.

Focusing on parents residing in Davao City and the surrounding areas of Mindanao will provide insights into the unique cultural, social, and economic factors that shape parenting experiences in this specific context. Davao City, being the largest city in Mindanao and a regional center for healthcare and education, offers a diverse population and access to autism support services, making it an appropriate location for this study.

By purposefully selecting participants based on these criteria, the study aims to gather rich, in-depth data that will contribute to a nuanced understanding of the experiences of parents raising children with autism in Davao City and the surrounding areas of Mindanao. The diverse sample will allow for the exploration of common themes and patterns while also capturing the unique challenges and triumphs of each family's journey.

2.3 Data Analysis

The data analysis process in this qualitative phenomenological study will involve a systematic and iterative approach to examining the collected data, with the aim of identifying common themes, patterns, and meanings that emerge from the participants' experiences. The analysis will be guided by the research questions and the theoretical framework of the study, ensuring that the findings are relevant and meaningful.

The first step in the data analysis process will be the transcription of the audio-recorded interviews. The researchers will carefully transcribe each interview verbatim, ensuring that all verbal and non-verbal cues are accurately captured. The transcripts will then be reviewed and checked for accuracy by the researchers and the participants themselves, through a process known as member checking. This step is crucial in establishing the credibility and trustworthiness of the data.

Once the transcripts are finalized, the researchers will begin the process of coding the data. Coding involves assigning labels or tags to specific segments of the data that are relevant to the research questions and the theoretical framework. The researchers will use a combination of deductive and inductive coding techniques, starting with a set of pre-determined codes based on the literature review and the research questions, and then allowing new codes to emerge from the data itself.

The coded data will then be organized into categories and sub-categories, based on the similarities and differences between the codes. The researchers will use a constant comparative method, constantly comparing and contrasting the categories to identify patterns and relationships between them. This process will involve multiple rounds of coding and categorization, until the researchers are satisfied that the categories are saturated and no new insights are emerging.

The next step in the data analysis process will be the identification of themes. Themes are higher-level patterns or meanings that emerge from the categories and sub-categories. The researchers will use a thematic analysis approach, looking for common threads and ideas that run through the data and that capture the essence of the participants' experiences. The themes will be reviewed and refined through a process of peer debriefing, where the researchers discuss and validate their interpretations with each other and with external experts in the field.

Finally, the researchers will develop a comprehensive narrative that describes the themes and their relationships to each other and to the research questions. The narrative will be supported by direct quotes from the participants, providing rich and vivid illustrations of their experiences. The researchers will also provide a reflexive account of their own role in the research process, acknowledging their own biases and assumptions and how these may have influenced the analysis.

Throughout the data analysis process, the researchers will maintain a clear audit trail, documenting each step of the analysis and the decisions made along the way. This will ensure that the analysis is transparent and replicable, and that the findings are grounded in the data itself. The researchers will also engage in ongoing reflexivity, constantly questioning their own interpretations and seeking alternative explanations for the data.

By following this systematic and rigorous approach to data analysis, the researchers aim to generate a deep and nuanced understanding of the experiences of parents raising children with autism in Davao City and the surrounding areas of Mindanao. The findings will contribute to the existing body of knowledge on parental acceptance and adaptation, and will inform the development of interventions and support services that are tailored to the unique needs and challenges of these families.

2.4 Ethical Consideration

The participants of this research are the five parents who have child of autism whom officially enrolled learners in the school year 2023- 2024. To ensure the respondents' overall safety, the researchers observed the following ethical considerations.

The researchers considered conducting the process of recruitment ethically. As a result, the researchers pointed out the following ethical concerns; (a) Voluntary- the researchers will not pressure the parents to participate or force them to do so, the researcher will make sure to give the respondents plenty of time for them to consider their involvement or participation in the study. (b) Respect for Privacy- the respondents' sensitive information will be given with utmost care and will remain confidential until the end of the conduct of the study. For this reason, the information gathered should only be used for research purposes. (c) Accurate information- the respondents will be provided with details on what the research is all about, the objective of the study, and its significance for them to be aware of how their data will be utilized.

