

Handling Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder: Best Practices and Challenges of Parents and Teachers of Sped Centers in Buenavista, Nasipit and Carmen Districts of Agusan del Norte

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Abstract. *This study investigates the best practices and challenges encountered by teachers and parents dealing with children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in Special Education Centers (SPED) in the municipalities of Carmen, Buenavista, and Nasipit in Agusan del Norte. The study made use of a qualitative phenomenological approach which delve into the lived experiences of 16 respondents, which is composed on 10 parents and 6 teachers, to understand their strategies, struggles, and practices. The study highlights several key findings in these areas: behavioral management, life skills development, and the engagement of social interaction and communication skills. Parents and teachers reported significant emotional and psychological stress due to challenges in managing behavioral problems such as tantrums and aggression. Common coping strategies include seeking support from family and colleagues, relying on personal resilience, and engaging in stress-relief activities. A critical finding is the widespread lack of knowledge and training in evidence-based practices among both parents and teachers, leading to the use of ineffective strategies. Parents often give in to their children's demands to avoid tantrums, while teachers struggle with the limited resources and inadequate professional development programs and opportunities. The study calls for a comprehensive training programs that will support ongoing needs of parents and educators with the necessary skills and knowledge. The research underscores the importance of a collaborative approach involving parents, teachers, and the broader community to create a supportive and inclusive environment for children with ASD. Included recommendation from the study highlights the need for tailored intervention programs, regular assessment of children's progress.*

Keywords- *Autism Spectrum Disorder, Teaching ASD, Managing ASD Children, Evidence-based practices, Behavioral Management, Life Skills, Communication Skills*

INTRODUCTION

Caring for children with Autism has affected many family caregivers around the world. It was reported that it contributed to problems with high-stress levels and health concerns (Ezzat, 2017; Nunes & Papadopoulos, 2023; Tathgur & Kang, 2021). Moreover, it also has put the parents in the position to undergo a complex set of persistent and substantial challenges, given that Autism is a non-curable condition (Khawar & Saeed, 2016; Papadopoulos, 2021). Autism Spectrum Disorder is a neurodevelopmental issue caused by a complex interaction between genetic and environmental factors that lead to behavioral-based assessment with symptoms ranging from social communication impairments to restricted-stereotyped behavioral impairments (Hodges et al., 2020; Ruysschaert et al., 2014). It is a developmental disability that significantly affects the verbal communication, nonverbal communication and social interaction as defined by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). These symptoms lead to challenges parents must overcome to continue for their families.

On the other hand, special education teachers were also exposed to these challenges. Most of the teachers from BUENASCAR districts do not possess specializations in special education. They often lack the necessary training to effectively manage and support children with autism. Accordingly, a lack of training and experience in dealing with autistic students likely impacts teachers' self-efficacy and ability to provide and implement teaching practices that cater to their diverse needs (Boucher, 2018; Cruz, 2020). Hence, teachers' skill and strategies contributed massively to the success of instruction and the management of students with autism spectrum disorder.

The growing problems also extend to the vicinity of the home, as family members deal with the different pressures of having a member under the autism spectrum. Parents also tend to rely solely on traditional methods for handling their children. They find it

challenging to manage the behaviors of children with ASD. Documented struggles include impacts on economic status, sibling interaction, and lifestyle modification of each family member (Begum & Mamin, 2019). Moreover, Chan et al. (2022), using path analyses in their study, revealed that parental sadness, harsh parenting, and co-parenting conflict were all significantly impacted by parents' experiences with discrimination. These factors, in turn, had a strong direct impact on children's internalizing and externalizing symptoms. This is indeed a prevailing problem that must be addressed for children with an autism spectrum disorder to be put in an environment that can mitigate and alleviate the symptoms of their condition.

Filipinos tend to think negatively towards parents with ASD children. Discriminatory actions are usually evident, so parents seek protection against discrimination (PWD Philippines, n.d.). The parents' journey involves several stages before they reach acceptance; during these stages, their child's interventionists play a significant role. Parents undergo five stages as they experience being the primary caregiver. These are: 1) shock, disbelief, denial, 2) anger and resentment, 3) bargaining, 4) depression and discouragement, and 5) the acceptance stage (Cook, Tessier & Klein, 2004). Seeing these scenarios, teachers also have the same sympathy; if they are not well equipped to handle the situation, problems will arise.

