

# The Phenomenological Study on the Emotional Struggles of Parents Having A Child with Special Needs

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## Abstract

The very core of this study is to know the challenges and struggles of parents having a child with special needs and how to help them. This phenomenological study targets the problem in every household having difficulty with their exceptional child and has the solution to the challenges each parent experiences.

The researcher aims to understand the family's feelings and most profound thoughts about having a child with special needs through qualitative form of research in a way of interview, observation, and immersion in the schools intended to have the respondents.

Ten parents who have a child with special needs from Don Julian Rodriguez Sr. Elementary School and Davao City Special School were interviewed and allowed to be engaged in the said study. The researcher wanted to identify different struggles that they are facing every day, their coping mechanisms, and their insights that will be able to help other parents who suffer the emotional struggles of having a child with special needs.

With the data gathered, most parents have emotional struggles because they need an idea of how and where to start helping their children with special needs. The researcher recommended empowerment, training, and workshops for parents with a child with special needs and building connections with a community that advocates and highlights helping and educating parents on how to educate their child with special needs.

Keywords: phenomenological, exceptional, immersion, struggles, coping mechanisms, insights, empowerment, workshops, advocates, highlights, educating, Davao City, Philippines

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## INTRODUCTION

Parents did not plan to have children with disabilities; for years, across the globe had studied this phenomenon. According to studies, parents with differently-abled children went through more enormous challenges, and they experienced rough terrains in their situations (Tudy et al., 2017)

Taking care of children with special needs can affect parents not only in their psychological well-being but also their physical being (Khan et al., 2016). Emotional stability is a must for every individual when facing the struggles and challenges of having a child with special needs. People from different walks of life respond differently based on their upbringing and beliefs.

This phenomenological qualitative study aims to recognize, associate, and identify the varied emotional struggles and coping mechanisms of parents having a child with special needs.

Part of the study is to collect and gather data through observation, interview and immersion with the respondents from middle- and lower-class families, which is very common in public schools. It will recognize the similarities and differences between the responses of the family respondents.

One thing that interests the researcher is how mentoring or educating parents with a unique child can give the proper intervention and education to their child at home and how important consistency in the teaching methods lessen the parents' struggles.

### The Objective of the Study:

This phenomenological study aims to allow the researcher

1. To describe the lived experiences of parents having a child with special needs.
2. To identify the coping mechanism of parents having children with special needs.
3. To draw insights from the parents' experiences having children with special needs.

### Research Questions

This study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are the emotional struggles of a parent with special needs child?
  - 1.1 Share some of the parent's experiences or struggles having a child with special needs.
  - 1.2 Is there a time in the family that blaming game arises?
  - 1.3 To whom bloodline does the child get the genes that made him/her exceptional?
2. As a parent/guardian/grandparent, what are the ways or steps to educate your child with special needs?
  - 2.1 Do the emotional struggles lessen or heighten your pursuit of learning about educating your child with special needs?
  - 2.2 Are you thinking of alternative medications for your child with special needs?
3. How do you cope with the emotional struggles of having a child with special needs?
  - 3.1 Do you consider going to school or attending training and workshops or any empowerment to have ideas on handling children with special needs?
  - 3.2 What are the significant steps to take to help the child with special needs? Any steps, insights, or suggestions to help you and other parents with the same struggles?

### Theoretical Lens

Parental involvement is as the participation of parents in the educational process and experience of their children (Wilder, 2013).

Anchored on the study of Joyce Epstein's Framework of Six Types of Involvement describes six essential dimensions of youth, family, and community engagement and partnership in schools. It is among the most influential models in school, family, and community engagement and partnership. The framework highlights the parental involvement that focuses on Parenting, Communicating, Volunteering, Learning at Home, Decision Making, and Collaborating with the Community.

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## METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the research design, participants and sampling, the role of the researcher, ethical considerations, data collection, data analysis, and trustworthiness of the study.

### Research Design

The researchers determined that a phenomenological methodology is the best approach for this investigation based on Davidson (2000) and Jones (2001). Phenomenology emphasizes the importance of subjective experience and is the most appropriate method for understanding this phenomenon of parents having children with special needs. Streubert and Carpenter (1999, p. 56) state that topics "appropriate to phenomenological research method include those central to humans' life experiences." Contrary to the rationalist, phenomenologists think researchers cannot separate themselves from their assumptions and should not pretend otherwise (Hammersley, 2000).

