

Behavioral Challenges of Parents to Children with Special Needs

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ABSTRACT

This study delved into the challenges of the parents in dealing the behaviors of their children diagnosed with special needs. Using the case study as its main design, 10 parent-informants were interviewed using an open ended questioning technique. Data were analyzed and treated using Yin's framework for qualitative data. Results of the findings revealed that among the challenges of the parents include handling situations when their children are experiencing tantrums, feeding, expenses in sending to school, providing instructional materials, discrimination, and bullying. Given this, it is thus important for parents to have foundational knowledge as regards handling their children during these challenging moments.

Keywords: Behavioral Challenges, Parental Concerns, Special Education

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I. INTRODUCTION

Parents of children with special needs are confronted with numerous and distinctive challenges regardless of what disability their children have. They often experience discrimination and struggles in their respective immediate society where they live. The acceptance of the people towards them has gaps considering that the children with special needs being associated as hyperactive, disturbing, dangerous, and trouble makers. Parents still feel this type of stereotyping in handling their children with special needs until now. Generally, they seek social understanding of their children with special needs through acceptance, tolerance, equal treatment, and access to various social services.

Arguably, stereotyping is wrong. Most conservative individuals, however, still find it odd. Those who believe these stigmas and are afraid of criticisms exhausted means of eradicating what they quote as "problem" by resorting to abortion, neglecting their responsibilities, and even abandoning their children in nursing homes or orphanages to keep themselves free from the insults of the critical public. These practices still happen in some Western countries like Canada.

The Epstein Model is usually referred to as the framework when explaining behaviors of children with special needs. The model summarizes six types of family involvement behaviors, namely (1) parenting, (2) communicating, (3) volunteering, (4) decision making, (5) learning at home, and (6) collaborating with the community.

Parental involvement refers to the children's housing, health, nutrition, clothing, and safety needs. True enough, as reflected in this model, the most influential advocates for the children are the parents themselves. The second type of involvement is on the communication dimension. It pertains

to the parents and the children's school need for open and constant communication to thrive and reach their optimum levels. Among these forms of communications include notes to the teachers, conferences with teachers and other school staff, attendance in school orientations and open houses, phone calls, and even regular newsletters. The third type is volunteering. This type demands the involvement of parents when they are in schools or classrooms. The research findings pointed out that positive parental involvement in schooling correlates to improved learners' improved academic achievement and socio-emotional development. Related studies also proved that students whose parents actively participate in their education perform better than students whose parents remain uninvolved. Finally, teacher-parent cooperation can strengthen a child's overall educational experience (Sanders *et al.*, 2019).

In the Philippines, dearth of studies exist as regards parental experiences relative to dealing the behavior of their children who require their undivided attention. With this contention it is thus imperative that an empirical study be conducted along this purpose. As such this present academic endeavor investigates the behavioral challenges of the parents to children with special needs.

II. THEORETICAL LENS OF THE STUDY

This academic endeavor draws its theoretical anchor on Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems and Bandura's Social Learning Theory. These theories epitomize knowledge and understanding of behavior and the social environment. The ecological systems theory, otherwise known as bioecological systems theory, is a brainchild of Bronfenbrenner. It describes complex "layers" of environment; each partaking affects a child's development. It emphasizes that a child's biology is its immediate environment. The interaction

between factors in the child's maturing biology, the close community, and the societal landscape directs his development. Changes or conflicts in any of the layers create a rippling effect throughout the other layers. Studying a child's development requires examining the child itself, his environment, and the child's interaction with the bigger environment (Guy-Evans, 2020). This theory serves as the basic theoretical framework for this study as family, school, and environment influence children's optimal development. The interaction of the social climate towards children with special needs is discriminating. Hence, they are stereotyped as vulnerable, harmful, problematic, and can contribute less to society. This theory, then, helps us understand the role of the microsystem in children's development.

Bandura's social learning theory, on the other hand, capitalizes on the value of observing and modeling the behaviors, attitudes, and emotional reactions of people surrounding the children. Bandura states that one learns best by examining models and observations and that human learning results from a continuous interplay of attention, retention, motor reproduction, and motivation. Additionally, Bandura posited that parents want their children with special needs to act and behave as normal individuals. In this study, Bandura's theory helps us understand that modeling, reward, and punishment may help children with special needs live everyday life as their responses and behavior are determined by their perceptions and experiences within the environment they live (Groenewald, 2021).

III. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Literature abound as regards support provided to children with special needs. Ahrbeck and Felder (2020), for example, reported that in Germany, its government recognizes the need to support children with special needs resulting in the full implementation of the country's inclusive education policy. Charran (2018), on the other hand, described the funding scheme of Trinidad and Tobago on its SpEd program with the end goal of coming up with a detailed report regarding the funded services of the country's SpEd program. However, the results of the findings revealed that services in SpEd are minimal. It signifies that children with special needs have to stay home because of the unavailability of these services in the communities. Consequently, parents have to pour out massive amounts of money to address their children's special needs.