Overall, during the recruitment stage, the participants will be given a background of the study, its objective and significance, and how their information will be utilized. Its importance is that as parents, they will be given awareness about the effect of their acceptance level in relation to learners with disabilities. In this process, the parents were also told of the time required or projected duration of their participation in the study.

2.5 Role of the Researcher

The researchers look for the participants who correlate the learner with autism spectrum disorder as the main respondents such as parents, teachers, relatives, siblings, and neighborhoods related to the learner. In this, the researcher will provide a questionnaire that is already validated by the experts and use it as a main tool of the research.

2.6 Data Collection

The data gathering procedure for this qualitative phenomenological study will involve a series of in-depth, semi-structured interviews with parents of children with autism residing in Davao City, Philippines. The interviews will be conducted in a manner that is respectful, sensitive, and responsive to the needs and preferences of the participants.

Prior to the interviews, the researchers will obtain ethical approval from the relevant institutional review board and will secure informed consent from each participant. The informed consent process will involve providing the participants with clear and detailed information about the purpose, procedures, and potential risks and benefits of the study, and ensuring that they understand their rights as research participants, including the right to withdraw from the study at any time.

The interviews will be conducted in a private and comfortable setting, such as the participants' homes or a neutral location of their choice. The researchers will use an interview guide that has been developed based on the research questions and the theoretical framework of the study, but will also allow for flexibility and adaptability in response to the participants' responses and needs.

The interview guide will include a range of open-ended questions that explore the participants' experiences of parenting a child with autism, including their initial reactions to the diagnosis, their coping strategies and support systems, their interactions with healthcare and educational professionals, and their hopes and fears for the future. The questions will be designed to elicit rich and detailed responses that capture the complexity and nuance of the participants' experiences.

During the interviews, the researchers will use a range of techniques to build rapport and trust with the participants, such as active listening, empathy, and non-judgmental communication. They will also use probing and follow-up questions to encourage the participants to elaborate on their responses and to clarify any ambiguities or inconsistencies.

Throughout the data gathering process, the researchers will maintain strict confidentiality and anonymity of the participants' identities and responses. All data will be stored securely and will be accessible only to the research team. The researchers will also provide the participants with information about available

support services and resources, in case they experience any distress or discomfort as a result of participating in the study.

By following this rigorous and ethical data gathering procedure, the researchers aim to generate a rich and authentic dataset that captures the lived experiences of parents of children with autism in Davao City and the surrounding areas of Mindanao. The data will form the basis for the subsequent data analysis and interpretation, and will contribute to the development of a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing these families.

3. Findings and Discussion

This chapter presents the findings to explore and understand the lived experiences, coping mechanisms, and insights of Parents having a Child with Autism Spectrum Disorder. To answer this research question, in-depth interviews and focus group discussions were conducted. Emerging themes were generated from the responses of the participants. The following are the accounts of responses.

3.1 Experiences of having a child with autism

The first research question asked was about the experiences of parents having a child with autism. Three (2) major themes and core ideas emerged from the data collected. The participants' statements during the in–depth interview and focus group discussion support and justify these themes. The following are the accounts of responses: Struggling in Childs Progress, Parental Resilience and Adaptation.

Struggling in Childs Progress

The participants revealed that the developmental trajectory of their child was different from the other children, which raised concerns because the youngster had speech difficulties and other unusual characteristics. The young patient sought advice from medical authorities and was given a diagnosis. The participants showed resilience by prioritizing understanding and supporting their child's growth and development in spite of challenges they faced.

