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A QUALITATIVE INQUIRY ON THE LIFE MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES OF PARENTS WITH EXCEPTIONAL CHILDREN

***Rosemarie Mayanne Q. Manalo**

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***Corresponding Author: Rosemarie Mayanne Q. Manalo**

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ABSTRACT

Parents play an important role in the life of their children. It is believed that a child's first school is their home and that their first teachers are their parents. However, becoming the best parent does not happen overnight and such life management can be extra challenging especially for parents of exceptional children. This study was done to describe the experiences, describe the life management strategies of parents with exceptional children and develop a short course program to enhance the lives of parents with exceptional children. The research utilized purposive sampling and was participated by seven participants based on the following criteria: participant must be a working parent, a bonafide resident of Batangas province and have atleast one child diagnosed with any type of disability. Also, the exceptional child must be enrolled in class attending interventions or therapies. Further, the study used the descriptive phenomenological research design. Findings revealed that the experiences of parents with exceptional needs were being filled with negative emotions, needing personal adjustments, negative social response, constant worrying, emotional dysregulation, celebrating every milestone, embracing exceptionality, supporting child, providing continuous nurturance and allowing child to live normally. Also, their life management strategies were practical preparation, support system, religious coping and positive outlook.

KEYWORDS: Exceptional Child, Experiences of Parents With Exceptional Children, Life Management Strategies of Parents With Exceptional Children.

INTRODUCTION

Parents play an important role in the life of their children. However, becoming the best parent does not happen overnight. Parents go through extra lengths to prepare for the coming of their

children but, no matter how one prepared so much, after childbirth, the truth comes that no one is really fully prepared for it.

All the more is true if the child turns out to have exceptionalities. Their experiences may range from challenges in accepting the situation, to processing their emotions, to teaching routines and different skills, to finding ways on how they can better help them, to protecting them from all the harshness and judgment of others, to being a mother to other children and being a woman who also has many other roles and responsibilities. They might need the assistance and help of caregivers and other family members. Some parents choose to give an early responsibility to the other child so that they will be the one to look after their exceptional sibling. Also, they are looking for a suitable school or therapy that may provide the necessary interventions for their child.

These glaring realities, along with all the challenges it entails make parenting an exceptional child unique as it requires extra love, commitment, energy and time for them to be able to totally cope up, learn and understand the exceptionalities of their children. As such, it is no wonder if life management can be extra challenging for them.

According to recent estimates in the United States, one in every six children aged three to seventeen years has one or more developmental impairments. Developmental impairments are a collection of conditions caused by a physical, learning, language, or behavioral impairment. These problems emerge during the developmental era, have an impact on daily functioning, and typically last a person's entire life (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2022).

The Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), supported by the Australian Government, have released the results of the Global Cost of Parenting Children with Disabilities Study. The Philippine survey is the first of its kind in the world. Attempts have been made in this country to find out how much it costs families to raise a child with a disability. The study found that additional costs were 40-80% higher for households with children with disabilities than for households with children without disabilities, depending on the degree of disability. The additional cost of including children with disabilities in the poverty rate or poverty rate means that the poverty rate for children with disabilities is likely to be 50% higher than for other children. In addition to the high cost of raising a child with a disability, there are also systemic problems,

such as inadequate services for children, resulting in children not being enrolled in school, neglecting treatment and counseling, lacking resources, and hindering their development and participation severely restricted (DWSD, 2022).

While parents only want what is best for their children, some parents may experience denial or trauma upon learning that their child is different. There may be times that they will not seek for professional help or attend interventions because they do not believe that something is different from their child. Aside from the struggles of having an exceptional child, parents may also encounter different experiences as to having an exceptional children. While there might be people who has a broad understanding with regards to the differences of the exceptional child, some may still experience discrimination towards these children.

It is widely acknowledged that parents have a significant impact on their children's intellectual and social/emotional development. The nature of the stigma that may be attached to the label of giftedness is one important distinction between parents of children who have been diagnosed as gifted and parents of children with other exceptionalities. Parenting an exceptional child requires commitment, energy and time for them to be able to totally cope up, learn and understand the exceptionalities of their children. Following routines and teaching another skill are only some of the things parents need to learn and understand for them to be able to help their child.