The purpose of the study is to document the experiences of teachers and parents in handling children with Autism. Specifically, identify the methods employed by looking at the mechanics of how they manage behavioral problems and develop life and, social and communication skills. Moreover, the research would like to study the coping mechanisms of the teachers and parents, as these factors help develop an educational plan. The need to document evidence-based practices will help establish a suitable intervention program for schools in BUENASCAR to deliver quality care and education to students with ASD.

Specifically, the research answered the following:

1. How do teachers and parents describe their experience in handling students with autism spectrum disorder?
2. How do teachers and parents cope with the challenges of raising students with ASD?
3. What are applied by teachers and parents when dealing with students/ pupils with ASD?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Method

The study utilized a qualitative research design, specifically phenomenology, to capture detailed interpretations and individual experiences. Phenomenology seeks to uncover the universal essence of shared experiences among participants. The study focused on understanding the experiences of parents and teachers living with an Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) child.

Research Environment, Population and Sample

The research was conducted in the areas of Carmen, Nasipit, And Buenavista Sped Centers in the DEPED- Division of Agusan del Norte. Sixteen respondents participated in the study which is composed of ten parents and six teachers. A purposive sampling based on the criteria was used to identify the respondents of the study which highlights the inclusion of ASD children enrolled in the SPED Programs.

Research Instruments

An open-ended interview guide, validated by an expert was used to facilitate the discussions about the experiences and challenges of dealing with ASD children. The validity and reliability of the instrument was used for potential respondents before the actual interviews.

Data Gathering and Ethical Procedures:

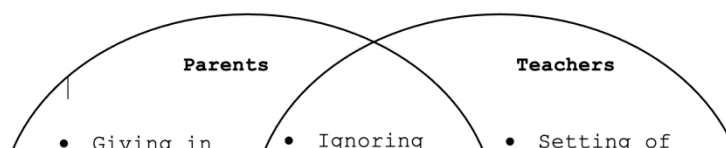
The researcher obtained the permission from the relevant educational authorities as well as the consent from teachers and parents. The interviews were conducted on respondents' convenient time and setting. The process included introducing the study's goals, obtaining permission to record sessions, and allowing the respondents to review the guide questions.

After the said interview, the researcher transcribes, categorize, and analyze the ideas presented on the recordings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Navigating the Struggles in Handling ASD Children

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This encompasses the practice and emotional aspects of dealing with difficulties of behavior, teaching communication and daily living skills. The data indicated that management of these areas requires resilience and full knowledge of adaptation of strategies.

In the context of the parents and teachers, the most significant problem in the area of behavioral management falls into the difficulty of handling and minimizing ASD students' tantrums. These are excerpts that show these overarching sentiments from the teachers and parents who were interviewed:

Parent 1: "Kini gyud ang main ma'am kining magtantrums sila. Ug kanang, kini nuon sila diria ma'am, dili raman nuon kaayo sila hasol nga mga bata unya mga harmless manpud nuon sila. Oo magtantrums sila. (This is the main issue; these children are throwing tantrums. And they're not troublesome children here; they are quite harmless and only throw tantrums.)"

Parent 2: "Magtantrums siya labi na og dili makuha iyang gusto, mag wild siya. (Will eventually throw tantrums. If you don't get what he wants, he becomes wild, ma'am.)"

Parent 3. naa gyud time nga usahay mura kag ma high blood, pag imong badlungon dili mamati

Teacher 3: "Na mag tantrums jud kung dili matagaan sa iya gusto. Mao nang ako ginabuhay kay pasagdan ra pero dili ihatag ang gusto."

Emotionally, parents and teachers had to face this as a potential problem in their day-to-day encounters with these ASD children. Some even noted that they are stressed out and are often times tired about navigating these difficulties, as described in these lines:

Parent 3. "naa gyud time nga usahay mura kag ma high blood, pag imong badlungon dili mamati."

