

Enabling Mothers of Children with Special Needs to High Quality Education and Gender Equality

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ABSTRACT

This action research explores the demographic traits, difficulties, and engagement in the community of parents/guardians of children with special needs (CSN) using data from surveys. An important finding from the survey is that the predominant demographic of parents/guardians is women, between the ages of 31 and 35, and they typically have two children. Obtaining health services and meeting educational needs are significant issues, with a considerable number of people facing difficulties in accessing necessary services. Therefore, it is recommended that the project prioritize the provision of customized assistance and resources that specifically address the distinct requirements and difficulties encountered by moms of children with special needs.

Keywords: Mothers of Children with Special Needs, Inclusive Education, Gender Equality, High Quality Education, SDG 3 and 8

INTRODUCTION

No one can deny that parenting is a demanding job and brings a lot of changes to a person's life facets especially for women. This burden of taking care of the house and the children typically is shouldered by the mother especially for societies that follow traditional roles of parents. Aside from being a disciplinarian and tutor, Kaniyattam and Oxley (2021) identified other roles of mothers with special needs: nurse, care manager, and home trainer. Gulec-Aslan (2017) observed that the happiness inside the house is shouldered by the women and thus entails emotional and psychological investments. Further, to nurture children who have special needs, it takes more than a normal parents' degree of understanding, patience and dedication. This situation is further exacerbated when the family is economically-challenged when parents themselves cannot afford to have a caregiver or when one is compelled to stay at home to take care of the children. As observed by Degirmenci (2019), parents of special children should be able to balance the economic needs of their special needs child with their household; hence, he stresses that social support is of paramount importance in their life and lack of which leads to sadness and frustration. Siman-Tov and Kaniel (2010) remarked that a child with special disability needs long-term care which consequently will lead to caregiver stress and utilization of effective treatment for a considerable long time amounting to societal loss.

Facing this reality, that working parent, usually the husband, has to make ends meet in order to fulfill the family's needs and to bring a certain level of comfort if not luxury or indulgence. On the other hand, maybe as a result of compromise to some, the non-working spouse might feel the pressure of providing economically or to even feel disappointed for not being self-accomplished. Aside from this tension, the study of Al-Oran and Al-Sagarat (2016) from parents of children with autism reckoned that negative well-being, depression, and anxiety negatively impact the parents' relationship to their child. To heed the recommendation of Al-Oran and Al-Sagarat (2016) and to alleviate the problem of the parents of children with special needs, this paper aims to identify appropriate support and education to contribute to the betterment of the respondents' well-being targeting UN SDG 3 call for good health and well-being and SDG 8 Decent work and economic growth.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The project aims to meet the requirements of mothers with children who have special needs by offering a variety of programs and services that attempt to improve their education, abilities, and mental health. The project's objective is to empower moms by granting them access to livelihood services, health and wellness programs, and special literacy initiatives. These resources will enable them to properly support their children and to tap community and society organizations for trainings and allocations of such.

HYPOTHESIS

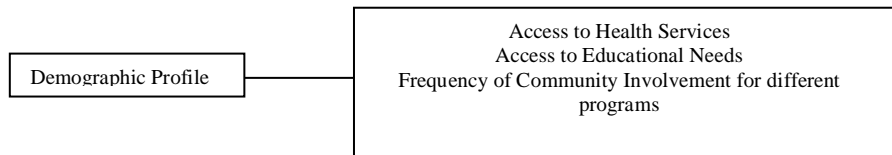


Fig. 1. Research Paradigm

This study would like to identify if there is a significant difference between the demographic profile and the accessibility to the different needs of the respondents.

RELATED STUDIES

The discussion of literatures below is categorized to economic profile of the respondents and access to resources or support.

Economic Profile

A family's economic status impacts a great deal in accessing health care and other resources for children with special needs and for the needed support by the parents. This is shown in the case study of Lloyd and Rosman (2005) where they illustrated the different obstacles of a single mother and pointed out "when making assessments, interventions, and/or developing policies one must understand the functioning of all of the systems that a family must interact with on an everyday basis."

In the case of DeRigne and Porterfield's (2010) study of special needs children, they have studied medical homes as a factor for determining the employment change of married and single-mothers. Their results revealed that both single mothers and married parents determine to shorten their working hours or even to stop working depending on the gravity of their children's condition and the insurance or disability payment they receive from the government. Time allotted for taking care of their child also played a role in decreasing their employment hours which can also result in incurring higher debts. Similar finding is also yielded by Eijiri and Mitsuzawa (2017) in their study of Japanese mothers. They concluded that much improvement is needed for providing childcare support and increasing the working hours of mothers.

