Proceedings Series on Health & Medical Sciences, Volume 8
Proceedings of the 6th International Nursing and Health Sciences Universitas Muhammadiyah Purwokerto
ISSN: 2808-1021

Coping Strategies of Parents/Guardians Caring for a Child with Autism Spectrum Disorder: a Phenomenological Study

Shaniah Shane N. Gante[1], Grace C. Lopez[1], Nikko Angelo A. Figueroa[1], Nissi Faith V. Ilumin[1], Hannah Patricia F. Encarnacion[1], Rizza Mae R. Hernandez[1], Aizee M. Duldulao[1], Diocelle Anne S. Eucasion[1], Adrian A. Ferrer[1], Mark F. Dela Cruz[1]
[1]College of Nursing, Nueva Ecija University of Science and Technology, Philippines

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

DOI:
10.30595/pshms.v8i.2017

Submitted:
July 29, 2025

Accepted:
Sept 22, 2025

Published:
Oct 23, 2025

Keywords:

Autism Spectrum Disorder; Caregiving; Coping Strategies; Phenomenology; Resilience

ABSTRACT

Caring for a child with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a profound, emotional, and life-altering journey that demands remarkable resilience and adaptability from caregivers. This qualitative phenomenological study explores the lived experiences and coping strategies of ten parents or guardians in Nueva Ecija, Philippines, who care for children aged 2 to 10 years diagnosed with ASD. Through in-depth semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis, the research identified three major themes: Walking on a Tightrope (the emotional and physical burden of caregiving), Designing a New Path (adaptive strategies and adjustments in daily routines), and Building the Bridge: The Way to Resilience (sources of support and personal growth). Participants described challenges such as stigma, fatigue, emotional distress, and identity loss, but also shared stories of hope, inner strength, and strengthened family ties. Coping mechanisms included emotional resilience, support from family and community, spiritual grounding, and adaptive daily routines. Over time, many families reported improved communication, increased emotional endurance, and stronger bonds. The findings highlight the importance of culturally relevant support systems, including access to therapy, family education, caregiver self-care, and educational support services. The study recommends the development of an ASD guidebook, creation of local support networks, and inclusion of mental health workshops for caregivers. These insights aim to inform educators, healthcare providers, and policymakers in designing effective, compassionate, and inclusive interventions for families raising children with ASD.

Corresponding Author:
Shaniah Shane N. Gante
Bachelor of Science in Nursing
College of Nursing. Nueva Ecija University of Science and Technology
Gen. Tinio Street, Quezon District, Cabanatuan City, Nueva Ecija 3100, Philippines
Email: shaniahshanengante@gmail.com

1. INTRODUCTION

Caring for a child with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a complex and deeply personal journey, marked by emotional, psychological, and social challenges. Parents and guardians often face a wide range of responsibilities that demand resilience, adaptability, and a long-term commitment to understanding their child's unique needs. Although global awareness of autism is increasing, the nuanced and often invisible struggles of caregivers remain underrepresented in academic literature, particularly in low- and middle-income countries. This study addresses this gap by exploring the lived experiences of caregivers and highlighting the strategies they use to navigate the daily demands of ASD caregiving.

Autism Spectrum Disorder is characterized by varying degrees of difficulty in communication, social interaction, and behavior. The World Health Organization (2023) defines ASD as a "spectrum" because of the considerable diversity in how symptoms manifest from one individual to another. While some children develop the skills necessary for increased independence, others require consistent support throughout their lives.

For caregivers, this variability translates into a caregiving role that is often emotionally and mentally demanding. Many report high levels of stress, anxiety, and depression, often intensified by challenges in accessing appropriate healthcare, therapy, and educational support (Warreman et al., 2023). These concerns are not limited to any one region. Globally, approximately one in 100 individuals are affected by autism (Zeidan et al., 2022). In the Philippines, the Autism Society of the Philippines reports a similar prevalence rate, estimating around 1.2 million Filipinos living with autism (Center, 2025). Meanwhile, national data show that more than 1.4 million Filipinos have disabilities, including those with intellectual and developmental conditions (Cordero, 2024). Filipino families caring for children with autism face significant challenges such as limited access to specialized therapy, social stigma, and inadequate institutional support, which are issues that are often more pronounced in rural and underserved communities (Quilendrino et al., 2022). These realities underscore the importance of contextually grounded research that examines how caregivers cope to maintain their emotional well-being and family stability despite these constraints.

While previous studies have examined parental stress and coping mechanisms, few have employed a phenomenological lens to deeply explore how these strategies are understood and lived out in everyday contexts. This study addresses that gap by highlighting the subjective experiences of Filipino parents caring for a child with ASD, situating their coping strategies within the local cultural and social environment. Through this qualitative approach, the research captures emotional nuances and meanings that are often overlooked in quantitative or Western-centered studies. By examining how coping mechanisms are shaped, sustained, and embedded in daily routines, this study contributes a culturally grounded and context-sensitive understanding of what it means to care for a child with ASD in the Philippine setting.

These coping strategies have a profound influence not only on the caregiver's mental health but also on the overall resilience of the family and the developmental outcomes of the child. For instance, research during the COVID-19 pandemic found that mutual support among caregivers contributed to stronger family relationships and increased emotional stability, even under heightened stress (Gagat-Matuła, 2022).