Parent 7: "Of course but it's there already. It is really tiring and it's normal, especially since I'm busy, and when I come home, there are still chores to be done."

The teachers and the parents' emotional state is very important for the ASD child's behavioral progress as this will determine the extent of their influence as well as the degree of involvement that they have in the behavioral goals set. Dealing with behavioral problems, indeed, highly impacted the teachers and parents. This causes heightened stress levels to both the caretakers that facilitate the development of ASD children. One parent said that:

Parent 1: "kanang lisud gyud siya tudloan ma'am. Ang struggles lang gyud sa akoo ma'am kanang kuan ma'am ba mag tantrums siya, Mag lisud ko unsaon naku pag handle og ma stress sab ko" (One of the struggles is that they throw tantrums, I find it hard to handle and get stressed.)

Lu et al., (2021) emphasized that it is crucial to look at the psychosocial factors associated with dealing with the behavioral problems of children with ASD. It was found that parents perceived social support, resilience, and self-efficacy have a significant correlation that plays a lot in behavior management continuity.

Moreover, the lack of knowledge in managing behavioral problems have also contributed to poor practices in behavioral management which was visibly seen in their statements:

Parent 1: "Oo ihatag ang gusto niya. Para mo hilum." (I easily give what he wants for him to keep quiet.)

Parent 3: "Ingon ato ra akong buhaton lingawon ug di mada ug estorya, patan-awon ug TV, mao ra. (I just do it like that, if I can't manage him I will let him watch television.)"

The constant struggle and lack of knowledge on good practices in behavioral management harms the developmental goals. In the lines above, most of the parents succumb to what the child wants which very contradictory to the standard placed by professionals and organizations of ASD behavioral management (*Disruptive Behavior and Autism Spectrum Disorder - Golden Care*, n.d.; Doehring et al., 2014). Attending always to their wants would lead to severe consequences that will harm the behavioral management goal of the entire care team.

Looking on the theory of Bronfenbrenner, microsystems cover the immediate environmental setting where the child is placed to be developed in the hands of the family and the school (Dai, 2011). Furthermore, the context of microsystems helps explain that children with ASD need their families to be directly engaged with their familiarity with required actions, such as managing the behavior and helping facilitate social and life skills development. There is a need for the parents and teachers to work on developing behavioral modification plans that will help build ASD student's good habits and minimize behavioral problems like tantrums.

In the area of teaching daily life skills, both parents and teachers stated that it is a challenge for ASD students to absorb and process instruction. As reflected in these lines, there is a need to help the parents and teachers find better strategies to achieve the expected development outcomes.

Teacher 1: "Dili dayun sila makasabot ma'am kay mas focus man sila sa actions" (they could not understand right away, just because they're more focused on actions.)

Teacher 4: "I have a hard time because I handle lots of students in different categories. It is really a challenge, especially when someone wants to use the bathroom that is why I told the parents to just stay nearby so that I can easily ask for their help with their child."

Parent 1: "First, ma'am, what's important is consistency in guiding him always. You must remind him repeatedly because he tends to forget easily. That's why we are currently training him, especially at home, so he won't need diapers anymore and he can tell us when he needs to pee since he sometimes forgets. When he needs to poop, we can notice er because he tiptoes and rushes to the bathroom. So, the key is to always guide him."

Teacher 1 noticed that her student is driven mostly with action and demonstration. This can be said in some studies since the oral communication skills of most ASD children are impaired (Belmonte et al., 2013; Chenausky et al., 2019; Mody et al., 2017). The struggles in teaching them can also be more on problems with communication. Parents and teachers are trying to consistently deliver instruction to help build good habits for ASD children. Both parents and teachers experienced having a hard time helping students with autism spectrum disorder.

It is imperative that this documented experience of struggles be addressed in order to minimize the stress associated with handling ASD children. Careful planning can help in minimize these problems.

Lack of Knowledge on the Proper Way to Mitigate Challenges

Understanding evidence-based practices can help in alleviating the challenging conditions of parents and teachers in their struggles with helping ASD children. The data set indicated that most of the struggles were due to a lack of knowledge of proper care treatment. In the case of Parent 1 she stated:

"Oo ihatag ang gusto niya kung dili jud mo tuo."