As an advocate of child psychology and children with exceptional needs, the researcher felt the need to conduct the study to help the parents to continue with their lives despite the fact that they have exceptional children. The researcher herself, as a parent recognizes the efforts, hard works and struggles to become a good one in handling their child, so as to the efforts of the parents with exceptional needs. Based on her experience as a former special education teacher, she was also able to witness the struggles and admire the perseverance of the parents of her former students.

This study is perceived to provide significant insights to the parents with exceptional children, to the schools offering special education services, to the local government, to the mental health professionals and to the future researchers. To the parents of the children with exceptional needs, this study will help them understand the exceptionality of their child more and also find ways on how to continue despite the situation of their child and also, from the possible responses of the participants in the study, their life management strategies may help

and uplift other parents that also has an exceptional child; to the schools offering special education services, this study may be a good source of data as to what the parents of exceptional children experience and how they survive their daily life; to the local government, this study may be a rich source of primary data on the list of parents with exceptional children within their area so that they may be able to help address the needs of the child and the parents. To the mental health professionals, this study will help them develop and provide more interventions for better parent and child relationships; and to the future researchers, this study may serve as a basis for comparison towards the future investigations that might be conducted for further studies.

Conceptual Framework

The experiences and life management of parents having exceptional children both contributed as to how they survive and fulfill their responsibilities to their children and to themselves everyday.

Accordingly, parents of exceptional children experienced parental worries; a greater sense of self -worth; a major shift when it comes to priorities; a deeper appreciation of life; pride in the child's accomplishments; a growth in faith and spirituality; and deeper connections with others. Parents also experienced the feeling of inadequacy and unpreparedness especially when the pandemic striked on the thought about their child's education as a result of absence from school. They worried much on the possible effects of the lockdown the child's functioning, socialization, and behavior.

On the other hand, most of the literatures reviewed emphasized the following as the life management strategies of the parents of exceptional children: collaboration with parents and professionals; good social relationships; resilience; good parenting techniques; mindfulness exercises and forming parent support group.

Based on the literature reviews, the researcher was able to consolidate the most common experiences and life management strategies of parents with exceptional children that served as the conceptual framework of the present study. This was further illustrated in Figure 1 that also served as the research paradigm of the study.

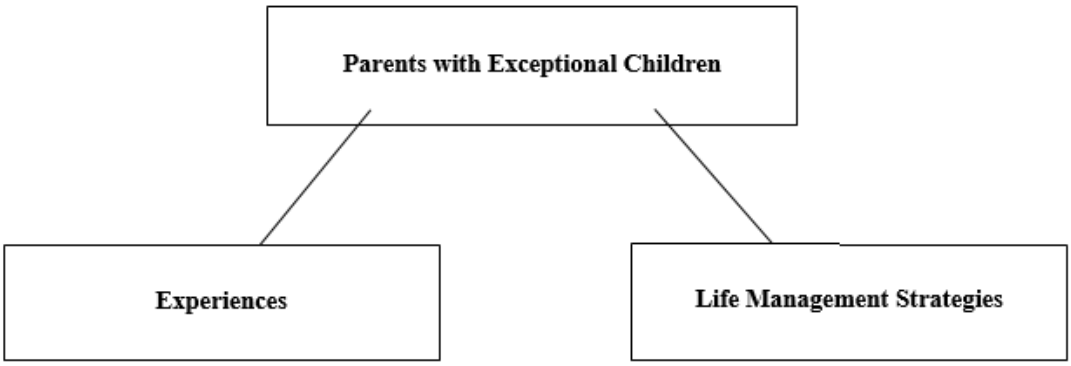

Figure 1.

Research Paradigm

The goal of the study was to recognize the experiences and explore the life management strategies of parents with exceptional children. Specifically, it aimed to answer the following:

1. How may the experiences of the parents with exceptional children be described?
2. How may the life management strategies of parents with exceptional children be described?
3. What life management program may be developed to enhance the lives of parents with exceptional children?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Participants

The researcher was able to gather seven (7) parents with exceptional children as the participants of the study. Participants were selected through purposive sampling and they were chosen based on the following criteria: the participant must be a working parent; a bonafide resident of Batangas province; must have one child diagnosed regardless of the type of disability and level of functioning; and that the exceptional child must be enrolled in class and attending interventions or therapies. The participants were identified through the help of the different schools offering Special Education Services in the province.

All the participants gathered were all working mothers, residing in Batangas province and had two children. Five of the exceptional children has Autism Spectrum Disorder, one has Intellectual Disability and the other has Cerebral Palsy.