Sari and Basbakkal's (2010) study showed that the educational level of mothers and financial status impact on them having depression. The higher the educational level the less depression the mothers feel and the higher their self-esteem. It is because they have a better perception of their children's situation. The higher the level of education the more social support they get. Further, as their income increases their burden decreases. Al Awaji, et. al.'s (2021) study on the quality of life during the COVID 19 has shown the vulnerability of mothers of children with disability with regards to accessing different healthcare services and the needs of the mothers. Their result showed that among the variables social and environmental well-being were lower than the families without children with disabilities. The lockdown increased the difficulty of accessing funds and medical care which may affect the physical and mental well-being of mothers with children with special needs i.e. the decline of their child's condition during the lockdown. The mothers also pointed out that their much-needed support was emotional, psychological, and family support.

Access to Resources or Support

In the study of Degirmenci (2019), there are different social supports received by the mothers of children with autism coming from relatives and from the population [SIC] which can be presumed as the community. It is also worth noting in this study that the husband’s character which is being open to problems also has an impact in the marital situation. Degirmenci (2019) pointed out that social support and stress are connected with one another. He observed that mothers who experienced limited support have more difficulties facing motherhood and are more prone to depression and frustration, low parental self-efficacy, and a delay in returning to business life. The kind of spousal interaction also plays a role in child-related stress.

Montes and Halterman’s (2007) study show that mothers of a child with autism experience poor mental and emotional health and have higher stress. Also, mothers who have higher levels of happiness have better social skills and have better adapting abilities. This finding is further corroborated in Findler, et. al.’s (2016) study which stated that the amount of support received by the mothers highly correlates to the level of happiness which in turn affects the functioning of the mother in the society or in other words mothers having social relations. This finding is also revealed in the qualitative study of Gulec-Aslan (2017) on the experiences of Turkish mothers who have children diagnosed with autism. This entails that parent of children with special needs need support in alleviating their situation.

In Heer, et. al.’s (2015) study of mothers who belong to a certain school for children with developmental disability in India, they hold that mothers tend to feel isolated and joining this organization has led to better adjustment to their circumstances. Aside from them accepting their children’s condition, the role of the organization in providing them with competencies and skills helped them redeem their confidence and control as parents. And as a member of a support group system, they were able to have a source of emotional support and to have achieved a “sense of self” (p. 226). Another important notable finding from their research is the availability of different forms of support groups at different stages. This study also aligns with Kaniyattam and Oxley’s (2021) research that parents of children with special needs function as a case manager wherein the parents themselves look for the best possible approaches for their child.

METHODS

A descriptive quantitative approach was utilized. Through non-random sampling, 56 parents answered the survey from a specialized school in Paranaque that caters to children with special needs only. The consolidated data was analyzed using frequency distribution and weighted mean. A questionnaire focusing on offering extension services was created. The four extension services are as follows: livelihood, health and wellness, environment, special literacy. Kruskal-Wallis with a threshold of 0.05 was employed to analyze the significant difference between the different demographic variables and accessibility to different needs.

RESULTS

A survey conducted yielded useful information regarding the demographic profile and requirements of parents/guardians of children with special needs in Paranaque City especially on availability of resources, and community engagement of this specific group.

Socio-Demographic Profile

TABLE 1 Demographic Profile

Characteristics		Frequency
Age	26-30	10
	31-35	14
	36-40	11
	41-45	1
	46-50	9
	51-55	6

	56-60	1
	61 -65	2
	Did not specify	2
	TOTAL	56
Sex	Male	1
	Female	52
	Did not specify	3
	TOTAL	56
No. of Children	None	2
	1	11
	2	19
	3 or more	19
	Did not specify	5
	TOTAL	56
Civil Status	Single/Solo Parent/Cohabiting	17
	Married	19
	Divorce	0
	Widow	1
	Did not specify	19
	Total	56
Job Description	Regular	8
	Contractual	1
	Casual	0
	Freelance	5
	Part-time	3
	Unpaid Labor	22
	Did not specify	17
	Total	56
Monthly Income	Less than 20,000	34
	20,000-39,999	10
	40,000-59,999	0
	60,000-79,999	1
	80,000-99,999	0
	100,000 and more	0
	Did not specify	11
	Total	56
Educational Achievement	College Graduate	15
	College Undergraduate	10
	High School Graduate	15
	High School Level	5
	Elementary Graduate	2
	Elementary Level	0
	Vocational Graduate	6
	Vocational Undergraduate	0
	Not educated/Uneducated	0
	N/A	3
	Total	56
No. of Children with Special Needs	NONE	1
	1	41
	2	5
	3 or more	1