This study aims to examine the coping strategies employed by primary caregivers of children with ASD and to gain insight into their emotional and psychological journeys. By centering caregivers' voices and lived experiences, the research seeks to offer both practical and scholarly contributions that can inform more responsive healthcare systems, targeted interventions, and policies that support the well-being of families affected by autism. Specifically, this study aims to address the following objectives:

1. What are the significant stressors faced by parents/guardians in caring for a child with ASD?
2. What personal or community resources are considered most helpful by parents/guardians in managing the challenges of raising a child with ASD?
3. How do parents/guardians perceive the impact of raising a child with ASD on their family life?
4. What strategies do parents/guardians utilize to manage the daily stressors associated with caring for a child with ASD?
5. In what ways do families adjust to the stressors of raising a child with ASD, and how does this adjustment impact their overall resilience?
6. What implications can be drawn from this study to enhance the understanding of the lived experiences of parents caring for children with ASD?

2. RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological research design to explore the lived experiences of parents of children with ASD in Nueva Ecija. Grounded in Edmund Husserl's philosophy of phenomenology, the approach sought to understand human experiences as they were perceived and lived. It prioritized the subjective realities of the participants, allowing for an in-depth exploration of the emotional, psychological, and practical challenges they faced.

Research Locale

The study was conducted in Nueva Ecija, a province in Central Luzon, Philippines, involving ten (10) participants from various rural and semi-urban communities. The province was selected for its diverse socio-economic and cultural context, as well as the variation in access to autism support services compared to more urbanized areas. These conditions provided a meaningful setting for examining how parents and guardians of children with ASD navigate caregiving responsibilities and cope with everyday challenges within their local environments.

Sample and Sampling Method

In this study, purposive sampling was initially employed to select participants who met specific inclusion and exclusion criteria relevant to the research objectives. This method ensured that the sample consisted of individuals with direct and rich experience of the phenomenon under investigation, in order to obtain in-depth understanding.

Inclusion Criteria

1. Parental/Guardian Role: Participants must be biological or adoptive parents/guardian of children diagnosed with ASD.
2. Parental/Guardian Capability: Parents should demonstrate the ability to effectively manage the challenges associated with raising a child with ASD.
3. Diagnosis Confirmation: The child's diagnosis of ASD must be confirmed through official medical documentation, such as a valid Persons with Disability (PWD) card or medical certificate.
4. Child's Age Range: Eligible children must be between two to ten years old to align with the critical period when developmental concerns typically emerge and families begin navigating diagnosis, intervention, and support needs.
5. Geographical Location: Parents must reside in Nueva Ecija for at least 6 months to account for familiarity with local caregiving contexts, resources, and support systems.

Exclusion Criteria

1. Paid Caregivers: Individuals who are employed or financially compensated for providing care to a child with ASD will be excluded from the study. Only parents or guardians who are not receiving payment for caregiving will be included.
2. Unconfirmed Diagnosis: Parents of children without official medical documentation confirming an ASD diagnosis (e.g., no PWD card or Medical Certificate) are not eligible.
3. Co-occurring Diagnoses in the Child: Exclude children with significant additional medical or developmental conditions (e.g., severe intellectual disability, physical impairments).
4. Child's Age Outside Range: Families with children younger than two years or older than ten years are excluded.
5. Non-Residency in Nueva Ecija: Parents who do not reside in Nueva Ecija are excluded to maintain focus on local caregiving contexts and resources.

Following this, snowball sampling was used to expand the participant pool by leveraging referrals from initial participants. Snowball sampling is particularly justified when the target population is difficult to access or when social networks facilitate recruitment, allowing researchers to reach participants who might otherwise remain hidden or hard to identify. Importantly, the same inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied during the snowball phase to maintain consistency and methodological rigor.

A recent review by (Memon et al., 2024) explains that this combination is highlighted as effective for reaching hidden or hard-to-reach populations, ensuring both targeted recruitment and broader inclusion to achieve sufficient depth and diversity of perspectives. The review further notes that this method supports data saturation and enhances the credibility of findings by facilitating triangulation and corroboration from multiple sources.

Scope and Delimitation

This phenomenological study aimed to gain insight into the salient stressors experienced by the caregivers, the coping strategies they used, and the support resources that helped them overcome challenges in everyday life. The study also discussed how raising a child with ASD affected family life and the various ways families adapted to such stressors, particularly in terms of resilience and adaptation.

The study included parents or guardians of children aged two to ten years old with a confirmed diagnosis of ASD, excluding those with other co-occurring disorders or children aged above ten years old. Participants were selected from a specific geographical area, limiting the findings to that region’s context. The study used a qualitative approach, relying on in-depth interviews to gather personal experiences, and did not focus on broader policy-level issues.

Research Instrument

This phenomenological study utilized a semi-structured interview guide to collect detailed narratives. The guide included open-ended questions that focused on the challenges these parents face, such as caregiver difficulties, access to support services, and societal stigma. It also explored coping strategies and their effects on family dynamics, taking into account socio-economic, emotional, and psychological factors. The interviews aimed to empower parents by sharing insights that could benefit others in similar situations.

Data Gathering Procedures

The process of gathering data started with receiving authorization from the Dean of the College of Nursing and developing a detailed interview protocol. The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with 10 parents/guardians of children diagnosed with ASD in Nueva Ecija, Philippines. The interview guide included open-ended questions that focused on emotional well-being, caregiving challenges, and sources of support. The interviews took place in a private setting, either in person or via secure video conferencing, to ensure confidentiality and voluntary participation. Each interview lasted between sixty (60) and ninety (90) minutes and was audio-recorded with the participants' consent to facilitate accurate data collection. Following the interviews, transcripts were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify key patterns and themes.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was employed in this study to examine data from interviews with parents/guardians of children with ASD. This approach effectively identified significant patterns and themes that reflected the participants' lived experiences. As noted by Naeem et al. (2023), thematic analysis enables researchers to systematically analyze qualitative data, resulting in a deeper understanding of insights.

