

# Embracing Uniqueness: A Qualitative Descriptive Study on Parental Love and Acceptance Among Filipino Parents of Children with ADHD and Autism Through the Lens of Family Acceptance Theory

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## Abstract

Parental love and acceptance play a vital role in the emotional, social, and developmental growth of children with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). In the Philippine context, parents often face emotional struggles, social stigma, financial limitations, and limited access to specialized services while raising children with developmental conditions. Through this qualitative descriptive study, I explored how Filipino parents expressed love, acceptance, and resilience in caring for their children with ADHD and autism. Using purposive sampling, I interviewed eight parents from selected communities and schools in the Philippines. Through thematic analysis, I found that parental acceptance developed gradually through understanding, emotional adjustment, spiritual faith, and family support. Parents described love as unconditional and transformative despite challenges related to public judgment, educational concerns, and emotional stress. Findings also revealed that Filipino cultural values such as *pagmamahal sa pamilya*, *malasakit*, and *bayanihan* strengthened parental commitment and resilience. The study suggests that schools, healthcare providers, and policymakers may strengthen parent support systems, counseling programs, and awareness campaigns to help families raising children with ADHD and autism.

Keywords: parental love; parental acceptance; ADHD; autism; Filipino parents; qualitative descriptive

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## INTRODUCTION

As I reflected on the experiences of families raising children with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), I realized that parental love and acceptance remained among the most important factors influencing the emotional and developmental well-being of children with special needs. While many studies focused on educational interventions, behavioral therapies, and clinical management, I observed that the emotional journey of parents was often less explored, particularly in the Philippine setting. From my perspective, parents became the child's first source of understanding, protection, and emotional security, especially in environments where stigma and misunderstanding toward developmental conditions still existed.

In the Philippines, I noticed that many parents initially struggled to understand their child's condition due to limited awareness about ADHD and autism. Some parents experienced denial, fear, guilt, confusion, and anxiety upon learning about their child's diagnosis. Others encountered negative comments, discrimination, and social judgment from relatives, neighbors, and even educational institutions. Despite these difficulties, I observed that many Filipino parents gradually developed deeper compassion,

patience, and unconditional love for their children. Through daily caregiving experiences, they learned to embrace their child's uniqueness and advocate for their needs.

I also recognized that raising a child with ADHD or autism required emotional, physical, and financial sacrifices from parents. Access to therapy, special education, medical consultations, and behavioral interventions often placed significant burdens on families, especially those with limited economic resources. In many cases, parents became emotionally exhausted while balancing work responsibilities, family obligations, and caregiving demands. Yet, despite these struggles, I noticed that many parents continued to demonstrate remarkable resilience and unwavering commitment toward their children.

As I further examined the realities faced by Filipino families, I realized that parental acceptance was not an instant process but rather a gradual emotional journey shaped by understanding, support systems, cultural beliefs, and lived experiences. I observed that Filipino values such as *pagmamahal sa pamilya* (love for family), *malasakit* (deep concern for others), and *bayanihan* (community support) played important roles in helping parents remain hopeful and committed in caring for their children. These realizations encouraged me to conduct this study to better understand how parents expressed love and acceptance toward their children with ADHD and autism within the Philippine context.

Through this study, I sought to examine and describe the lived experiences of Filipino parents regarding parental love and acceptance toward children with ADHD and autism. I believed that understanding their perspectives could contribute to improving support systems, awareness programs, and inclusive practices for families and children with developmental conditions.

### Significance of the Study

I considered this study significant because it explored the emotional realities, struggles, and resilience of Filipino parents raising children with ADHD and autism. Through this inquiry, I aimed to provide a deeper understanding of how parental love and acceptance developed despite challenges associated with caregiving, social stigma, financial difficulties, and emotional stress.

I believed that parents of children with ADHD and autism would benefit from this study because it could validate their experiences and encourage emotional support, self-understanding, and acceptance. I also saw teachers, guidance counselors, and special education professionals as beneficiaries because the findings could help them better understand the emotional needs of families and strengthen collaboration with parents.

Furthermore, I anticipated that healthcare providers, mental health professionals, and policymakers could gain meaningful insights regarding the importance of accessible counseling services, family-centered interventions, and awareness programs for developmental conditions. In my view, strengthening support for parents also contributed to the emotional well-being and holistic development of children with ADHD and autism.

### Statement of the Problem

In this study, I explored parental love and acceptance among Filipino parents having children with ADHD and autism. Specifically, I sought answers to the following questions:

1. How do parents describe their experiences of love and acceptance toward their children with ADHD and autism?
2. What emotional challenges do parents encounter in raising children with ADHD and autism?
3. How do Filipino cultural values and family support influence parental acceptance?
4. How do parents cope with social stigma, public judgment, and caregiving responsibilities?