Moreover, Shevlin and Banks (2021) examined Ireland's SpEd policy and compared it with its obligations under the United Nations Convention for People with Disabilities (UNCRPD) pact it entered. Results showed that the country's system for inclusive education necessitates overhauling, mainly so that even up to these days, there is no existing policy on implementing the program as children with special needs are still mainstreamed in general education. It implied then that the government's failure to make these services readily available is costly to the

families with children with special needs and, in turn, harms the country's economic growth.

IV. METHODOLOGY

Since the study is case specific, it therefore utilized the descriptive case study design. Creswell (2014) said that case studies are a design of inquiry found in many fields, especially evaluation, in which the researcher develops an in-depth analysis of a case, often a program, event, activity, process, or one or more individuals. Still as claimed by Creswell (2007), data for the nature of this study may come from observations, interviews, documents, and other relevant materials. It likewise requires either a holistic analysis of the entire case or an embedded analysis of a specific aspect of the case. Furthermore, Zainal (2007) claimed that an empirical inquest pinned on the principles of a case study as its method allows a researcher to scrutinize gathered data contextually. Basically, this method is confined to a small geographical setting and makes use of its small population as its respondents. It can be implied then, that, this method is best suited in investigating existing problem conducted in a comprehensive contextual analysis in a limited number of occurrences and their relationships (Yin, 1994).

In this study, 10 parents of children with special needs were purposively chosen as informants. They were interviewed and data generated from the interview were coded and thematically analyzed following Yin's framework.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Analyses of the data made yielded this theme Challenge Accepted. This theme is about the challenges of the parents in raising their children with special needs. Data point to the physical, mental, emotional and, psychomotor manifestations of their being special children, as they said. *"I just let him laugh and wait until he finishes laughing and start teaching or assisting his homework"* (p.7); *"When he feels bad, he is banging his head, nanbabambo [violent to others]."* (P-8); *"He is hyper and nagwawala (hysterical), nanunupra (spitting), nangigigil (shivering), whenever his wants are not given to him"* (p.10).

According to Walsh (2018), interacting with a child with special needs requires relationship building. These children must feel at ease and be comfortable first before they can reciprocate trust to others. Additionally, children with special needs often possess behavior that distracts others. However, once they are told and eventually learn things and practice these occasionally, they will retain all these in their memory and form part of their habit. The researcher further explained that they are also likely to experience problems on their involvement and activity limitations in executing these activities. Children with special needs behave differently, and these misbehaviors are observable. These include short retention span, attention deficit, sit down without talking, roam around every time, and even create noise and disturbance.

Apart from the misbehavior mentioned above, parents-informants also echoed that food choice is also among their concerns. The respondents said, *"He is choosy for what he would like to eat"* (p.6), *"In house, he doesn't want his things or food to be touched or borrowed (makuti hiya parti iya mga gamit/food) [he is meticulous about his personal belongings and food], if you do he would pinch, spank and shout"* (p.7); *"In house and school, she will not eat if she doesn't like the*

food. I tell her that not all you want will be given to you right away most especially if we do not have enough money and we are not rich” (p.10).

Furthermore, as explained on Golisano Children Hospital’s official website, children with special needs to set their mood before eating. Parents could provide a quiet atmosphere, setting the child comfortable position; and, sharing positive emotions. Parents should also need to use suitable equipment such as a fork and spoon. Parents can start the meal by massaging their child’s gums with a finger dipped in lemonade. To address the concerns encountered by the parents- informants’, they said that they encourage sibling’s support schemes through the guidance of their parents. Family members are helping together in managing the child with special needs. A group of informants said: “I am advising my other children to look after their sibling with special needs whenever I am not around para dire la hiya mapabay-an an ira bugto [so that she will be taken care of] (p.2); “We as a family are helping together so our child would be successful someday” (p.3). Supports from siblings’ mean a lot to children with special needs. According to Hauser-Cram and Woodman (2016), siblings feel a great deal of love and a desire to protect their brothers and sisters with disabilities.

IV. CONCLUSION

The results of the findings discussed above proves that children with special needs behave differently as compared to their counterparts in the mainstream. One of the implications of this result is that parents should strive to get at least foundational knowledge on first- aid approaches to treat misbehaviors of their children with special needs. They must as well learn how to alleviate the behavior and tantrums of their children since they are the first to know the potential misbehaviors of their children. On the other hand, Kanno and Onyeachu (2018) suggested that teachers need to mentor parents of children with special needs on basic approaches to calming tantrums.

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