P3:*"The struggles I encountered was like his behavior whenever his wants will not be granted. We also seek help to other on how we understand his words so that we can understand him. he can't do eye contact and keeps on talking nonsense."*

P5:*"I observed that he started lining up toys when he was 2 years old. He doesn't copy me when I ask him to talk or say his request, like milk. He doesn't want to play with other kids, and he doesn't want his toys to be touched by others. He keeps throwing tantrums and we don't know what he wants because he was not expressive. Plus, he is very hyperactive and doesn't seem to feel tired even if he keeps running around the house."*

Parental Resilience and Adaptation

The majority of participants were informed that their child had been diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). At first, the mother feels a range of feelings, from relief to despair, as she struggles to accept her child's condition and wonders what the circumstances are. Upon receiving an ASD diagnosis, the mother is faced with additional financial and emotional strain. The mother as well exhibits incredible fortitude and tenacity in the face of multiple obstacles, staying unwaveringly dedicated to his/her child's growth.

P2:*"It took a while for us to accept because it seemed like it was still in-denial at first. But it not too long because immediately sought an intervention or maybe it's in-denial cause how can we seek a therapy yet were hopeful that he would not be [positive for autism] but due to have signs already that he's positive for autism, we felt really shocked. Eventually, we still think positively. My husband and I have come up with*

motto of 'never give up". moreover, we feel Happy and sad however we are so happy every time he conquers another milestone that he has achieved."

P5: "*Are so happy whenever he helped us wash dishes at home and talk to us with his stated words. He even knows how to use gadgets because he loves to play now games in mobile phones."*

This can be implied that the themes show the participant's responses to related to their experiences of having a child with autism. The identified participant shares their journey of accepting their child's diagnosis and the challenges they face in managing their child's behavior.

The participant's initial reaction to their child's diagnosis was sadness, as they had already suspected that their child might have autism based on a friend's observation (Paz et al., 2018). Despite this, the participant accepted the diagnosis and sought professional help to confirm it. The participant also experienced a period of denial, observing their child for almost a year before seeking professional help (Lee et al., 2021).

The participant also highlights the difficulties they encounter in adjusting to their child's autism, such as managing tantrums, hyperactivity, and the child's treatment of their sibling (Sarrett, 2015). These challenges are common among parents of children with ASD, as they navigate the complexities of understanding and accommodating their child's unique needs (Di Renzo et al., 2020).

This was reinforced by the idea of Papadopoulos' (2021) concept, which highlighted the emotional toll that mothers face, such as shock, confusion, and worry upon diagnosis, provided support for this. Furthermore, Bonis (2016) talks on the increased stress and financial difficulties that parents of children with ASD face, emphasizing the necessity of making tough choices like quitting work to concentrate on therapeutic needs.

3.2 Struggles Encountered by the Denial and Acceptance of the Parents of their Child with Autism

The second research question asked was how the participants struggled encountered the denial and acceptance of having a child with an autism spectrum disorder. Only one (1) major theme and core idea emerged from the data collected. The participants' statements during the in–depth interview and focus group discussion support and justify this theme. The following are the accounts of responses misconception of people to their condition.

Misconception of People to their Condition

P1:*"After having the paper with the result, I was devasted maam I don't know what to do or what to feel. I felt scared because we don't know how to deal with his condition and how other might think about my child because the community, we live is still not fully aware of this kind of condition.*

P5:*"The things I worried about is his future. What would be his future if he has autism? That Is why I search and seek help about his condition. And I'm happy that there are schools already that has sped program that caters like him. And as of today, I am grateful that he has a school and home routine which help us a lot. He knows what to do when he wakes up and what to do when he goes to school and go home. I would just wish that this routine or set up will be interrupted because he will surely be distracted if this will happen."*

The participant expresses the emotional impact of the diagnosis, describing feelings of sadness, confusion, and a sense of loss (Paz et al., 2018). However, the participant also highlights their child's accomplishments, such as being on the honor list, gaining confidence in social situations, and showcasing their singing abilities (Di Renzo et al., 2020).