When put in difficult situations on how to calm down the tantrums of ASD children, Parents tend to give in to the wants of the children. This is even visible in other participants' first line of action:

Parent 3. Ingon ato ra akong buhaton lingawon ug di mada ug estorya, patan-awon ug TV, mao ra.

**Gakos-gakuson ra nimo, mukatawa raman na siya. Mao ray akong ginabuhat.*

**Kanang ako-ako rang kanang personal lang nga nahibaloan*

Parent 7: "papalitan og coke mismo sa tindahan, mubarog siya pagka kita niya sa coke inom dayon"

Parent 9: "Actually akong nabuhat nga steps before pag mutukar na iyang hyper active tagaan ug gadgets"

Evidence-based practices are essential in the management of Autistic Spectrum Disorder students. Looking at the respondents of the study, there was a great highlight in the lack of familiarity with evidence-based practices in dealing with ASD, especially in the case of parents.

Parent 9: "Actually ma'am wala koy nahibaloan na evidence-based information.

Usahay kanang si misis lang magtan-aw siya sa mga vlogs bitaw nga about sa mga

naay anak na naay ASD." (Actually, ma'am no, I haven't obtained any evidence-based

information. My wife would just watch vlogs about family who has a child with ASD.)

Parent 7: "Wala ma'am, magtan-aw ralog videos sa facebook sa parents unsaon nila pag deal sa ilang anak nga nay ASD." (Nothing, ma'am, I just watch videos on Facebook of how parents deal with their children that have ASD.)

Moreover, most parents seek the internet and other videos as sources for how to handle the behavioral and other associated problems of ASD students.

Parent 1: "Magtan-aw rako sa facebook ma'am. Daghan man mga parents nga nay ASD ang anak." (I will just watch on Facebook, ma'am. There are lots of parents of ASDs there.)

Given the lack of introduction to EBP, there is indeed a gap that should be addressed to help parents manage their children effectively. Humeet al. (2021) support that identifying best practices leads to better goal achievement for children with ASD and people in the care team. This minimizes challenges set by their unique encounters.

There were also problems with integrating EBP in the classroom setting for teachers. Three teachers do not have prior experience or relevant training in SPED and are currently handling ASD students. They have tried their best to learn from internet sources, previous experiences in the regular class, and short training given by the Division. Most of the strategies employed were not evidence-based practice. As reflected in these lines:

Teacher 1: "Wala in particular ma'am., though magsearch kos google ug sa youtube para matabangan ko unsaon pagdeal sa akong mga learners." (None in particular, though I constantly search Google and watch YouTube videos to help me deal with my learners once in a while.)

" Naa ba kay nahibaloan nga evidenced-based practices na magamit unsaon pagdeal sa bata nga nay ASD?"*

- Wala, ma'am."

*(*Do you know what evidence-based practices are used to deal with ASD?*

- Nothing, ma'am.)

Given the circumstances teachers experience, strengthening their knowledge of evidence-based practices for dealing with ASD students will help improve their achievement. EBP has the potential to improve outcomes for young children with ASD if teachers can effectively utilize them (Dynia et al., 2020). The government should intensify and provide training for Special education, especially for cases of Autistic Spectrum Disorder, since there are many problems associated with it.

In terms of teachers' desire to find training, it could also be observed that there is little motivation on their part because of some identified issues, such as not being required in their workplace and the unmatched expertise of teachers in their assigned cases. This is reflected in the following transcripts:

Teacher 4: "Wala kayo siya na imposed especially kay wala mi mga seminars naapilan."

(It seems like those were not imposed well especially now that we don't have many seminars.)

Teacher 1: " Most of the practices that I do are based on my personal experience. So wala gyud koy direct nga kuan, direct nga natudlo gikan sa lain nga tao or any one coz my major actually in graduate studies is intellectual disability dili ASD. However that is the only available nga slot dinhi sa atong kuan so mao na siya diha ko nabutang. So based on experience gyud ning akoo." (Most of the practices I follow are based on my personal experience. So, I don't have any direct training or instruction from other people because my major in graduate studies is intellectual disability, not ASD (Autism Spectrum Disorder). However, that is the only available slot in our department, so that's where I ended up. So, I rely on my own experience for this.)