Design

The researcher followed a qualitative method of research, specifically the descriptive phenomenological research design. Phenomenological research is an inquiry design derived

from philosophy and psychology in which the researcher describes persons' lived experiences with a phenomenon as described by participants. This narrative concludes with the substance of the experiences of various people who have all witnessed the occurrence (Creswell, 2014). This research method was used to explain how people view a particular phenomenon. In this case it helped describe the lives of parents with exceptional children and the way they manage their lives in order to help their children.

Materials

The study used a semi-structured interview that the researcher had prepared. The said instrument was validated by the licensed professionals (two psychologists) and subject expert (one licensed teacher whose focus is mainly on exceptional children) in the field before the actual conduct of the study. For the convenience of the participants, the research instrument was translated into Filipino. The participants were interviewed for about 30 to 45 minutes about their quality of life; experiences as parents of exceptional children at home, in school and in the community; and their life management strategies as parents with exceptional children.

Procedure

As part of the initial step in conducting the actual study, the researcher sent a letter to the respective schools catering special education services to ask help and permission to have the parents of their students as the participants of the study. Upon the approval of the school administrators, the researcher proceeded with the arrangement of schedules that will be the most convenient on the part of the participants. The participants had the option to choose if the interview will be done online or face to face. Four (4) of the participants were interviewed in the school's waiting area while their child was attending either class or therapy sessions. The remaining three (3) participants opted to be interviewed online via Facebook Messenger.

Before the conduct of the actual interview, the participants were given informed consent and the researcher discussed their rights as participants. They were also oriented with the structure and possible flow of the interview. All the participants were presented with the same set of interview questions that will be comprehensible and relevant to the participants being interviewed. The researcher also seek for the approval of the participants to record the whole interview for transcribing purposes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Experiences of the Parents with Exceptional Children

Results of the interview from the participants developed several themes and categories for each statement of the problem. For the experiences of the parents with exceptional children, ten themes were identified namely; (1) being filled with negative emotions; (2) needing personal adjustments; (3) negative social response; (4) constant worrying; (5) emotional dysregulation; (6) celebrating every milestone; (7) embracing exceptionality; (8) supporting child; (9) providing continuous nurturance; and (10) allowing child to live normally.

Theme 1. being filled with negative emotions

Based on the experiences of the parents with exceptional children, being filled with negative emotions came up as the first theme. This was constructed from the formulated meaning knowing children's condition and future brings feelings of sadness in varying degrees.

If a child is diagnosed with any type of exceptionality, the parents may experience different emotions especially on the part that they need to adjust for the situation. They may feel sad when they think about the dreams that they have for the child and for the family. They may also feel guilt towards the situation and may sometimes blame themselves while wondering why this happened to their child and their family.

Participants experienced a roller coaster ride of emotions upon learning that their child has an exceptionality which can be seen based on the responses that they have answered during the interview. These were supported by their statements below.

“It's a sad feeling because I know that he's not going to be a typical kid and the life that we are going to take will be different”. - Participant 1

“I already had an inkling regarding her possible condition due to my research. It was really a sad feeling. But I needed to be strong and ask the doctor what I needed to do to help my child”. - Participant 2

“I became totally sad because I know something is different about him”. - Participant 3

“I felt like I was hit by a big rock that I couldn't stand.. heavy on my chest”. - Participant 4

Upon knowing that the child has exceptionality, the parents experienced sadness thinking about how they would be able to deal with the situation. They also felt the need to be strong despite the condition of their child. Others expressed feelings of uncertainties and fears.

According to Participant 1, the moment that she was informed about the condition of her son she became sad and she immediately thought about the future since they will not be going to take a similar path with that of the normal kids. This situation was also the same with that of Participants 3 and 4 where they became sad and felt weak upon knowing that something is different with their sons.

At first, Participant 4 was not able to move upon hearing the update from their developmental pediatrician. For Participant 2, she already had a hint ever since about the condition of her daughter through her actions but she chose to confirm it through developmental assessment. Upon confirmation, she felt sad at first but when she thought about the future, she realized that she needs to be strong for her kids especially for her daughter who has a lifetime condition.

The most common emotions or negative feelings reported by parents with a disabled child are: anxiety, stress, worry, getting depressed, feeling helpless and frustrated. Aside from these, they also felt anger, grief and loss. Some may also experience chronic grief and trauma (Griffin, 2019).