Several authors agreed with this. In her discussion of the emotional turmoil parents go through after learning of their child's diagnosis, Catubigan (2023) emphasizes the early battle for acceptance and explores feelings of shock, perplexity, and fear about the future and the possible reaction of people or community. Furthermore, as highlighted by Bonis (2016), parents of children with ASD face increased stress and financial burdens, underscoring the necessity of adaptable solutions to properly handle the situation inside the home and the community. Furthermore, Chin et al. (2023) emphasize the significance of comprehending coping mechanisms to mitigate the strains that come with raising a kid with ASD, arguing that acceptance and adaptation play a critical role in shedding light on parenting stress and promoting improved parent-child interactions. All of these findings provide credence to the idea that parents of ASD children exhibit resiliency and tenacity in meeting their child's particular demands in spite of confronting major obstacles and disappointments.

3.3 Would you like People to Know and Understand about Children with Special Needs

The third research question asked was how you like people to know and understand of having a child with an autism spectrum disorder. Two (2) major themes and core ideas emerged from the data collected. The participants' statements during the in–depth interview and focus group discussion support and justify these themes. The following are the accounts of responses: advocating for awareness to people/Community, and family support.

P1: “That they should ask professional on how to deal with their child, don’t be reluctant and think that the old generation is the same as today. Because people tend to say that its natural for the kids to be so energetic, hyper, and so on. Give them more patience and love. And It is really better to seek help from the professionals”

P4: “If they are having a child with special needs, I want them to know that it's okay to be scared at first, it's normal to feel weary and sad. That all you feel is valid and accepted. - Lucky! For they cannot feel what we feel. But I just want them to know that, please don’t be so quick to judge other parents, especially when they don’t know personally that person. Do not judge them according to what you see, because you never know if the child is the same as yours, normal, or if the child is having a meltdown because of his/her condition. condition. I don’t think that many parents know about what it feels like to have a child with special needs, that is why some are so quick in judging others.”

P5: “For those parents who are in the same boat as mine, I would like to say that it is ok to feel scared and worried however always remember that a parent’s love is more powerful tool to guide their children. Let’s help each other to spread awareness about this condition. Don’t let others bully your child or hide them from the world. exposed them and let the world see them as a gift. ´

The participant highlights the difficulties they encountered in adjusting to their child's autism, particularly in communication and understanding their child's needs (Di Renzo et al., 2020). The participant also expresses the emotional impact of their child's public meltdowns and the perceived judgment from others (Sarrett, 2015).

The participant emphasizes the importance of providing support, helping the child overcome difficulties, and seeking professional assistance when needed (Hu et al., 2020). They also highlight the significance of accepting the child's existence as a gift and being present throughout their journey, aligning with the values of unconditional love and involvement (Epstein, 2001).

The participant's coping mechanisms include seeking support from family and friends, accepting their child's individuality, and engaging with other parents of children with autism through therapy centers (Hu et

al., 2020). These strategies align with the Framework of Six Types of Involvement, particularly in the areas of parenting, co

The participant emphasizes the importance of awareness and understanding among people who do not have children with special needs, advocating for empathy and a non-judgmental approach (Lee et al., 2021). The participant also stresses the significance of acceptance and using it as a motivation to help their child, especially when they see them struggling to live a normal life (Sarrett, 2015).mmunicating, and collaborating with the community (Epstein, 2001).

3.4 Coping Mechanism of Having a Child with Autism Spectrum Disorder

The fourth research question asked about the coping mechanism/ insights of having a child with an autism spectrum disorder. Two (2) major themes and core ideas emerged from the data collected. The participants' statements during the in–depth interview and focus group discussion support and justify these themes. The following are the accounts of responses: family support system, prioritizing his/her happiness, celebrating his/her small milestones with the family.