The analysis began with a verbatim transcription of the interviews, followed by multiple readings to fully comprehend the participants' stories. Key quotes related to stressors, coping resources, parental perceptions, and family adjustments were extracted.

These quotes were analyzed and organized into clusters representing central themes shared by the participants. The themes were cross-referenced with the original transcripts to ensure the accuracy and credibility of the findings. Finally, a member-checking process allowed participants to review the analysis for verification. This thematic analysis provided rich insights into the coping strategies and experiences of parents caring for children with ASD, highlighting both the positive and negative aspects of their journey.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

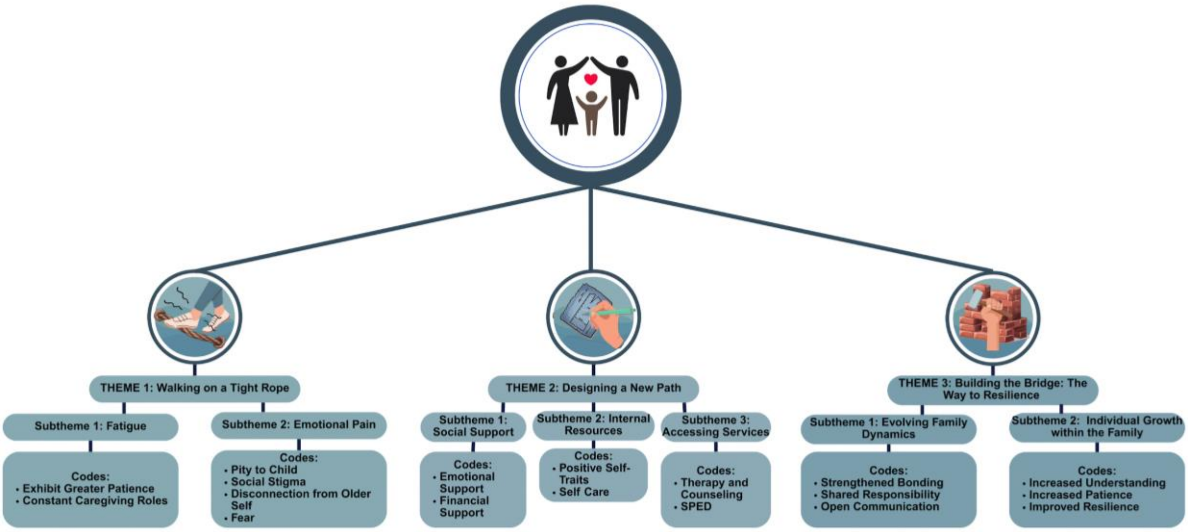

Figure 1.

Figure 1 shows the findings of this study and revealed three major themes that reflect the complex journey of parents/guardians caring for a child with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). **Theme 1: Walking on a Tightrope**, **Theme 2: Designing a New Path**, and **Theme 3: Building the Bridge: The Way to Resilience**.

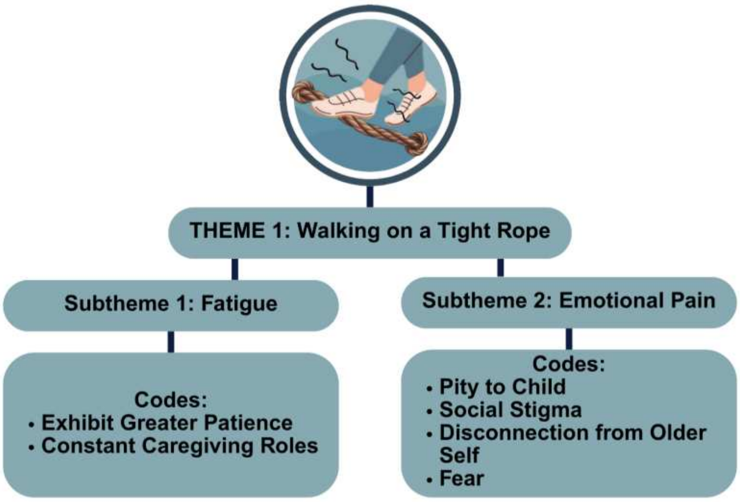

Figure 2.

Theme 1. Walking on a Tightrope

The central theme, Walking on a Tightrope, captures the precarious and emotionally charged balancing act that parents navigate daily while caring for a child with ASD. It reflects the multifaceted stressors they face physically, emotionally, mentally, and socially. The metaphor of a tightrope walker suggests that any misstep could result in emotional collapse, reinforcing the sense of constant vigilance, unpredictability, and overwhelming responsibility. This theme highlights the various struggles that parents or guardians face while caring for a child with ASD. Much like walking a tightrope, these caregivers experience significant difficulties in managing their lives, often questioning how they can navigate this journey and remain resilient. A study by Lindly et al. (2022) highlights the persistent and ongoing exhaustion experienced by parents of children with ASD, noting that caregiver strain often continues well beyond early childhood due to the long-term demands of caregiving. This chronic fatigue negatively impacts cognitive functioning, patience, and coping abilities, creating a feedback loop where parental exhaustion amplifies the perception of difficult child behavior. These insights reinforce the theme’s depiction of caregiving as an intense, unrelenting experience fraught with emotional and physical strain. This theme is subdivided into two main subthemes: Fatigue and Emotional Pain.