Theme 2. needing personal adjustments

The second theme constructed from the responses of the participants is the needing personal adjustments. According to the formulated meaning from the significant statements, accepting child's condition requires adjustments and difficulties which can be seen from the responses of the participants below:

“The first thing that I thought was necessary is to accept because that is what was given to us”. - Participant 5

“At first, I was shocked and surprised. But being a parent you accept and you need to accept your child with all your heart”. - Participant 6

Parents may be shocked and surprised upon learning that their child has a problem most especially upon learning that their child will be having a lifetime condition. They may feel sad and devastated and of course have the feeling of fear at times for the future of their little one. This was what Participants 5 and 6 felt upon knowing that their child has exceptional needs.

Upon knowing that their child has a lifetime condition, their parents tried to accept it and move forward especially that they also have another child depending on them. Also as a parent, their love for their child prevailed and that was what pushed them to continue with their life. According to the participants, despite their child's condition, their care, love and understanding for their child will always be there. These were what Participants 5 and 6 felt when they learned that their child was exceptional.

Fear is one of the most common reactions of parents to their child's learning disability. Parents frequently experience fear when they discover their child's learning problem for the first time. For instance, they may be concerned about how they will get through this or the future of their child. They might even be concerned that this learning impediment would not be able to be overcome. Additionally, they could focus on the possibility that their child will constantly require all the help from them and that they worry about what would happen if they would leave them unattended (Logsdon, 2022).

Theme 3. negative social response

Negative social response was the third theme that the researcher was able to come up with based on the significant statements of the participants. From the formulated meaning based from the answer of Participant 7, there was a difficulty in dealing with people who may not understand children's condition. This was evident from the response of the participant.

"When someone is already staring strangely towards my child, that is the time that we are already triggered". - Participant 7

As parents of exceptional children, it is normal for parents to be overprotective of their children especially in this cruel world. Their child may appear to be unprepared in dealing with these circumstances that is why they are the ones who are ready to defend and fight for their children.

This was what Participant 7 often encounters whenever she and other family members goes out with her daughter. During the interview, she mentioned that it was no big deal with her if they were just looking at her daughter. But whenever she felt the strange looks towards her child, that was the time when she feels triggered and ready to fight if something wrong was about to happen. There also came a time when she needed to explain her daughter's condition to everyone that they encounter.

Theme 4. constant worrying

As for the fourth theme, the researcher was able to generate constant worrying based on the formulated meaning that the future of the child as an adult is a major concern of the parents. This was evident from the significant statement of Participant 5 which was stated below:

"Since my child is a girl, it is more challenging especially because of her menstruation". - Participant 5

For Participant 5, she found it more challenging when her daughter had her first day of menstrual period experience. She was bothered on why her daughter was sobbing and did not want to say even a single word, only to find out that her first menstrual day period had arrived. She then repeatedly look over her child from time to time. She sees to it that she will always finds time to talk to her daughter to know what she needs and what she wants. She sees to it that even though her child was different, she will never feel alone especially during these days that she is experiencing puberty stage.

As parents, they worry about the future of their children. How the child's needs affect other areas of life can affect how parents feel. This can affect the amount of time that parents can spend on work, social life, or personal interests and hobbies. The diagnosis of the child can also change a parent's sense of identity especially if they connect with a disability-specific parent support group or advocate for the child's needs. The level of support a parent receives from others, such as partner, family, and friends, can also affect how they feel. There is no "right" way to feel, all emotions are valid. Controlling emotions is part of handling the diagnosis and moving forward in life for them, their child, and their family (Raising Children Network, 2021).

Theme 5. emotional dysregulation

The researcher was able to come up with emotional dysregulation as the fifth theme and experiencing challenges due to the different needs of the child and managing personal needs and emotions was the constructed formulated meaning based from the response of the participant.

"How to balance being calm and being firm is really challenging since you need to correct his behavior and properly handle situations and unusual behaviors." - Participant 6

"His meltdowns are the most challenging to deal with. But slowly, I have learned how to deal with it." - Participant 7

Aside from experiencing the challenges of properly handling the situations, they also experienced meltdowns and they learned on how to deal with its challenges. For Participant 6, she was able to learn how to deal with her son's behavior. She admitted that it was really challenging at first but eventually she was able to correct and properly handle the situations of her child.