It is essential to match the expertise and the potential case to complications in the long run. Students with ASD need continuity and well-trained teachers to help them and their parents achieve their learning goals. In some studies abroad, there are similar cases of the gap between theory and practice, where teachers have acquired knowledge of evidence-based practices but need help with practical applications in their working environments (Hsiao & Sorensen Petersen, 2018; Larraceleta et al., 2022). Knowledge of EBP and practical applications are necessary to bridge the gaps in this problem.

Minimizing the problems and complications of recurring behavior patterns improves the situation for the entire care team. Evidence-based practices should be introduced and practiced in the cases of ASD students in BUENASCAR.

Currently, the actions made by most parents and teachers are considered to be trivial. This means they are only based on what they think could be the best choice. The transcripts show the lack of deep understanding of the principles of employing evidence-based practices:

Parent 5: "Ginakuan ra nako siya ma'am, pag naa mi sa balay ang akong ginahatag sa iyaha aron ma minusan, makalimot siya sa yang gusto kay palabhon, pahugason sa plato... ug di ba kaha paliguon, bahalag kalas tubig. Mawala nana sa iyaha, usahay ako siya e massage"

Teacher 3: "idivert na dayon unya immediate feedback kay usahay makalimot man gud, usahay ako ra entertainun kung mag sinamok jud"

Given these circumstances, it is high time to check on helping parents and teachers with the proper knowledge on how to handle these issues associated with ASD childcare.

2. Coping Up Mechanisms of Teachers and Parents in Raising Children with ASD

Controlling Emotions Amidst Struggles

Stress and emotional problems are always expected in handling children with ASD. As teachers and parents navigate the complexities of being there for their children, it is essential to understand how they control their emotions.

Most parents experience difficulty in managing their emotional well-being. Their stress is more anchored on the idea of uncertainty about the future of their students as expressed in these lines:

Parent 7: Of course, I sometimes get stressed. But I really just take it in stride because, of course, I need to teach them so that they can truly become independent in the future and be able to do something on their own. So, I really need to teach them even if I have to repeat things multiple times, and it requires more patience.

Parent 9: Yes future lang gyud niya nga hopefully makita namo na makaya na gyud niya. Wala mi niasa na ma normal kay gi accept naman nga ingon ana siya, dili normal pero at least ma better na ma independent siya ba

Parents tend to worry on this area because they are not assured of what will happen if they are gone into this world. Their sense of love and care goes beyond the boundaries of time and placement. Moreover, it is undeniable that their willingness and hope are unwavering as reflected in these lines:

Parent 5: Wala kuan lang ma'am palangga lang gyud nako siya. Tungod sa love para mu survive lang gyud, gyud pud siya.

Parent 4: Oh unya syempre naa man gyud ng kakapoy, ma stress ka kapoy pero as a nanay lagi unconditional love syempre anak pa gyud dawaton, oh dawaton nako.

The stress that parents feel are normal. Stress management should be introduced as it is an effective tool for helping oneself flourish with adversities. In the context of the study, parents and teachers have always tried to keep themselves afloat in helping their ASD children.

Parents' primary motivation behind teaching and enrolling ASD children in SPED schools is to equip them with survival skills. This will give them the feeling of ease for their children's future security. Indeed, as supported by studies, raising a child with special needs is stressful and demanding. The ever-growing concerns have led to the risk of developing depression because of psychological stress (Efstratopoulou et al., 2022; Olsson & Hwang, 2001). It is crucial in this study that there should be a sound support system for parents.

On the other hand, teachers are under more pressure to teach the expected outcomes effectively. Teachers must always be in control of their emotions so that they can help ASD students.

Teacher 4: As teachers, we should control our emotions when dealing with them to discipline and teach them. Even if you are already angry, those emotions should be controlled so they don't see you as a monster, as it might make them even more scared. So, you should stay calm when angry and express your happiness for their achievements to show them that you are happy because it can also motivate them to want to please their teacher.)