### Assumptions of the Study

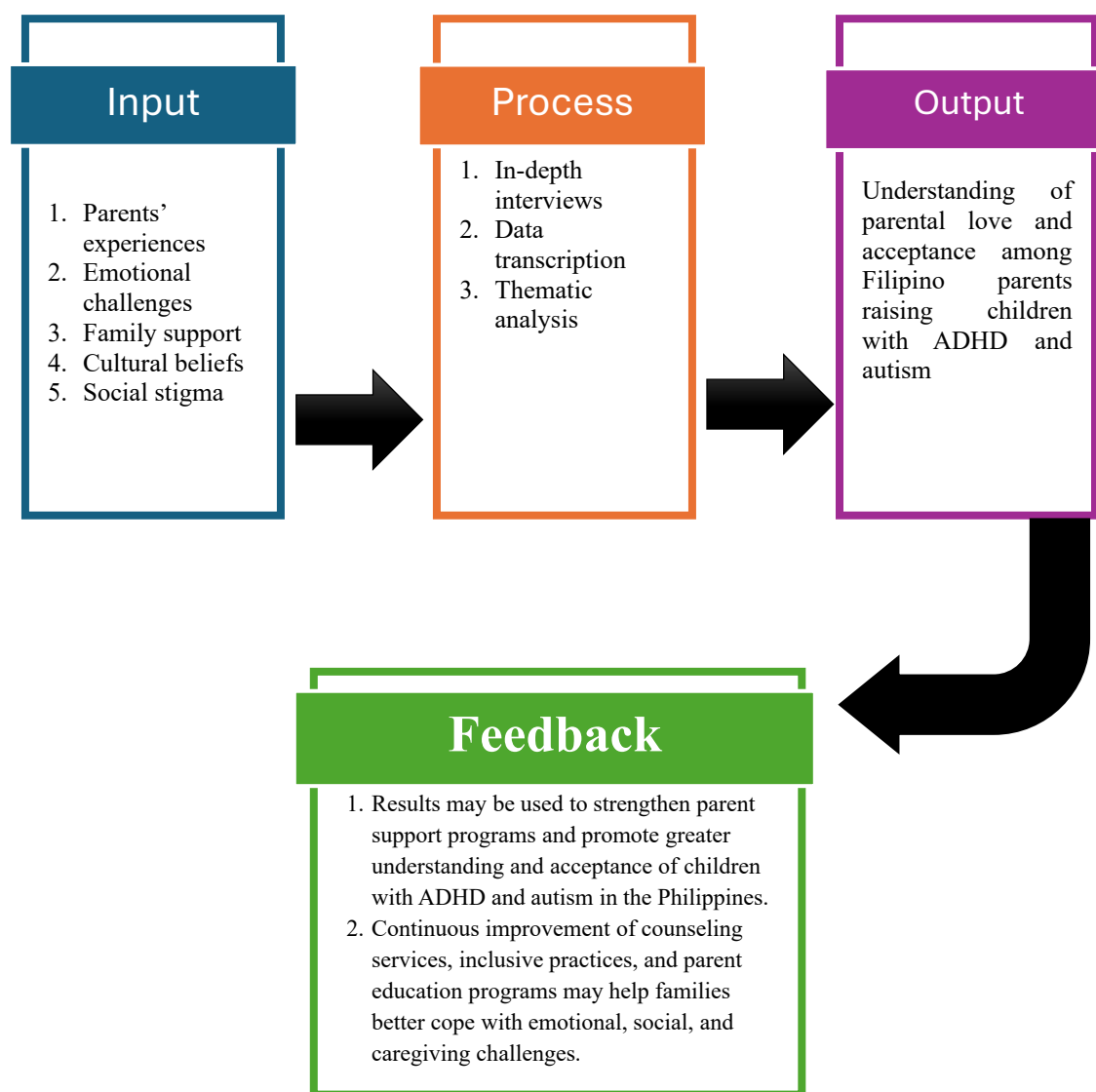
It is assumed that parents' experiences of love and acceptance toward children with ADHD and autism are shaped by their emotional experiences, family relationships, cultural beliefs, and social interactions. Furthermore, it is assumed that acceptance develops gradually as parents gain understanding, emotional adjustment, and support from family and community.