Because the nature of the research lends itself to Giorgi's approach to the phenomenological analysis of accumulating both theme and structural understandings of experience or events, this study will use phenomenological methodologies proposed by Giorgi (1985). Giorgi's method of analysis, which consists of steps for reduction (reducing large quantities of data to more minor, essential elements) and structural description (describing key themes and arguments within the data), helped follow and examine the emotional struggles of parents of children with special needs. Similarly, as each participant told different stories of their experiences, the development of individual participant portraits, as one of the analytical steps suited to Giorgi's approach, is helpful in structural analysis, reduction, and theoretical model development. Giorgi's phenomenological approach facilitated analysis of the individual reports and descriptions of the experience to identify essential structural components and extract developmental and educational understandings not previously gleaned from studies of parents having children with special needs.

### Research Participants

Creswell (2013) advised that a phenomenological study conducted with a heterogeneous group should have a minimum of 3 to a maximum of 15 individuals. Respondents interviewed in this study. Ten participants from Davao City Special School and Don Julian Rodriguez Sr. Elementary School. Out of 10 parents, five (5) parents participated in the in-depth interview, and another five (5) parents in the focus group discussion shared their experiences On The Emotional Struggles Of Parents Having A Child With Special Needs.

We explained to them the objectives and methodology of this study for that to be guided in answering the interview guide question. The participants were identified through purposive sampling. Creswell (2007) defined purposive sampling

as selecting participants who meet specific criteria or experience the phenomenon under study. The researcher selected the participants who are parents having a child with special needs. Participants were selected by the researcher and were asked for voluntary participation. The criteria for selecting parents from different schools of Davao City Special School and Don Julian Rodriguez Sr. Elementary School were based on the following dimensions. The parents' participants were both male or female public elementary. Also, the parents' participants shared experiences from the beginning of the school year when their child enrolled. The participants were informed through personal contact with the interviewer. In qualitative research, the participants were informed of the said interview (Boyce & Neale, 2012), the time and place of the interview (Lochmiller & Lester, 2016), and the time that the participants suggested from their convenience (Hancock, 2013).

#### **Data Analysis**

After conducting and collecting data from parents who have emotional struggles having a child with special needs, the researcher found out that respondents have varied responses, different experiences, and unique coping mechanisms to give and supply the needs of their child with special needs. Parents struggle to handle their child's tantrums and have difficulty teaching them the basics of life. Most of them were interested in learning and training in handling children with special needs, so they also helped their families and others.

#### **Trustworthiness Of The Study:**

In this method, the researcher further discusses the study's validity and reliability. The researchers ensure that the study's findings are credible, transferable, dependable, and confirmable. To wit:

**Credibility:** One of the bases on that researchers can claim the study's trustworthiness is credibility. To assure the reader of this study that the data gathered are valid and reliable, I have gathered information through interviewing, observing the participants, and giving them a questionnaire to ensure that all the data gathered are appropriate and documented.

**Transferability:** Transferability is the natural inquirer's response to external validity in positivism (Lincoln & Guba, 1985); to claim the trustworthiness of the data is that it is transferrable not just in one context but to other similar circumstances. The researcher attached all collected data and thorough discussion/descriptions needed to support the study to address this technique.

**Dependability:** Dependability establishes the research studies' findings as consistent and repeatable (Patton, 2005). To ensure the study's dependability, the researcher wrote down all the critical points during interviews, took pictures during observation, and collected all the questionnaires to document all the details and have attached them so that the reader or the next researcher might gain some knowledge and ideas from it.

**Confirmability:** The researcher assures that the data gathered are checked, rechecked, and documented throughout the data collection and has given analysis to ensure that the results/ findings are not due to participant and researcher bias. The researcher also consulted an expert in qualitative research to share his wisdom on this matter.

#### **Ethical Consideration**

In having ethical consideration in research studies, Republic Act No. 10173 is the state's policy to protect the fundamental human right of privacy and communication while ensuring the free flow of information to promote innovation and growth.

Confidentiality of the study and the respondents' lives are the researchers' main concerns. Whatever documents gathered are safely kept with the person who is involved in helping parents who emotionally struggle in handling a child with special needs.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

This part presents the struggles of parents having a child with special needs, their experiences, and their coping mechanism. Based on the research done through an interview, observation, and community-school immersion to fully understand parents' struggles, particularly how to educate and handle their child with special needs.