Subtheme 1.1: *Fatigue*

Fatigue emerged as a profound and recurring experience among all of the participants. This was not merely physical tiredness, but an all-encompassing exhaustion stemming from their enduring caregiving roles and the necessity to exhibit heightened patience. Additionally, parents experienced burnout characterized by exhaustion and emotional disengagement, this burnout contributed to family conflicts and affected children's emotional well-being. They often feel disbelief, sadness, anxiety, and surprise when they receive the diagnosis. For those unfamiliar with autism, this can be very overwhelming, leading to confusion (Pascua and Dizon, 2022). The accounts demonstrate how fatigue is intricately tied not only to the tasks of caregiving but also to the emotional burden of anticipating the child’s needs around the clock. The constancy of their role results in a type of chronic stress that permeates every aspect of their life. A study by Bradshaw et al. (2022) supports the intricate connection between caregiving tasks, emotional burden, and chronic stress. This research examined caregiver strain among 374 parents of children with ASD and identified key predictors such as disruptive behavior and autism severity. The findings indicated that parents often have inadequate knowledge about their child's condition, which contributes to delays in identifying the problem and seeking appropriate services. Many parents reported feeling uninformed about the disorder and experienced confusion following the diagnosis (Shilubane & Mazibuko, 2020). These factors were shown to contribute significantly to both objective and subjective caregiver strain, highlighting the chronic stress experienced by parents as they navigate the constant demands of caregiving.

1.1.1 *Exhibit Greater Patience*

Parents reported the need to continuously suppress their frustrations, restrain emotional outbursts, and extend patience far beyond what they believed they were capable of. This constant self-regulation, often performed without adequate support, drained their emotional resources. Recent studies highlight the considerable challenges parents and guardians face in maintaining patience while raising children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). In the study of Samsell et al. (2022), it synthesized qualitative evidence showing that parents frequently experience emotional and psychological strain that undermines their patience and caregiving capacity. This stress is often exacerbated by gaps in support from educational and healthcare systems, social isolation, and stigma. Similarly, Hock et al. (2022) evaluated the Autism Parent Navigators program, finding that parental stress, depression, and conflict can negatively impact warm and consistent parenting.

One of the most striking and emotionally charged moments during the interviews came from one of the participants, who recounted a particularly difficult but familiar scene in their daily life:

> *"Kapag wala siyang gadget, hindi siya mapakali, naghahagis ng gamit, ganu'n siya katindi mag-tantrums. Nakakasagad, pero unawain mo talaga, pagpapasensyahan mo," ("**When he doesn't have a gadget, he becomes restless and throws things—his tantrums are that intense. It's draining, but you really have to understand and be patient with him."**) P.4*

Participant 4 recounted the everyday struggle of managing their child's intense meltdowns, especially during moments when routines are disrupted or preferred objects are withheld. These episodes often escalate into physical outbursts, such as objects being thrown, rooms turned upside down, and emotions running high. In those moments, the atmosphere at home shifts instantly, and the caregiver must act swiftly, not only to keep the child safe but also to remain composed despite the rising stress. It is during these times that patience is most severely tested. The parent described how exhaustion seeps in, not just from the physical demands but also from the emotional weight of having to stay calm, gentle, and understanding over and over again. Every day becomes a lesson in endurance, in choosing to respond with care even when frustration threatens to take over. For this parent, cultivating patience was not a one-time decision. Rather, it was a continuous and difficult process that demands selflessness, emotional control, and a deep well of love, especially when faced with behaviors that many would find overwhelming.

> *"Ang hirap, totoo 'yan. Minsan gusto mo nang sumuko sa pagod, sa bigat ng lahat. Pero anak ko siya—puso ko. Kaya kahit gaano kahirap, titiisin ko, aalagaan ko siya hanggat kaya ko, kaya lang nakakapagod din minsan." (**"It's hard, that's true. Sometimes you just want to give up from all the exhaustion and the weight of everything. But he's my child—my heart. So no matter how difficult it gets, I'll endure it and take care of him as long as I can, though it does get tiring sometimes."**) P.7*

These words from Participant 7 encapsulate the profound emotional struggle of caregiving. The burden of responsibility, coupled with the relentless challenges of managing a child's needs, can often feel overwhelming. There are times when the sheer weight of it all pushes a caregiver to the edge, when exhaustion and frustration cloud their every thought. The desire to give up is real, as the constant demands of caregiving wear down the spirit. Yet, despite this, the caregiver's love for their child remains the driving force that sustains them. The child, as Participant 7 put it, is their "puso" (heart). This is the reason they endure. Even in moments of deep fatigue, when every day feels like an uphill battle, the commitment to care remains firm. The exhaustion is undeniable, but the bond between parent and child compels them to press on. For these caregivers, the duty to care is not merely a responsibility. It is an act of profound love and sacrifice that fuels their strength, even when their energy is depleted.