Similar with Participant 7, she admitted that it was really hard for her to deal with the meltdowns of her son but eventually she was able to address it slowly and surely. Also, the participants were able to get used to the routines and tantrums of their children making it easier for them to deal with it in their everyday lives.

Being a parent means learning how to deal with your offspring accordingly depending on their attitudes and temper. This also goes to every child regardless of their conditions.

Theme 6. celebrating every milestones

Another theme that the researcher was able to generate from the responses of the participants is celebrating every milestone. The first persons to appreciate the hardships of their children were, of course, their parents. They are also the first persons to understand the needs of their child. Children are more likely to believe in themselves and the future when their parents are encouraging, optimistic and also, always there to celebrate every milestone with them. Participant 1 said:

"I am happy to see him happy and see his developments even though they are just baby steps."

From the response of Participant 1, the formulated meaning that was constructed was being happy with the child's developments. Despite her child's exceptional needs, she and her family enjoyed every second of their child's improvement. She made sure that her child was always attending school and also, the needed therapy sessions for further improvement. As a family, they always attend their child's school program to show support for their child. She mentioned also that it was part of their agreement as parents to their children that they need to be present in every milestones of each of their child.

One of the parent's roles in the development of a child with exceptional needs is to help them build self-confidence. Children dislike the idea of being different. It undermines their self-esteem and causes them to struggle more. This uncertainty will also influence how they connect with their classmates. It is only normal for everyone to have both skills and shortcomings. Encourage them to persevere by educating them not to give up. Set tiny daily goals, and by fulfilling them on a daily basis, they will increase their self-esteem and confidence (Behavioral Health Works, Inc., 2020).

Theme 7. embracing exceptionality

The seventh theme created from the response of the participant was embracing exceptionality. Parents play an important role in the life of their children. A child needs a family, a home and a child deserves to be cared for and loved. A child needs their parents to guide and support them in their way to achieve their dreams and goals in life. Parents go through extra lengths to prepare for the coming of their children because of course, becoming the best parent does not happen overnight but being optimistic may change our point of view in life especially for the parents with exceptional children.

Through creating a positive perspective in life, the parents of the exceptional children were able to experience seeing their child as a blessing. This was evident with the response that Participant 5 mentioned during the interview.

"Learning from my child and treating him as a beautiful and important blessing." - Participant 5

From the response of the participant, the formulated meaning constructed by the researcher was receiving a blessing. Aside from celebrating every milestones of their child, they also treat their child as a received blessing from above similar to their other children. They look after each child fairly. According to Participant 5, they always discuss any issues as a family. She talks to her youngest about her brother's condition. She always explains everything to both of them. During the interview she mentioned that she and her husband always ask her youngest to be patient with her brother always. Though his eldest has a lifetime condition, she always had conversations with him to listen too to his sister and that they should love each other always.

Building a positive framework for your thoughts is about investing in yourself and your future, not being bubbly and excessively cheerful. It's okay to feel low or think pessimistically from time to time, but responding with optimism, resilience, and appreciation can benefit you far more in the long run (Ackerman, 2023).

Theme 8. supporting child

Supporting child is the eighth theme formulated based on the responses of the participant. Associated with parenthood is supporting your child until he reaches old. Children's self-efficacy and propensity to engage in prosocial, healthful activities rise when positive behaviors are acknowledged.

From the response of the participant, the formulated meaning constructed was wanting a child to immediately get the help needed. This was evident on the statement below:

“I had my child checked by doctors and had him undergo therapy and attend school.” - Participant 3

Added to this, Participant 3 mentioned that they will always give the best for their children. As parents, they made sure that their son receives the necessary interventions for him to become better and okay. Ever since they received the diagnosis of their child, they never failed to follow the advice of the developmental pediatrician. She also shared that they started having occupational therapy on a daily basis before but now, it was reduced at three (3) times.

The findings of a study conducted by Bariroh (2018) revealed that parental participation has a significant impact on children's motivation. The study also recommended that parents should assist, accompany, and guide their children more intensively, particularly children with special needs, in order to improve their motivation and academic progress. It is also suggested that instructors and schools should foster more fruitful collaboration across schools in order to facilitate their requirements and potentials.

Theme 9. providing continuous nurturance

As for the ninth theme, the researcher was able to formulate continuous nurturance based on the responses of the participants in the study. Providing continuous nurturance is necessary to children most especially to exceptional children since they need interventions and therapies as part of their everyday living.