P1: *" What we do at home, are we ask him how or what he feels about school when he gets home so that we can express his self-thru simple words, we don't let him drink or eat chocolate that would makes him hyper, we also bond him through play time and especially we give an activity at home that would let him feel he is part of the family and a member of the family, we give household chores like washing dishes with his father and let him fold his beddings when he gets up in the morning. "*

P2: *"My coping mechanisms are having constant communication with my husband and supporting each other. We will try harder or push the therapy for Gab. Then I don't always think about things that makes me depressed instead what we think is as long as I exist as a parent, I will always support him. Another part of my coping mechanism is my mindset that I don't put pressure on my child. I didn't set high expectations for Gab, unlike other parents who want their children to go to college and work, for me I didn't set my mind on their same way of thinking. I have put it out of my mind, for me as long as he's always healthy, and can manage all by himself. Another part of my coping mechanism is doing physical fitness or exercise because I need to be physically fit in taking care of my child, hanging out with friends. While my husband also has his own way of coping mechanism. So that at least we can unwind also we don't get stress and weak. And lastly, our best coping mechanism is whenever Gab hits new milestone, my husband and I are super-duper happy. We didn't set boundaries for him nor putting him pressure, only things what he could handle."*

F4: *"Family's support system. The support I get from my family especially my husband plays a big role in this situation, as well as friends. Acceptance and understanding, one of the most important coping mechanisms for me is to accept my child's autism and embrace their individuality. Understanding their strengths and challenges allows me to approach parenting with patience and empathy."*

In terms of coping mechanisms, the participant engages in open communication with their child, provides a structured environment with rules, and involves the child in household activities to promote a sense of belonging within the family (Hu et al., 2020). These strategies align with the Framework of Six Types of Involvement, particularly in the areas of parenting, communicating, and learning at home (Epstein, 2001).ing that a child with or without autism is a gift to be cherished.

The participant's experiences align with the Framework of Six Types of Involvement, particularly in the areas of parenting, communicating, and collaborating with the community (Epstein, 2001). The participant's efforts to understand and support their child's needs, as well as their engagement with therapy services, demonstrate their commitment to their child's development and well-being (Hu et al., 2020)

The participant's insights highlight the importance of parental acceptance, understanding, and proactive involvement in supporting the development and well-being of children with autism (Di Renzo et al., 2020; Paz et al., 2018; Lee et al., 2021).

The participant's main concerns revolve around their child's future and the challenges they may face, particularly when the parents are no longer around to provide support (Lee et al., 2021). This worry is common among parents of children with ASD, as they navigate the uncertainties of their child's long-term well-being (Sarrett, 2015).

The participant's insights highlight the emotional journey of accepting a child's autism diagnosis, the challenges faced in adjusting to their child's needs, and the importance of support systems and awareness in promoting the well-being of children with autism and their families (Paz et al., 2018; Di Renzo et al., 2020; Lee et al., 2021).

This is suggested by Bonis's (2016) discussion of the challenges faced by parents of ASD children and the significance of making therapy a top priority even in the face of financial hardships. In a similar vein, Algorani (2023) highlights the expression of coping strategies to handle difficult circumstances, arguing that healthy parental coping requires preserving love and care while striking a balance between understanding and discipline. Furthermore, Chin et al. (2023) emphasize how crucial it is to comprehend coping mechanisms to offset the strains that come with raising a child with ASD. Doing so may improve parents' wellbeing and cultivate stronger bonds between parents and children.

Conclusion

The present qualitative phenomenological study explores the experiences of parents raising children with autism in Davao City, Philippines. By employing in-depth interviews and analyzing the data through the lens of the Framework of Six Types of Involvement (Epstein, 2001), the study provides valuable insights into the challenges, coping mechanisms, and perspectives of parents navigating the journey of accepting and supporting their children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD).

The findings of this study highlight the emotional impact of receiving an autism diagnosis, the multifaceted challenges parents face in adjusting to their child's unique needs, and the resilience and commitment they demonstrate in supporting their child's development and well-being. The study also underscores the importance of parental acceptance, involvement, and unconditional love in fostering positive outcomes for children with autism.

Moreover, the insights gained from this study shed light on the need for greater awareness, empathy, and understanding among individuals who do not have children with special needs. The findings emphasize the significance of creating an inclusive and supportive environment for families of children with autism, highlighting the role of society in promoting the well-being and inclusion of individuals with ASD.