Given the different stress levels that parents and teachers face daily; in managing their stress levels, they first try to accept their situation. Acceptance is critical in their motivation to persist and continue with the journey. Some even have cried over the situation but remained committed to accepting their fate with their sons or daughters. As seen in these transcripts:

Parent 4: (... I accept that this is part of the child, a part of their system, and thinking that they are like this. So, it's just about accepting them as they are.)

Parent 1: I will just cry, ma'am. There's nothing I can do, so I've accepted it.

Parent 2: I sometimes get stressed, but I have accepted what God has given me.

Moreover, it should also be noted that during these times of difficulty, they will persist and move forward with the noble task at hand to help ASD children. These are the things they have said about it:

Parent 5: Yes ma'am. Even though we say she's not really catching up, at least she's growing and she also has some knowledge....You can't really blame her; that's just how she is. I just hope and pray, ma'am, that through this therapy, her to school she will become better ma'am.

Parent 7: Yes and of course, there are times when it's really tiring. But as a mother, you will accept it because your unconditional love for your child is much bigger. At least we are happy that they're here, and we can teach them.

The positive outlook of parents and holding themselves accountable to the future of their students is very commendable. They are indeed looking forward to better outcomes and their love and care is their biggest motivation is investing time in the education of their kids.

In another area, teachers and parents are closely linked to their families and friends regarding emotional support. They confide in them for advice on what to do and seek inspiration to continue.

Teacher 6: " Ohh, my co-teachers, especially my co-SPED teachers.

Teacher 4: " (My family... especially my children, are my ultimate stress relievers because they truly understand, maybe because they also grow up alongside these kids.)

The study of González-Herrera et al. (2021) emphasized the significance of offering support to the people caring for ASD children. They should be given intervention plans that will make the support system better. Accordingly, it should also be emphasized that the significance of offering support to these families should be the primary goal of intervention plans. The heightened risk of experiencing stress is pervasive (González-Herrera et al., 2021)

Other ways used by parents and teachers involve praying, directing attention toward different things, and finding people to talk to, as illustrated in these transcripts:

Teacher 1: I get too overwhelmed, like it's becoming too much. I tell them to stay and then tell them I need to have a snack, but I will just go to the canteen and chat with someone there to distract myself.

Teacher 4: What I did, of course, is pray. So that I will have more strength in guiding them. I always motivate myself to guide them, so they grow old with learning.

Parent 4: Of course, ma'am, they are my children. I pray for guidance and good health to manage and handle all our problems. Then, I pray that I will be given a strong and motivated mood. I am already happy I have my children and can help them.

In light of the negativities associated with raising children with ASD. Most parents and teachers diligently take the moral road by being closely associated with their religious practices. Prayers and hopes of positivity remained as the joint banner statement.

Promoting self-care like prayer is a tool that will help ASD caregivers to continue. These findings were also validated in the studies of Alvarez (2021) and Bishop-Fitzpatrick et al. (2017), which documented strategies primarily used: prayers, attending church, recreational activities, exercising, regular family bonding, support groups, and deep breathing. Stress management improves the social function of adults handling ASD, and having self-care activities improves their conditions.

Most of the coping mechanisms done by parents and teachers revolve around the idea of emotional and psychological support from the people in the community where the ASD student is. They have always ventured on their families for comfort and support. The good thing is that they are still motivated to be a beacon of light for mentally impaired children. This dedication, indeed, is a heroic act from teachers and parents.

Acceptance as Key in Resilience

Resilience is essential in ensuring that ASD students' learning is continuous. This is shouldered by the responsibilities of both parents and teachers, who are at the frontlines. The capacity to withstand and recover from adverse situations, stress, and challenges in personal and psychological well-being is a necessary attribute that will make a big difference to the intended outcomes.

Acceptance of their situation and fate was a recurring theme among the participants of the study. They have said the following lines:

Teacher 1: I also ask why I was placed here because I really don't have any units in SPED. The suddenly, when I arrived here, I felt so happy, my heart felt really light. I even thought that maybe the Lord had a purpose for me here.

Teacher 4: When it comes to managing stress levels, I accept that this is part of the child, a part of their system, and thinking, that they are like this. So, it's just about accepting them as they are.