Children with special needs are much like other kids, with the exception that they can require additional accommodations and support because of their physical, emotional, or learning issues. They may require treatments, therapies, social skills training, and other academic support that other children typically do not (The Aditya Birla Integrated School, 2023).

“The pandemic hampered the therapy. The schools also closed so I needed to immediately look for a tutor so as not to put into waste all that we have started specially the skills that were already developed and the money that were already spent. I don't want him to get stuck with his developments.” - Participant 2

“I give him my full attention and really follow our doctors, teachers and therapists' advice. For as long as we can, we will endure everything just to make sure that our child will be put in a good place.” - Participant 3

“There are times that I become tired already but as a parent, as long as you can, do everything for them because that is our obligation with or without having a child with special needs. It is only through us that they can get the love that they need.” - Participant 4

“When they were just little kids, there were times that you just can't really understand them. So you need to give your support, understanding and lots of patience. And eventually, they become less challenging to handle”. - Participant 5

“It is giving unending patience and having wide understanding not only with your child but with others as well”. - Participant 6

Based on the responses of the participants, the researcher was able to formulate the following meanings from their significant statements: never getting tired of caring; wanting a child to immediately get the help needed; giving full attention, patience, following advice of professionals and enduring everything; and not giving up.

For Participant 2 and 3, they said that they did everything to help their child’s development. Though the pandemic made the therapy centers closed, Participant 2 made sure that she was able to find a tutor for her child. As for Participant 3, she made sure to always follow the advice from the doctors, teachers and therapists. She added that she also made sure to always give her full attention to her child because she believed that as parents, we will endure everything just to make sure that our child will be better.

According to Participants 4, 5 and 6, there may be times that they felt tired but of course as a parent, they were always ready to give the love that they need to give for their child. Also,

they added that a lot of understanding and uneding patience are their ingredients for them to be able to handle their child with exceptionalities.

According to the parents if there is one thing that they learned upon having a child with exceptional needs, it was to love and understand them even more because eventually you will see the fruit of your labor through their accomplishments, developments and improvements.

The involvement of parents and legal guardians in the special education decision-making process is crucial. The physical, social, developmental, and family histories of a kid are better known to parents and guardians. They are the only adults who have been actively involved in the educational process and will continue to do so throughout the child's academic career. This continuity is quite beneficial. Although parents may not be educators themselves, they nonetheless add to the process their years of expertise in various careers and areas of life, as well as their own experience with their own child (Logsdon, 2022).

Theme 10. allowing child to live normally

Associated with parenthood are their experiences of doing things and being the best companion of their child. Based on the responses of the participants, the last theme formulated was allowing the child to live normally.

Despite the exceptionalities of their children, the participants still managed to be the best companion for their child. From the response of Participant 1, it can be interpreted that she is always being the best buddy to her child. This was evident from the statement below:

“We are really buddies since it is only with me that he is comfortable saying what he wants”. - Participant 1

Also, they were also getting used to the established routine that they have with their child. They also see to it that they are teaching appropriate things to do in situations. These were evident from the statements of Participant 2 and 3 below:

“It is really very challenging at first since he is very playful and you can easily understand what he is saying”. - Participant 2

“I taught him how to say sorry every time he would hurt someone or everytime he would do inappropriate things". - Participant 3

Also the parents were exposing the child with the environment and teaching safety skills. They let them experience riding on public transportations like buses, jeepneys and tricycles. They also let them experience the things that other normal children do like going to the church, in the market or at the park. They also teach them life and safety skills that can be applied in their activities in daily living. These can be supported with the statements below:

"I let her be exposed in the community and be aware of the things going around her so that she will also learn. I also train her safety skills to protect her. I am just here to support her since the situation is already here". - Participant 4
"You need to teach them how they can live and survive since it is a lifetime condition". - Participant 5

This may be associated with the study of Toscabo & Ferreira (2017) which indicated the value of physical activity and exercise, especially fundamental coordination and strength training, as therapeutic therapies for kids with autism spectrum disorder as their findings.

According to the study of Park, S. et al. (2018), parents of gifted students with disabilities play an important role in their child's home and educational environment. They were able to identify the following themes: parents' recognition of and reaction to twice-exceptionality, challenges and efforts in supporting their children, and perception of their sociocultural contexts in relation to parenting practices. Additionally, a parent's sociocultural background, including race and ethnicity, can influence parenting practices. Parents developed strong parenting styles and tenacity while grappling with the complex characteristics of exceptional children in multi-layered cultural contexts.