### Theoretical Lens

To understand the experiences of Filipino parents raising children with ADHD and autism, I employed Family Acceptance Theory as the guiding theoretical framework of this study. This theory emphasizes that parental acceptance, emotional support, and family

relationships significantly influence the well-being, self-esteem, and emotional development of children. The theory further explains that acceptance develops through emotional adjustment, understanding, empathy, and supportive family dynamics.

### Conceptual Paradigm



**Figure 1: Paradigm of the Study**

### METHODOLOGY

In this study, I employed a qualitative descriptive research design. This design enabled me to gather rich and detailed descriptions of parents' experiences regarding love, acceptance, and caregiving for children with ADHD and autism. Qualitative

descriptive research is appropriate for studies that aim to explore and describe human experiences within their natural settings using participants' own words.

### Locale of the Study

This study was conducted in the Philippines, in the school: 131012 where parents of children diagnosed with ADHD and autism were accessible for participation. The locale was chosen to provide contextual understanding of the lived experiences of Filipino families raising children with developmental conditions.

### Sample and Sampling Technique

This study consisted of eight (8) Filipino parents who have children diagnosed with ADHD or Autism Spectrum Disorder. I utilized purposive sampling to intentionally select participants who possessed direct experiences relevant to the study. This approach enabled me to gather meaningful and information-rich descriptions concerning parental love and acceptance.

### Data Gathering Technique

In this study, I used in-depth interviews to gather data. This method allowed participants to openly express their emotions, experiences, struggles, and realizations regarding raising children with ADHD and autism.

Prior to data collection, I made sure to have a letter of permit to the school principal to conduct the study since the interviews will be done inside the school, participants were informed about the purpose of the study, confidentiality measures, and their voluntary participation. Open-ended interview questions guided the conversations, enabling parents to narrate their personal journeys of acceptance, caregiving, and emotional adjustment. With their consent, interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy.

### Data Analysis Technique

This study employed thematic analysis to organize and interpret the gathered data. Through repeated reading of interview transcripts, I identified recurring patterns, meanings, and themes related to parental love, acceptance, emotional struggles, and coping mechanisms. Thematic analysis allowed me to systematically interpret participants' experiences and generate meaningful findings grounded in their narratives.

### Trustworthiness of the Study

To ensure ethical integrity, I secured informed consent from all participants before conducting interviews. Participants were informed about confidentiality, anonymity, and their right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequences. Pseudonyms were used to protect participants' identities, and all gathered data were securely stored.

To establish trustworthiness, I focused on credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was strengthened through member checking, where participants reviewed and confirmed the accuracy of their statements. Transferability was supported through detailed descriptions of participants and contexts. Dependability and confirmability were maintained through careful documentation and reflective journaling throughout the research process.

## RESULTS

### Parental Love and Acceptance Toward Children with ADHD and Autism

Parents described their love for their children as unconditional despite emotional, behavioral, and social challenges. One parent shared:

*"At first, budlay kaayo dawaton kay daghan kog questions sa akong kaugalingon. Pero habang nagkadugay, nakita nako nga kinahanglan sa akong anak ang akong love ug pagsabot labaw sa tanan. (At first, it was very difficult to accept because I had many questions within myself. But eventually, I realized that my child needed my love and understanding more than anything else.)"*

Another participant said:

*"My child taught me patience, understanding, and unconditional love. Even if there are difficult days, I continue to fight for my child because I know he deserves acceptance."*

From these accounts, I realized that parental love became stronger as parents gradually understood their children's conditions and embraced their uniqueness.

### **Emotional Challenges Experienced by Parents**

Participants described feelings of fear, denial, sadness, and emotional exhaustion after learning about their child's diagnosis. One participant stated:

*"There were moments when I cried secretly because I worried about my child's future and how society would treat him."*

Another parent mentioned:

*"kung kis ah makapoy gyud emotionally ug physically. Naa pay mga tao nga dili kasabot kag kaintindi sa behavior sa akon nga bata. (Sometimes it becomes emotionally and physically exhausting. There are people who do not understand my child's behavior.)"*

I observed that emotional struggles were often intensified by social misunderstanding and public judgment toward children with developmental conditions.

### **Influence of Filipino Values and Family Support**

Parents emphasized the importance of family support, faith in God, and Filipino cultural values in helping them accept and care for their children. One participant shared:

*"Our family became closer because we learned to help one another. Through prayer and support from relatives, mas nakaya namon ang challenges. (We were better able to handle the challenges.)"*

Another participant explained:

*"As parents, we believe that every child is a blessing from God regardless of their condition."*

These accounts revealed that Filipino family values and spirituality strengthened parents' resilience and emotional acceptance.