The study's findings contribute to the existing body of knowledge on parental experiences and acceptance in the context of autism, particularly within the cultural setting of Davao City and Mindanao, Philippines. By providing a deeper understanding of the challenges and coping mechanisms employed by parents, the study offers valuable information for the development of interventions and support services tailored to the unique needs of these families.

The conclusions drawn from this study have important implications for practice and policy. The findings underscore the need for accessible and comprehensive support services for families of children with autism, including early intervention programs, therapy services, and parent support groups. Additionally, the study highlights the importance of promoting awareness and understanding of autism among the general public, educators, and healthcare professionals to foster a more inclusive and supportive environment for individuals with ASD and their families.

Furthermore, the study's conclusions emphasize the significance of considering cultural context when developing and implementing interventions and support services for families of children with autism. The experiences and perspectives of parents in Davao City and Mindanao, Philippines, may differ from those in

other cultural settings, underscoring the need for culturally sensitive approaches to supporting families of children with ASD.

In conclusion, this qualitative phenomenological study provides valuable insights into the experiences of parents raising children with autism in Davao City and the surrounding areas of Mindanao, Philippines. The findings contribute to the existing knowledge base on parental acceptance and involvement in the context of autism and offer important implications for practice, policy, and future research. By understanding and addressing the challenges faced by these families, society can work towards creating a more inclusive and supportive environment that promotes the well-being and inclusion of individuals with autism spectrum disorder.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of this qualitative phenomenological study exploring the experiences of parents raising children with autism in Davao City and the surrounding areas of Mindanao, Philippines, several recommendations can be made to improve support services, promote awareness, and foster a more inclusive environment for individuals with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and their families.

Firstly, it is recommended that policymakers and healthcare providers prioritize the development and implementation of accessible and comprehensive support services for families of children with autism. These services should include early intervention programs, therapy services, and parent support groups that are tailored to the unique needs of families in the region. By providing families with the necessary resources and support, children with autism can receive the appropriate interventions and care to promote their development and well-being.

Secondly, it is crucial to promote awareness and understanding of autism among the general public, educators, and healthcare professionals. This can be achieved through public education campaigns, workshops, and training programs that provide information about the characteristics, challenges, and strengths of individuals with ASD. By fostering a greater understanding of autism, society can work towards creating a more inclusive and supportive environment that reduces stigma and promotes acceptance of individuals with ASD and their families.

Thirdly, it is recommended that future research continues to explore the experiences of parents raising children with autism in diverse cultural contexts. The present study highlights the importance of considering cultural factors when examining parental experiences and developing support services. By conducting further research in different cultural settings, researchers can gain a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges and coping mechanisms employed by families of children with autism, ultimately informing the development of culturally sensitive interventions and support services.

Fourthly, it is recommended that educators and school administrators work towards creating inclusive educational environments that accommodate the needs of students with autism. This can be achieved through the provision of appropriate accommodations, modifications, and support services within the classroom setting. Additionally, teachers should receive training and resources to effectively support the learning and social-emotional development of students with ASD.

Fifthly, it is recommended that policymakers and organizations work towards promoting the rights and well-being of individuals with autism and their families. This can be achieved through the development and implementation of policies and legislation that protect the rights of individuals with ASD, ensure access to appropriate services and support, and promote equal opportunities for participation in society.

Lastly, it is recommended that parents of children with autism be encouraged to actively seek support and engage with resources available to them. This may include participating in parent support groups, accessing therapy services, and collaborating with educators and healthcare professionals to develop individualized support plans for their children. By actively engaging in their child's care and advocating for their needs, parents can play a crucial role in promoting the well-being and development of their children with autism.

In conclusion, these recommendations underscore the importance of a comprehensive and collaborative approach to supporting individuals with autism and their families. By prioritizing the development of accessible support services, promoting awareness and understanding, conducting further

research, creating inclusive educational environments, promoting the rights and well-being of individuals with ASD, and encouraging parental engagement, society can work towards creating a more inclusive and supportive environment that fosters the well-being and inclusion of individuals with autism spectrum disorder.