1.1.2 *Constant Caregiving Role*

The constant caregiving role is a major challenge for those caring for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), profoundly affecting caregivers' psychological and physical well-being. Caregivers are often the primary point of contact for children with ASD, and the demands of meeting their children's needs require significant time, effort, and vigilance. This ongoing responsibility frequently leads to psychological distress, depression, anxiety, and even physical health problems. The need to manage intellectual and communication deficits, behavioral challenges, and daily routines can result in exhaustion and restrict caregivers' ability to participate in social or professional activities. Moreover, caregivers often face financial strain due to high out-of-pocket healthcare expenses and, in some cases, unemployment or reduced work hours, further compounding their stress and sense of burden (Tathgur & Kang, 2021).

In addition to these pressures, caregivers must constantly supervise their children to ensure safety, particularly because children with ASD may be prone to wandering or engaging in dangerous behaviors. The unpredictability of behavioral outbursts or meltdowns requires caregivers to remain alert at all times, often leading to sleep deprivation and chronic fatigue. These challenges can also strain marital relationships and limit opportunities for self-care, contributing to a cycle of burnout and isolation (Tseng, 2023).

> *"Dumating talaga ako sa punto na nagkasakit ako dahil madalas siyang umiiyak sa gabi. Namayat ako non dahil lagi akong kulang sa tulog at pahinga, eh matanda na ako." (**"I really reached a point where I got sick because he would cry often at night. I lost weight because I was constantly lacking sleep and rest, and I'm already old."**) P.1*

Despite the growing fatigue, Participant 1 continued to shoulder the responsibilities, driven by an unwavering commitment to their child. However, this experience underscores the hidden sacrifices many caregivers make, often at the expense of their own health. The emotional and physical toll of constant care is not only a challenge to their well-being but also highlights the need for better support systems to help alleviate the burdens faced by parents and guardians.

> *"Minsan nangunguha siya ng mga bagay na hindi sa kaniya kaya kailangan lagi kang nakabantay, laging nasa kaniya yung atensyon mo. Hindi pwedeng hahayaan mo siya mag-isa." (**"Sometimes he takes things that aren't his, so you always have to watch him closely and give him your full attention. You can't just leave him alone."**) P.4*
>
> *"Gusto kong mag-abroad, pero hindi ko kayang iwan siya dahil sa kalagayan niya, ako lang talaga kasi ang hinahanap niya." (**"I want to work abroad, but I can't leave him because of his condition—he only ever looks for me."**) P.6*

Both narratives highlight the intense, round-the-clock care that children with ASD require, and the deep emotional connection that binds caregivers to their children. This constant attentiveness not only demands significant time and energy but also places emotional limits on what caregivers can pursue in their own lives. The findings emphasize the selfless dedication of caregivers, who prioritize their children's well-being over their own personal needs and goals.

Subtheme 1.2: *Emotional Pain*

Caring for a child with ASD brings with it an emotional weight that many parents quietly carry. In our study, the voices of these parents revealed a recurring pain rooted in love, fear, and the unspoken challenges of everyday life. This pain stems from witnessing their child's struggles with behavior, communication, and development, which often lead to feelings of pity and helplessness. A study by Van Niekerk et al. (2023 revealed that parents often experience a significant emotional burden that profoundly affects their quality of life and sense of self, while also contributing to ongoing feelings of isolation, stigma, and psychological distress. In our own findings, many parents shared experiences of guilt and denial, questioning why their child was affected. At the same time, they battle social stigma that causes them to feel judged and isolated in public spaces. As their world becomes centered on caregiving, they often lose touch with their previous identities, personal goals, and social connections. Beneath all of this is a deep and constant fear for their child's future. Many worry about who will care for them, protect them, and understand them once the parents are no longer around. This emotional burden, though often invisible, is heavy and enduring. It shapes their lives in silent but significant ways.

1.2.1 *Pity for the Child*

Participants described moments of deep sorrow when watching their children struggle with behaviors such as self-harm, hyperactivity, delayed development, and difficulty in expressing themselves. These observations often led to feelings of helplessness and pity, not out of weakness, but out of a longing to ease their child's burden. A related study by Hebdon et al. (2022) also revealed that caregivers frequently feel pity as they witness their child struggle with developmental challenges and social interactions. This often evokes a profound sense of helplessness and sorrow. There was also a recurring sense of guilt and questioning. Many asked themselves: Why them? Why their child? These were not just passing thoughts, but deep emotional wounds shaped by uncertainty and a desire to understand what went wrong. Several participants admitted going through a phase of denial at first, followed by a lingering sense of guilt, especially when comparing their situation to others who seemed unaffected.

> *"Minsan napag-uusapan namin na bakit siya pa? Marami namang iba riyan na masama. Nakakadurog ng puso, kung pwede lang, akuin ko na lang, ala naman siyang kasalanan." (**"Sometimes we talk about why it had to be him. There are so many others out there who've done bad things. It breaks my heart—if I could take it all on myself, I would. He didn't do anything to deserve this."**) P.9*
>
> *"Minsan, hindi pa rin ako naniniwala na may ganon siyang sakit. May mga oras na naiiyak talaga ako kapag nakikita ko siya." (**"Sometimes, I still can't believe he has that kind of condition. There are moments when I really cry just seeing him."**) P.4*

1.2.2 *Social Stigma*

Social stigma added another layer to this emotional pain. Parents shared how hesitant they were to go out in public, not because they were ashamed of their child, but because they feared the misunderstanding and judgment of others. They recounted moments when strangers stared during tantrums, whispered during episodes of hyperactivity, or even made insensitive comments. These experiences led many to isolate themselves, not out of choice, but as a form of self-protection. According to the study of Salleh et al. (2022), parents of children with ASD often faced affiliate stigma, internalizing public judgment and misunderstanding of their child's behavior, which led to significant emotional strain and self-imposed social isolation as a means of protection.