Life Management Strategies of Parents with Exceptional Children

For the life management strategies of parents with exceptional children, four (4) themes were identified: (1) practical preparation, (2) support system, (3) religious coping and (4) positive outlook.

Theme 1. practical preparation

Based on the life management strategies of the parents with exceptional children, practical preparation was the first theme to appear. Participants expressed the need to be emotionally prepared to handle the challenges and tantrums of their exceptional children. Participants 2, 3 and 4 emphasized the importance of having emotional, physical, mental and financial

preparedness; having the ability to adjust in any type of situation and establishing routine. These formulated meanings were evident based from the significant statements of the participants below:

“We have to be ready emotionally, physically, mentally and financially.”
“If we leave the house, I make sure that I prepare what he needs and what he likes.”
“He is used to that when he takes a shower in the morning, he will put on his clothes.”

As parents of exceptional children, the participants were able to learn preparations and strategies for their children. They made sure that before they leave the house, everything is prepared. They follow a certain routines that is convenient to both the child and the parent. They also prepare the other child to assist them in case tantrums for their exceptional child will occur.

Problem behaviors are less common in children who have stable routines. This was also part of what the participants learned while they are spending time with their child. As time goes along, they were getting used to the routines with their child. They know when and why their child will throw tantrums. They also learned how to control theirs and their child’s temper.

Predictability has been shown to reduce the occurrence of these harmful behaviors. Problem behaviors can be used by children with disabilities to express their dissatisfaction or to tell their parents what they want. Knowing when certain activities occur can help to reduce some of these habits. Home habits are obviously different right now, and having a plan can help a youngster realize that they can still participate in some of the same activities they used to, only in a different way. Schedules and routines are instruments for communicating information about what to expect and when it will occur (Demchak & Sutter, 2023).

An organized and consistent home environment helps children, even those with disabilities, autism, or other special needs, feel comfortable and secure. Routines can be especially beneficial when things are stressful or when children are going through challenging stages or experiences. Also, if your disabled child needs to take medication or undergo other medical procedures on a regular basis, creating a schedule will help everyone remember. In addition, family routines might help your youngster learn new abilities. For example, if your child's goal is to improve communication skills and take turns, you may remind them several times throughout dinner that it's their turn to discuss what happened at kindergarten. If your child

has complicated requirements, you may be required to provide the majority of their routine care. However, your youngster will continue to appreciate and benefit from being a part of your everyday routine (Raising Children Network, 2021).

Moreover, the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), supported by the Australian Government, have released the results of the Global Cost of Parenting Children with Disabilities Study. The Philippine survey is the first of its kind in the world. Attempts have been made in this country to find out how much it costs families to raise a child with a disability. The study found that additional costs were 40-80% higher for households with children with disabilities than for households with children without disabilities, depending on the degree of disability. The additional cost of including children with disabilities in the poverty rate or poverty rate means that the poverty rate for children with disabilities is likely to be 50% higher than for other children. In addition to the high cost of raising a child with a disability, there are also systemic problems, such as inadequate services for children, resulting in children not being enrolled in school, neglecting treatment and counseling, lacking resources, and hindering their development and participation severely restricted (DWSD, 2022).

Theme 2. support system

Based on the responses of the participants, the second theme formulated to be the life management strategies of parents with exceptional children is a support system.

When you are the parent or guardian of a kid with a disability, many facets of parenting are emphasized. Playdates can develop into difficult projects needing patience, support, a lot of time, and diplomacy. Visits to the doctor are costly, time-consuming, and frequently stressful. Shopping trips can be overwhelming on a sensory and emotional level for you and your kids. Parents need to have more time, reserved energy, money, friendships, emotional outlet, physical activity, resources and guidance (Rudy, 2022).

Participant 2 said that she actively seeks professional help, therapies, and support systems to assist their exceptional children. Part of their life management strategy as a parent of children with exceptional needs was to open in receiving therapy for their child. This can be proved by the statement of the participant below:

“I invested in his therapies to help him develop and improve.”

Participant 2 made sure to follow all the advice from their developmental pediatrician. During the interview, she also added that whatever equipment or materials that the therapist will suggest, they made sure to buy it and use it at home for their child.