	Did not specify	8
	TOTAL	56
Length of Experience taking Care of Children with Special Needs	Less than 1 year	0
	1 -5 years	20
	6-10 years	17
	11-15 years	3
	15 years or more	1
	Did not specify	8
	TOTAL	56

The majority of participants are women who are married and are aged 31-35, who have two children, and are involved in unpaid work, earning a monthly income of less than 20,000 pesos. Majority also have graduated either from high school or college with only one special child. Only 20 have 1-5 years of experience taking care of children with special needs.

Access to Different Needs

TABLE 2 Respondents' Access to Different Needs

Description		Frequency
Access to Health Services	Very Difficult	4
	Difficult	27
	Neutral	12
	Easy	5
	Very easy	2
	Did not specify	6
	Total	56
Access to Educational Needs	Very Difficult	4
	Difficult	27
	Neutral	12
	Easy	5
	Very Easy	2
	Did not specify	6
	Total	56
Frequency of Community Involvement for different programs	Never	7
	Rarely	33
	Sometimes	11
	N/A	5
	Total	56

Regarding access to health services, 27 of 56 found it difficult while access to educational needs while access to educational needs, 32 respondents answered neutral. The difficulty of accessing health care and meeting educational needs underscore the need for community engagement and support initiatives. Lastly, in terms of Community Involvement for different programs, 33 answered they rarely join community programs

Extension Services

TABLE 3 Respondents' Preferred Extension Services

Extension Services		Frequency
Livelihood	Wine Mixing and Bartending	9
	Meat Processing	27
	Perfume Making	25

	Basic Welding	4
	Soap, Conditioner, and dishwashing making	23
	Handicraft Seminar	9
	Empanada and Pastries Making	18
	Basic Electrical Wiring	9
	Orientation on starting new business	14
	Business Finance	5
	Product marketing, packaging, branding, etc.	3
	Total	146
Health and Wellness	Food preparation and sanitation	24
	Proper grooming and personal hygiene	15
	Meal planning and table etiquette	18
	Fitness training	25
	Sports officiating	5
	Total	87
Environment	Urban gardening	30
	Solid Waste Management	26
	Total	56
Special Literacy	Barangay Accountable Governance and Katarungan Pamperingly	8
	Barangay Basic Census and Survey	5
	Basic English Training for Call Center Agent	15
	Reading and Writing Workshop for Children	16
	Road Safety Campaign	6
	Basic Housekeeping	11
	Cultural Tourism	3
	Consumer Electronics	3
	Business correspondence	3
	Disaster risk management seminar	11
	IT Literacy Training	9
	Parenting and Values Formation	15
	Dangerous Drugs	5
	Cooperative Organizing and Management	16
	Theater	1
	Dance	4
Total	131	

For livelihood services, the top three choices of the respondents are Meat Processing, Perfume Making, and Soap, Conditioner and Dishwashing Making. For Health and Wellness, they prefer Fitness Training, Food Preparation and Sanitation, and lastly, Meal Planning and Table Etiquette. For Environment, Urban Gardening comes first followed by Solid Waste Management. And the fourth extension service which is Special Literacy, the top four choices are Reading and Writing Workshop for Children, Cooperative Organizing and Management, Basic English Training for Call Center Agents, and Parenting and Values Formation.

Is there a significant difference of accessibility if grouped according to demographic profile?

TABLE 4 Significant Difference Between Demographic Profile and Accessibility to Different Needs