Other parents have noted that it was not easy to learn about their child's condition. It was painful, and it took time to process the findings of their child. As shown these lines:

Parent 7: Yes ma'am and slowly accepting it. You cannot help but compare her to other kids.

Parent 4: It's really tiring ma'am but we can do nothing about it because he's my child, so I just accepted it.

By accepting the situation, it became evident that they understood the challenges of being a parent or a teacher of an ASD child and what it entails. This has helped them identify how to help themselves as caretakers better and lessen their emotional burdens. The caregivers often undergo a journey of emotional acceptance. The posted unique challenges of ASD entailed adjusting their expectations and hopes for the child. This is very evident as Parent 4 have mentioned this:

"I really accept that this part of the child, a part of their system, and thinking, that they are like this"

Such consideration and acceptance are crucial for emotional stability and resilience. This allows parents and teachers to focus on achievable goals and daily management rather than being overly unaware of what might happen. It should be emphasized that building resiliency among ASD caregivers must be a priority. Resiliency is the ability to bounce back, adapt, and recover effectively from adversity, challenges, or difficult situations. Resiliency built upon the context of spirituality was influential in helping the parents (Pandya, 2018). They posted higher scores on their Parenting and Family Adjustment Scale. Moreover, another study supports that resilient families have less parental stress (Zhao & Fu, 2022). Making the family adaptable to the coming challenges associated with dealing with ASD provides a lot of positive benefits. Resiliency should also be a banner program developed among family members and caregivers (Bekhet et al., 2012; Bonis, 2016; Mzizi, 2023).

In the context of this study, acceptance indeed influences the quality of care and education provided for ASD children. Teachers and parents have embraced their circumstances and appeared to be more patient and emphatic towards their day-to-day dealings.

3. Practices Applied by teachers and parents when dealing with students/ pupils with ASD

Poor and Unverified Practices In ASD Management

Effective management of ASD children is grounded on high knowledge of evidence-based practices. The majority of the parents and teachers in the SPED Schools of Carmen, Buenavista, and Nasipit lack access to effective evidence-based practices. The interview transcripts from parents discussed the various sources of knowledge that were mostly taken from advice from bloggers, YouTubers and internet links sent as found in these lines:

Parent 9: Actually, ma'am no, I haven't obtained any evidence-based information. My wife would just watch vlogs about family who has a child with ASD.

Parent 7: Nothing, ma'am, I just watch videos on Facebook of how parents deal with their children that have ASD.

Given the lack of introduction to EBP, there is indeed a gap that should be addressed to help parents manage their children effectively. Humeet al. (2021) support that identifying best practices leads to better goal achievement for children with ASD and people in the care team. This minimizes challenges set by their unique encounters.

There were also problems with integrating EBP in the classroom setting for teachers. Three teachers do not have prior experience or relevant training in SPED and are currently handling ASD students. They have tried their best to learn from internet sources, previous experiences in the regular class, and short training given by the Division. Most of the strategies employed were not evidence-based practice.

Teacher 1: None in particular, though I constantly search Google and watch YouTube videos to help me deal with my learners once in a while.

Teacher 5: *Do you know what evidence-based practices are used to deal with ASD?
- Nothing, ma'am.

Given the circumstances, teachers should strengthen their knowledge of evidence-based practices for dealing with ASD students. EBP has the potential to improve outcomes for young children with ASD if teachers can effectively utilize them (Dydia et al., 2020). The government should intensify and provide training for Special education, especially for cases of Autistic Spectrum Disorder, since there are many problems associated with it.

In terms of teachers' desire to find training, it could also be observed that there is little motivation on their part because of some identified issues, such as not being required in their workplace and the unmatched expertise of teachers in their assigned cases. This is reflected in the following conversations:

Teacher 4: (It seems like those were not imposed well especially now that we don't have many seminars.)

Teacher 1: Most of the practices I follow are based on my personal experience. So, I don't have any direct training or instruction from other people because my major in graduate studies is intellectual disability, not ASD (Autism Spectrum Disorder). However, that is the only available slot in our department, so that's where I ended up. So, I rely on my own experience for this.