> *"Hindi lahat ng tao kayang unawain ang mga batang katulad niya. Masakit lang sa amin kasi minsan talagang may masasabi sila." (**"Not everyone can understand children like him. It hurts us because sometimes people really say hurtful things."**) P.1*
>
> *"Nalulungkot ako sa tuwing naiisip ko kung paano ko siya ilalabas." (**"I feel sad every time I think about how I'll bring him outside."**) P.3*
>
> *"Mahirap noon kasi hindi pa talaga bukas ang mga tao tungkol sa Autism. Tuwing inilalabas ko siya at nagkaroon siya ng episode, tinititigan kami ng mga tao." (**"It used to be hard because people weren't really open about Autism. Whenever I took him out and he had an episode, people would just stare at us."**) P.6*

1.2.3 *Disconnection from Older Self*

For some parents, the emotional toll of raising a child with ASD turned inward, manifesting as a quiet, lingering grief for the person they used to be. They spoke not with bitterness, but with a deep sense of mourning for the careers they once pursued, the passions and hobbies that once brought them joy, and the friendships that gradually faded away. Their days became consumed by the unrelenting demands of caregiving, leaving little space for personal aspirations or self-care. Over time, the life they had once envisioned slowly dissolved, replaced by a reality centered entirely around their child's needs. This was not a feeling of resentment, but rather a profound sadness for a self that felt distant and unfamiliar. It was an identity that had been overshadowed by love, responsibility, and sacrifice. Additionally, Alimohamadi et al. (2024) describe how parents of children with ASD experience what they call "living-loss." This is a recurring grief for the life they had imagined, which gradually gives way to a caregiver-centered identity. As a result, many parents experience a deep emotional toll and a sense of losing their former selves.

> *"Hindi na katulad ng dati, na pwede kang makaalis agad kasi kailangan may magbantay sa kaniya." (**"It's not like before, when you could just leave anytime—now I always have to watch over him."**) P.2*
>
> *"Dati mahilig talaga akong magpunta ng mga party, ngayon wala na, bahay-school na lang kasi kailangan mo talaga siyang bantayan." (**"I used to be an outgoing person. I love going to parties, but now that's gone—it's just home and school because he really needs constant supervision."**) P.6*

1.2.4 *Fear*

Perhaps the most profound and haunting emotion parents expressed was fear—an ever-present anxiety about their child's future in a world that may not fully understand, accept, or care for them. Who will love, protect, and truly understand their child when they are no longer there? It is a question that echoes silently in their hearts, carrying with it a weight of helplessness and sorrow. Goodwin et al. (2022) found that parents of children with autism fear their child's increasing dependence and limited opportunities for independent living, due to growing anxiety and uncertainty about the future. This fear shapes their decisions, their sacrifices, and their hopes. It reveals a powerful truth: their caregiving extends far beyond the present moment and reaches into an uncertain future.

> *"Paano kapag nawala na ako? Sino na ang mag-aalaga sa kanya? Gusto ko sabay na lang kaming mawala." (**"What if I'm gone someday? Who will take care of him? Sometimes I wish we could just go together."**) P.3*
>
> *"Sinasaktan niya ang sarili niya at nagwawala. Natatakot kami, paano na lang siya kung may mangyari sa amin?" (**"He hurts himself and has outbursts. We're scared—what will happen to him if something happens to us?"**) P.6*

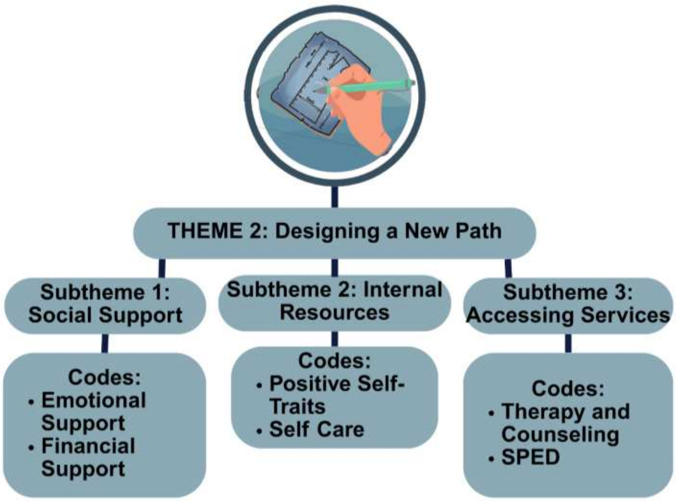

Figure 3.

Theme 2: *Designing a New Path*

While the first theme encapsulated the stressors parents experienced, "Designing a New Path" reflects their proactive efforts to adapt, find strength, and establish new routines and sources of support. When one path feels too hard, they find new ways to move forward. According to Yaacob et al. (2022), resilience is cultivated through acceptance and maintaining a positive outlook. Parents who embrace their child's diagnosis and adopt solution-focused approaches demonstrate a greater ability to manage stress and enhance their overall quality of life. This theme highlights the various coping resources they turned to in order to manage their caregiving responsibilities and sustain their well-being. It includes three sub themes: Social Support, Internal Resources, and Accessing Services.