Acknowledgement

It is all feasible when you have the Lord. The researchers expressed their sincere thanks to God for bestowing upon them His grace, wisdom, and benefits. Without the direction and assistance of numerous people who, in one way or another, contributed and extended www.ijrp.org their invaluable aid in the preparation and completion of this study, this research paper would not be feasible. Therefore, in order to successfully complete this research study, the researchers would like to express their sincere gratitude and appreciation to Dr. Wenefredo E. Cagape for his time, insightful comments, suggestions, and intellectual guidance as well as for his effort and patience in working with them. The researchers would also like to thank the institution for its unwavering support.We also extend our heartfelt appreciation to the organization for its resources and assistance. Lastly, we would like to thank our family and friends for their ongoing support.

References:

Andrews, M. L., Garcia, Y. A., Catagnus, R. M., & Gould, E. R. (2021). Effects of Acceptance and Commitment Training Plus Behavior Parent Training on Parental Implementation of Autism Treatment. *The Psychological Record*, *72*(4), 601–617. https://doi.org/10.1007/s40732-021-00496-5

Corti, C., Pergolizzi, F., Vanzin, L., Giulia Cargasacchi, Villa, L., Pozzi, M., & Molteni, M. (2018). Acceptance and Commitment Therapy-Oriented Parent-Training for Parents of Children with Autism. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, *27*(9), 2887–2900. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-018-1123-3

Hahs, A. D., Dixon, M. R., & Paliliunas, D. (2019). Randomized controlled trial of a brief acceptance and commitment training for parents of individuals diagnosed with autism spectrum disorders. *Journal of Contextual Behavioral Science*, *12*, 154–159. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jcbs.2018.03.002

Hu, S., Meyer, B., Pui, W., Pui Ling Chay, & Huei Jinn Tong. (2020). Parental acceptance of silver diammine fluoride in children with autism spectrum disorder. *International Journal of Paediatric Dentistry*, *30*(4), 514–522. https://doi.org/10.1111/ipd.12624

Juvin, J., Serine Sadeg, Julien-Sweerts, S., & Rafika Zebdi. (2021). A Systematic Review: Acceptance and Commitment Therapy for the Parents of Children and Adolescents with Autism Spectrum Disorder. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, *52*(1), 124–141. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-021-04923-y

Lee, G. K., Curtiss, S. L., Hung Jen Kuo, Chun, J., Lee, H., & Nimako, D. D. (2021). The Role of Acceptance in the Transition to Adulthood: A Multi-Informant Comparison of Practitioners, Families, and Youth with Autism. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, *52*(4), 1444–1457. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-021-05037-1

Magda Di Renzo, Guerriero, V., Giulio Cesare Zavattini, Petrillo, M., Racinaro, L., & Bianchi, F. (2020). Parental Attunement, Insightfulness, and Acceptance of Child Diagnosis in Parents of Children With Autism: Clinical Implications. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *11*. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.01849

Marino, F., Failla, C., Chilà, P., Minutoli, R., Puglisi, A., Arnao, A. A., Pignolo, L., Presti, G., Pergolizzi, F., Paolo Moderato, Gennaro Tartarisco, Ruta, L., Vagni, D., Cerasa, A., & Pioggia, G. (2021). The Effect of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy for Improving Psychological Well-Being in Parents of Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders: A Randomized Controlled Trial. *Brain Sciences*, *11*(7), 880–880. https://doi.org/10.3390/brainsci11070880

Paz, Siegel, B., Coccia, M. A., & Epel, E. S. (2018). Acceptance or Despair? Maternal Adjustment to Having a Child Diagnosed with Autism. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, *48*(6), 1971–1981. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-017-3450-4

Sarrett, J. C. (2015). Custodial Homes, Therapeutic Homes, and Parental Acceptance: Parental Experiences of Autism in Kerala, India and Atlanta, GA USA. *Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry*, *39*(2), 254–276. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11013-015-9441-z