1. Age	χ^2	df	p
Access to Health Services	9.22	7	0.24
Access to Educational Needs	5.34	7	0.62

Frequency of Community Involvement for different programs	7.99	7	0.33
2. Sex	χ^2	df	p
Access to Health Services	3.84	2	0.15
Access to Educational Needs	7.43	2	0.02
Frequency of Community Involvement for different programs	4.19	2	0.12
3. Civil Status	χ^2	df	p
Access to Health Services	4.54	3	0.21
Access to Educational Needs	6.45	3	0.09
Frequency of Community Involvement for different programs	7.07	3	0.07
4. Job Description	χ^2	df	p
Access to Health Services	3.61	4	0.46
Access to Educational Needs	2.48	4	0.65
Frequency of Community Involvement for different programs	3.6	4	0.46
5. Monthly Income	χ^2	df	p
Access to Health Services	4.09	3	0.25
Access to Educational Needs	4.62	3	0.2
Frequency of Community Involvement for different programs	4.23	3	0.24
6. Educational Achievement	χ^2	df	p
Access to Health Services	2.11	5	0.83
Access to Educational Needs	5	5	0.42
Frequency of Community Involvement for different programs	11.4	5	0.04
7. Length of Experience taking Care of Special Needs Children	χ^2	df	p
Access to Health Services	6.35	5	0.27
Access to Educational Needs	7.03	5	0.22
Frequency of Community Involvement for different programs	11.1	5	0.05

Results revealed that only Sex ($p=0.333$) has significant difference with access to educational needs while educational achievement ($p=0.04$) and length of experience in taking care of special needs children ($p=0.05$) have significant difference with the frequency of community involvement.

DISCUSSION

Parents of children with special needs, in this case, the mothers serve as caregivers who mostly have a low level of academic achievement, are much more in need of economic support for the long-term care and specialized treatment of their children as seen in their economic background where most of them are on the disadvantaged side. Also, the study has identified difficulty accessing resources and less community involvement. This result can lead parents, as shown in previous studies, to experience isolation, stress, low self-esteem, or worse marital woes.

In order for the parents to mitigate their situation, preventive care should be prepared for them spearheaded by institutions like the academe and different societal organizations whose mission is aligned to this sector to collaborate and create specialized programs and trainings focusing on the following extension services that will offer them micro businesses that is livelihood preferably on meat handling and processing. This will augment their income and consequently allow them to give time to their special needs child. Preventive care in this study is defined as the approach that will mitigate or help the parents of children with special needs to understand and support their situation. On Special Literacy, basic reading and writing as their foremost choice

reflects the mothers' role as tutor while parenting and values formation reflects their role as disciplinarian. This shows that as mothers their child's needs come first which are pre-literacy and a good citizenship as preparation for them to be part of the society.

IMPLICATION

The project aims to empower moms of children with special needs by specifically addressing their unique needs and problems. This initiative will contribute to the development of a more inclusive and equitable society. The project promotes gender equality and social inclusion by providing education, skills development, and community involvement opportunities to empower moms. This aligns with the UN Sustainable Development Goal 4 for inclusive education. Mothers who have had a formal education have a crucial impact on the development of physically and intellectually healthy children, hence, promoting a fairer and more comprehensive society. Moreover, by identifying the needs of the parents, this research hopes to alleviate or lessen their stress and anxiety through crafting specialized programs to improve their socio-economic status and marital condition.

CONCLUSION

It can be concluded from the results that initiative for a comprehensive strategy for empowering mothers of children with special needs, with a focus on the importance of providing high-quality education and promoting gender equality should be taken into account. By implementing focused initiatives, including the community, and employing strategic management techniques, the project is creating opportunities for an empowered future for these mothers and their children.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To empower mothers of children with special needs, the participants should improve their education, skills, and emotional well-being. Therefore, it is recommended that academe especially tertiary institutions prioritize the provision of customized assistance and resources that specifically address the distinct requirements and difficulties encountered by moms of children with special needs.

Initiatives to offer economic empowerment alternatives, such as vocational training, caregiving techniques, and employment assistance to assist these moms in enhancing their economic circumstances and achieving financial autonomy should be promoted by concerned institutions. Mental health assistance, to enhance the caregiving abilities of these moms and assist them in managing the stress and difficulties associated with caring for a child with special needs, should be integrated in the program.

Regarding access to services, promote policy reforms and municipal regulations that tackle the distinct requirements and difficulties encountered by mothers of children with special needs, namely regarding healthcare and education accessibility. Institutions that cater to children with special needs should tap legislators to create policy for bigger budget allocations.

Promotion of community engagement and inclusivity as well as promoting society awareness and acceptance can be achieved by actively involving mothers in community initiatives and decision-making processes, challenging traditional gender roles, and providing leadership training to empower mothers to participate in decision-making. Local government units through the concerned departments such as social welfare and promotion of welfare of women and children should come up with different activities that focus on inclusivity.

Since this paper focuses on mothers, it is also recommended to look at the role of fathers in diverse geographical settings to identify their perceptions and societal stigma they encounter. The results shown in this paper is a stepping stone for social improvement through collaboration of the academe and public and private institutions and other stakeholders whose aim is to promote inclusivity and equitable education.

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