Subtheme 2.1: *Social Support*

Social support, both emotional and financial, was consistently mentioned as a vital resource in coping with the challenges of raising a child with ASD. According to Sartor et al. (2023), available social support is a valuable resource for parents of children with ASD. Emotional support, such as having someone to talk to about thoughts and feelings, plays a key role in helping parents manage stress and regulate emotions. Financial and practical help, like access to childcare, also eases the pressures of parenting. Simply knowing that support is available within their social network boosts parents' confidence and can prevent stress. Research consistently highlights the importance of both emotional and financial support in promoting parental well-being.

2.1.1 *Emotional Support*

Participants found comfort in relationships with family members and friends. These interactions offered a space to share feelings, gain advice, or simply be heard without judgment. As highlighted in the study by Bradshaw et al. (2022), one of the most powerful sources of support for parents comes from other family members. When co-parents collaborate and support each other, parents report a boost in their confidence and a reduction in stress. The presence of supportive family members not only eases the burdens of parenting but also enhances overall well-being.

A meaningful aspect of this emotional support is that it doesn't rely on offering solutions, but rather on the simple act of being present. The feeling of being understood and supported can ease a significant part of the emotional burden. Family members, whether it's a sibling or a close friend, offer more than just advice; they provide a sense of safety and belonging that reassures parents they are not facing their challenges alone. When parents feel emotionally supported, they become more resilient and better prepared to navigate the demands of caring for a child with ASD.

This sense of emotional relief becomes especially evident when parents recount how interactions with their loved ones make a difference in their daily lives. A conversation with a sibling or friend, even without offering solutions, can lift a parent's spirits. The reassurance that someone is there for them, without judgment or expectation, can be enough to renew their strength. This emotional support, though often simple, has profound effects on both the well-being of parents and the overall family dynamic.

> *"May mga araw na pakiramdam ko bibigay na ako. Pero kapag nakakausap ko ang ate ko, kahit hindi niya masolusyunan ang problema, parang gumagaan. Hindi ko kailangang magpaliwanag—naiintindihan niya agad." (**"There are days when I feel like I'm about to break. But when I talk to my older sister, even if she can't fix the problem, things feel lighter. I don't need to explain—she just understands."**) P.1*
>
> *"Sinabi sa akin ng kaibigan ko, 'Hindi ko alam kung paano kita matutulungan, pero andito lang ako.' Nung narinig ko 'yon, okay na ako." (**"My friend told me, 'I don't know how to help you, but I'm here.' When I heard that, I felt okay."**) P.10*

2.1.2 *Financial Support*

Financial support is essential in easing the financial strain experienced by parents, strengthening their ability to care for their children, and enhancing the social integration of families with children who have special needs. Beyond offering immediate material aid, it also allows for a more comprehensive evaluation of the family's overall situation to tailor appropriate support Rantanen et al. (2025). Though many parents faced financial strain due to therapy and caregiving demands, they immediately had the support from their families and those who received financial help expressed a sense of relief and stability.

Indeed, social support is a crucial factor in navigating caregiving challenges. Emotional support is crucial for caregivers, as it helps alleviate stress and improves psychological well-being. According to the study of Mercado (2023), perceived social support, including emotional backing from family and friends, significantly mitigates caregiver burden and enhances resilience. Financial support is also vital, as caregiving often involves substantial economic costs, including medical expenses and lost income opportunities. Recent research by Moghaddam et al., (2023) emphasizes that social support systems, whether from family, community, or healthcare services, play a protective role in reducing caregiving strain and improving overall well-being. By understanding these forms of support, caregivers can better navigate their roles and design more sustainable paths for themselves and those they care for.

> *"Laking pasasalamat ko sa mga kamag-anak namin na tumutulong sa amin. Hindi ko na kailangang isipin ang pambayad sa therapy niya." (**"I'm incredibly thankful for our relatives who help us. I no longer have to worry about paying for his therapy."**) P.6*
>
> *"Nung dumating ang tulong mula sa mga kapatid ko, para akong nabunutan ng malaking tinik." (**"When help came from my siblings, it felt like a huge thorn was pulled from my chest."**) P.8*

Subtheme 2.2: *Internal Resources*

Recent studies confirm that internal resources play a crucial role in how caregivers cope with raising a child with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). High levels of personal mastery are associated with greater autonomy, personal growth, and better mental health. Similarly, self-care practices like exercise, mindfulness, and social engagement help reduce stress and prevent burnout, aligning with the findings of Kurzrok et al. (2021). Maintaining personal interests and strong social support also enables caregivers to preserve their identity and sense of purpose. These findings emphasize the importance of fostering positive self-traits and consistent self-care, as these significantly strengthen coping mechanisms and benefit both caregivers and their children. Intentional efforts to build and sustain these internal resources are essential for a more adaptive and fulfilling caregiving journey.

Beyond external support, many participants in our study identified personal strengths and daily practices that helped them cope. These included optimism, resilience, and intentional self-care. A study conducted by ALBusaidi et al. (2022) stated that emotional intelligence (EI) plays a critical role in managing stress among parents of children with ASD. The study highlighted how parents frequently apply positive reappraisal, an EI-related strategy that allows them to reinterpret stressful situations in a more constructive and hopeful manner. This adaptive ability contributes to an improved quality of life and emotional well-being. As a result, both individuals with ASD and their caregivers are better equipped to face the challenges they encounter

2.2.1 *Positive Self-Traits*

Parents spoke of developing or discovering resilience, patience, and understanding within themselves. They recognized their growth and ability to face daily challenges with strength. Findings suggest resilience is cultivated through acceptance and maintaining a positive outlook. Parents who embrace their child's diagnosis and adopt solution-focused approaches demonstrate a greater ability to manage stress and enhance their overall quality of life according to (Yaacob et al., 2022).