### **Coping with Social Stigma and Public Judgment**

Participants narrated experiences of discrimination, insensitive comments, and misunderstanding from society. One parent recalled:

*"Some people thought my child was simply naughty or undisciplined. They did not understand autism."*

Despite these experiences, parents became stronger advocates for their children. One participant stated:

*"Instead of feeling ashamed, I learned to educate others and stand proudly beside my child."*

From these conversations, I realized that parental acceptance also empowered parents to challenge stigma and advocate for inclusivity and understanding.

### **Summary of the Findings**

1. Parents viewed love and acceptance as unconditional commitments grounded in compassion, patience, and understanding.

2. Parents experienced emotional struggles such as fear, denial, sadness, exhaustion, and anxiety regarding their children's future.
3. Filipino cultural values, spirituality, and family support significantly strengthened parental resilience and acceptance.
4. Despite experiencing stigma and social judgment, parents became more empowered advocates for their children.

## DISCUSSION

### Parental Love and Acceptance

My findings revealed that Filipino parents gradually developed unconditional love and acceptance toward their children with ADHD and autism despite emotional, social, and caregiving challenges. These findings align with Gray (2021) and Woodgate et al. (2020), who emphasized that parental acceptance plays a significant role in strengthening children's emotional security, self-worth, and social development. Likewise, the participants' expressions of unconditional love and commitment reflected the assertions of Rogers (2022), who explained that acceptance within the family fosters resilience and emotional growth among children with developmental conditions. However, these findings contrast with the study of Mak and Kwok (2021), which suggested that some parents continue to experience prolonged denial and emotional detachment due to social pressure, limited awareness, and difficulty adjusting to their child's diagnosis.

### Emotional Challenges of Parents

The study showed that parents experienced emotional stress, fear, anxiety, sadness, and exhaustion while caring for children with ADHD and autism. These assertions support the findings of Hayes and Watson (2020) and Bonis (2021), who revealed that parents of children with developmental disorders commonly experience psychological distress due to caregiving demands, uncertainty about the future, and societal misunderstanding. Similarly, the emotional burden described by participants reflects the claims of Zablotzky et al. (2022), emphasizing that parents often struggle emotionally while balancing financial responsibilities, caregiving tasks, and family obligations. On the other hand, the findings oppose the study of Singh et al. (2021), which argued that some families quickly adapt to caregiving roles when strong institutional support systems and accessible mental health services are present.

### Influence of Filipino Values

The findings also demonstrated that Filipino cultural values, spirituality, and strong family relationships strengthened parents' resilience, hope, and emotional acceptance. These findings affirm the assertions of Jocson and McLoyd (2020) and Nadal (2021), who highlighted that Filipino family-centered values such as *pagmamahal sa pamilya*, *malasakit*, and close kinship relationships contribute to emotional strength and perseverance during family hardships. Furthermore, the participants' reliance on faith and spirituality supports the perspectives of Del Castillo et al. (2022), emphasizing that religious beliefs and spiritual practices help Filipino families cope with stress and uncertainty. However, these findings contradict the study of Reed and Osborne (2020), which suggested that excessive dependence on traditional beliefs and family expectations may sometimes delay professional intervention and acceptance of developmental conditions.

### Coping with Social Stigma

Participants' narratives revealed that misunderstanding, discrimination, and public judgment remained common experiences among families raising children with ADHD and autism. These findings support the studies of Turnock et al. (2022) and Kinnear et al. (2021), who found that social stigma toward developmental disorders often contributes to parental stress, social isolation, and emotional fatigue. Likewise, the participants' experiences align with the assertions of Divan et al. (2021), emphasizing that parents frequently become advocates for awareness and inclusion as they learn to navigate social misunderstanding and discrimination. In contrast, these findings differ from the study of Obeid and Daou (2020), which suggested that increasing public awareness campaigns and inclusive educational initiatives have significantly reduced stigma and improved societal acceptance of children with developmental disorders in some communities.

### Implications for Practice

Based on the findings, schools, healthcare institutions, and community organizations may strengthen programs that support parents of children with ADHD and autism. Counseling services, parent support groups, awareness seminars, and inclusive educational practices may help families navigate emotional and social challenges more effectively.



Teachers and healthcare professionals may also promote greater understanding and empathy toward children with developmental conditions and their families. Furthermore, policymakers may strengthen access to affordable therapy services, inclusive education, and mental health programs for parents and children.

### Future Directions

Future studies may explore the experiences of fathers, siblings, and extended family members of children with ADHD and autism. Researchers may also conduct quantitative studies examining the relationship between parental acceptance, stress levels, and child development outcomes among Filipino families.

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