#### **The Emotional Struggles**

Most of the interviewed parents expressed the depth of their emotions and thoughts on their struggles with having a child with special needs. Educating them is a challenge for most of them who need to go to work to sustain their family's needs.

Thinking about the future weakens most parents. Wandering and questioning what will be the future waiting for their child with special needs.

#### **The Coping Mechanism**

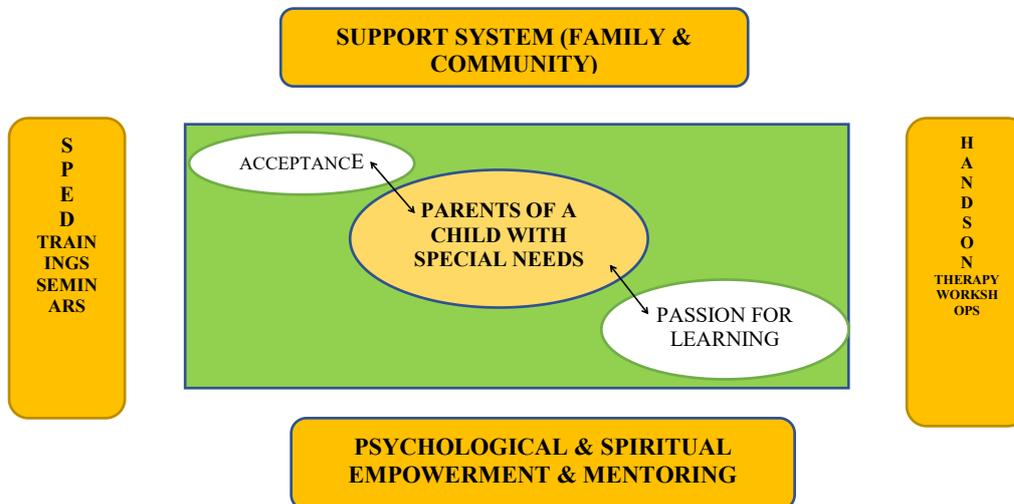
Some respondents do lots of reading, online research, training, and attending seminars on handling their child with special needs. Some of them make themselves busy to avoid thinking more about their family condition. Some of them find it hard to learn because they have more important things to attend to than learning how to educate their child with special needs.

#### **The Insights**

Acceptance is a significant factor in having a child with special needs. Some of the respondents find it hard to face

and deal with their situations, and some easily accept their situation and deal with it with positivity. The emotional struggles drive them to learn more and how to be of help not only to their family but to the Community as well.

## FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS



Parents of children with special needs often go through many stages when told their child has a disability. Some experienced shock, some were in denial, and some did not care. With the research questions given to the respondents, the researcher could understand and empathize with parents' different emotional struggles, their coping mechanisms, and their insights on how to go through such challenging experiences.

The figure shows that the primary goal of this study is to help and give aid to parents who have emotional struggles with having a child with special needs. Before the Support Systems, Therapy / Workshops, Training / Seminars, and Psychological and Spiritual empowerment and mentoring will effectively be experienced and applied, Acceptance and Passion for learning must be the first thing to do. Many studies show that positive parental attitude toward their child's disabilities plays a big part in coping with negative psychological feelings (Gupta, 2004).

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Having a child with special needs, parents may experience sadness and feelings of hopelessness. With the interview and observation done to the selected respondents, the researcher concluded that there is really a huge task in the field of special education in helping parents in educating and mentoring them in order to ally the burden that they are carrying everyday. If the child needs attention on their diverse needs, so as the parents needs help on how to effectively help their child with special needs.

As an integral unit, the family has to face different challenges determined by the social impact of the child's exceptionalities. Appropriately addressing the struggles and challenges faced daily by parents having a child with special needs will be a suitable intervention. Helping families develop a positive outlook would be the serving point of intervention. Connection with different advocates and associations will help them cope and overcome challenges. Currently, the city has organizations of professionals that consist of Physical therapists, Occupational therapists, Sped Teachers, and Psychologists who are willing and looking for a group of people to be empowered and mentored. It is a big help to connect and be mentored by these individuals who can lessen the struggles of handling a child with special needs.

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