It is essential to match the expertise and the potential case to complications in the long run. Students with ASD need continuity and well-trained teachers to help them and their parents achieve their learning goals. In some studies abroad, there are similar cases of the gap between theory and practice, where teachers have acquired knowledge of evidence-based practices but need help with practical applications in their working environments (Hsiao & Sorensen Petersen, 2018; Larraceleta et al., 2022). Knowledge of EBP and practical applications are necessary to bridge the gaps in this problem.

Minimizing the problems and complications of recurring behavior patterns improves the situation for the entire care team. Evidence-based practices should be introduced and practiced in the cases of ASD students in BUENASCAR.

CONCLUSION

Parents and teachers have dealt with a lot of challenges in dealing with their ASD students in the aspects of behavioral management, development of life skills, and social and communication skills. Amidst these trials, coping mechanisms were employed to counter such problems and have emerged as resilient. On the aspect of evidence-based practice, a stark gap remains visible: a lack of awareness; this underscores a reliance on traditional methods they perceive as effective and an urgent need to reconfigure for a structured and informed approach to help them in their situation.

The study's findings call for an imperative need to bridge the knowledge gap on EBPs among educators, parents, and caregivers of ASD students. The study advocates for the integration of comprehensive training programs tailored to the needs of children with ASD. Initiatives should aim to enrich the tools for parents and teachers with practical strategies and foster a supportive community network that best facilitates an exchange of knowledge and experience.

Though the study sheds light on the aspects of ASD management experiences of parents and teachers in Nasipit, Buenavista, and Carmen, this does not encapsulate the entire spectrum of experiences and practices in the Caraga region. This limitation should be understood with caution in generalizing the findings and prompting research in a broader scope for more inquiry.

Diversifying the research landscape in a broader geographical and demographic spectrum is necessary. The study serves as a reminder of the challenges associated with navigating ASD. It highlights the indispensable role of supportive, informed, and well-equipped parents and teachers in fostering a better environment for the ASD child to thrive.

Recommendations

Based on the results and findings of the study, the research would like to recommend the following:

For Parents

- There is a need to be acquainted with Evidence-based practices to lessen the challenges associated with dealing with ASD children.
- Engaging in support groups and counseling services will help deal with the emotional hurdles.

Teachers

- Undergo more professional development training in Evidence-based practices for ASD. Gaining expertise in this area will help enhance the ability to support students effectively. Moreover, Foster and build relationships with parents to collaborate effectively on the management of behavior and development of life skills and communication skills.
- Create a stable curriculum for ASD learners, incorporating life, social, and communication skills so that students are well-rounded and equipped for their progression in life.
- Technology should be incorporated into education, particularly in developing social and communication skills for ASD students. Available resources like songs and pronunciation drills will help with word familiarity.

School Administrators

- Formulate policies on inclusivity and invest more in teacher training for ASD management.
- Support teacher and parent initiatives on ASD support groups and development of resiliency.

Local Government Unit

- Support the local school board with regular financial aid on parents and teachers handling students with special needs.
- Initiate community awareness campaigns that helps reduce the stigma and discrimination associated with children with Autism Spectrum Disorder.
- Establish support services and develop inclusive policies that ensure children with special needs have access to quality education and healthcare services.

Department of Education

- Integrate ASD specific content into the teacher education curriculum to prepare future educators for handling students with autism.
- Provide continuous professional development opportunities for Special education teachers focusing on the areas of evidenced-based practices for managing ASD.
- Increase the resource allocation in order for schools to acquire quality materials and tools necessary for effective education for children with ASD.

Department of Social Welfare and Development

- Develop and implement programs designed to support families with children having special needs which contains financial aid, counseling and support groups.
- Train social workers on ASD to better support families and connect them to appropriate people and groups.
- Create community-based programs that facilitate integration of ASD individuals into community activities and social events.

Parents-teachers Association

- Create programs that encourage greater parental involvement in the developmental and implementation of individualized education programs for ASD children.
- Organize workshops and training sessions for parents on effective strategies for managing ASD children and other cases of children with special needs.
- Advocate for the needs and rights of ASD children within the school and create policies for inclusivity in school activities and work.

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