Kids are empowered when their struggles are acknowledged and explained. They frequently recognize there is a problem, and by realizing why they struggle rather than feeling ashamed, they can feel better. A competent therapist can assist parents and kids in recognizing and utilizing a child's abilities (Capanna-Hodge, 2023).

Participant 5 and 7 also mentioned the importance of finding moments for themselves, even if limited, to recharge and maintain their well-being.

“Every weekend, even if my time is limited, I try to squeeze in some "me" time.” - Participant 5
“I welcome my friends at home for some chit chatting”. - Participant 7

Aside from the love that they always give to their children, they also make sure to take good care of themselves as well. Participant 5 an 7 agreed that for them to be able to provide everything for their family, their cup must always be full.

Raising a child with special needs is difficult for most parents. The study of Heiman, T. (2021) focused on the emotions of parents of children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, or learning disabilities. Results of the study revealed that parents in all groups were going through difficult times post-diagnosis and in everyday life. They described a lot of stress, fear and anger. Some parents described their relationship as unstable and full of conflicts and disagreements, while others took a more positive attitude and dealt with the challenges they faced. Many parents mentioned the emotional support and guidance they received through support groups and therapist visits.

Theme 3. religious coping

The researcher was able to generate religious coping as the life management strategies of the parents with exceptional children. The participants relied on their faith and belief in a higher power to provide strength and guidance throughout their journey. They also expressed a deep sense of love, dedication, and commitment to their exceptional children.

“I keep myself motivated by his improvements and keeping my faith in God.” - Participant 1

“prayers, help from my family and friends that you will get through it, all of us at home love this child very much.” - Participant 5

According to the participants, it is prayers that really work for them. It was also a part of their routine to bring their child to church and teach them how to pray. Aside from this, they emphasize the importance of support system which they believed that helped them a lot to surpass the challenges in their life as parents of exceptional children.

The findings from the study of Karaca, A., & Şener, D. K. (2019) revealed that mothers of children with developmental disabilities frequently turn to spirituality as a coping mechanism in Turkey. They were able to deal with the pressure of their new life by turning to their spirituality. Their feelings of love and dedication were strengthened as they started to regard their children as the ones who gave their lives meaning and purpose. The mothers' main worry was what would happen to their kids after their parents passed away.

Results from the study of Sheperd, et.al., (2018) showed that the degree to which parenting stress rose along with the severity of the child's autism spectrum disorder symptoms varied depending on whether a general or disorder-specific parenting stress measure was utilized. The study also underlined the negative effects of utilizing various conceptual frameworks to quantify parental stress and emphasizes the significance of identifying the coping mechanisms used by parents of children with developmental problems.

Theme 4. positive outlook

Based on the responses of the participants, the fourth theme that was formulated based on the answers of the participants is positive outlook. Because of their situation, they also came up with realizations of the things that they did not think they could do. From the interview, they highlighted their ability to adjust and adapt to different situations.

“The fact that i can keep up with all the activities and my two children”. - Participant 5

In connection with the previous theme formulated for SOP 1, through seeing their child as a blessing, they were able to create a positive perspective in life that made them perform things that they did not think about that they could do. This was what Participant 5 admires always in herself. During the interview, she mentioned that when she learned that her child has autism spectrum disorder, she really cried so much because she does not know how she, as a mother can accept and survive her child’s situation. But through embracing positive outlook

and being optimistic, she was able to survive this with of course, the help of her husband and other support system.

Being optimistic as a parent is believing that a good result is just around the corner and that your love and strength can overcome any obstacle. And as it turns out, actively choosing optimism can enhance your family's quality of life. Optimism can lead to better coping skills, a longer life, and improved connections (Narvaes, 2018).

Proposed Life Management Course Program

Based on the data gathered from the interview, it can be inferred that the experiences of the participants helped them to manage their lives despite having an exceptional child in the family. From the qualitative data, they were able to surpass the challenges in raising an exceptional child through their religious beliefs, support system and preparedness.

From on the data analysis, the researcher proposed a life management course program to help the parents of exceptional children when it comes to their life management. Furthermore, this course also aims to help the parents with exceptional children to find richness in their lives through rediscovering balance and joy. This course will be composed of modules that will help the parents identify and recognize the different life management strategies that will help them address their needs.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusions were drawn:

1. Participants had different experiences upon learning that their child has exceptional needs.
2. Participants had different life management strategies to survive on their daily.
3. Upon analysis of the data gathered, the researcher came up with a life management short course program for parents with exceptional needs children.

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