Also, the use of emotion-focused coping, focuses on managing the emotional response to stress rather than changing the situation. Strategies include emotional expression, reappraisal, avoidance, and seeking social support. This approach helps individuals manage their feelings and reactions to stressors, which can be particularly useful when the situation cannot be changed.

Furthermore, resilience can be fostered by making adjustments to daily routines and engaging in continuous learning processes over time. Parents' ability to understand their child's behaviors in terms of underlying mental states fosters sensitive parenting and strengthens parent-child attachment. This reflective capacity enables parents to reframe challenges as opportunities to support their child's emotional and social development, promoting resilience and adaptive parenting behaviors Stuhrmann et al. (2022).

> *"Piliin mong maging positive, huwag mo tingnan kung ano ang kulang sa kanila, kundi iyong kakaibang gifts at talents nila." (**"Choose to look on the positive side—don't focus on what they lack, but on their unique gifts and talents."**) P.8*
>
> *"Lumaki kasi akong hindi mayaman, kaya ito sanay na ako magtiis, sanay ako sa hirap." (**"I didn't grow up wealthy, so I'm used to enduring things—I'm used to hardship."**) P.9*

2.2.2 *Self-Care*

Some parents learned to prioritize their own well-being through simple practices such as taking short breaks, praying, journaling, or engaging in hobbies. Even small acts of self-care provided them with much-needed energy and clarity. Changing the environment was also found to be beneficial, especially for parents of children with ASD, as it helped reduce stress and encouraged greater acceptance. Parents often make adjustments to better meet their child's needs, while also seeking out inclusive spaces that support their child's growth and development.

In addition, it is important for parents to take intentional time for themselves. Engaging in hobbies, going on trips, or simply spending quiet time alone allows them to relax, step back from their caregiving responsibilities, and clear their minds. Some parents also shared that these activities help fill their free time, serving as a healthy distraction from constant worry and offering a brief escape from everyday challenges (Pascua & Dizon, 2022b).

> *"Napapahinga ako kapag nanonood ako ng T.V., lalo na kung ang palabas eh 'yung paborito kong teleserye. Nakakalimutan ko mga dalahin ko sa buhay." (**"I get to rest when I watch TV, especially if it's my favorite drama series. It helps me forget my burdens in life."**) P.2*
>
> *"Mahilig ako maghalaman, gumagaan ang pakiramdam ko kapag nakikita ko ang mga ito." (**"I love gardening—it lightens my mood whenever I see my plants."**) P.5*

Subtheme 2.3: *Accessing Services*

Participants frequently described how therapeutic services, professional counseling, special education (SPED), and access to research resources were vital in both managing their child's condition and supporting their own coping process. Previous research also emphasizes the important role of therapy, counseling, and special education in reducing caregiver stress and improving coping. (Hayes et al., 2023) demonstrated that strong community support plays a crucial role in enhancing the mental health of caregivers of children with ASD, which in turn fosters greater family resilience. Their study found that community support was positively correlated with both caregiver mental health and family resilience. It also showed that caregiver mental health partially mediated this relationship, meaning that the benefits of community support on family resilience are, in part, achieved through its positive effect on the caregiver's well-being.

These findings highlight the importance of accessible and supportive community networks. Such systems not only help buffer the unique mental health challenges faced by caregivers but also promote adaptive family behaviors, including effective communication and problem-solving. As a result, these supports contribute to better outcomes for the entire family. Similarly, Sumbane (2024) found that caregivers' coping strategies directly impact their long-term well-being. This underscores the need for tailored interventions that promote effective coping strategies. Together, these studies emphasize the value of targeted services designed to help caregivers manage stress, maintain mental health, and build resilience.

2.3.1 *Therapy and Counseling*

Parents found significant value in their child's participation in therapy sessions and their own involvement in counseling. These interventions not only deepened their understanding of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) but also equipped them with practical strategies to support their child effectively. The study of Da Silva Neto (2020) analyzed multiple clinical trials and concluded that therapeutic interventions for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) lead to improvements in social interaction, communication skills, self-awareness, and problem-solving abilities, especially when there is strong family engagement. Moreover, counseling has been shown to provide both children with ASD and their parents with practical strategies to address challenges, manage behaviors, and enhance overall well-being. These findings support the findings that therapy sessions and counseling not only deepen understanding of ASD but also empower families with actionable tools to support their child's development and navigate daily life more effectively.

> *"Hindi lang siya ang natututo ron, maski ako rin na magulang. Natututunan ko sa teacher niya kung paano ang mga rapat at hindi rapat sa pag-aalaga sa kaniya." (**"It's not just him who learns—I, as a parent, learn too. His teacher shows me what's appropriate and not appropriate when caring for him."**) P.2*
>
> *"Mas naging close kami ng anak ko dahil sa therapy. Natuto siya makipag-communicate sa amin kahit papaano." (**"Therapy brought me and my child closer. He learned to communicate with us, even if just a little."**) P.4*
>
> *"Malaki ang pagbabago sa amin simula nung pinapa-therapy ko na. Hindi na siya ganu'n kalala mag-tantrums, kaya hindi na rin kami gaanong nahihirapan." (**"There's been a big change since I started his therapy. His tantrums are not as bad, so it's not as difficult for us anymore."**) P.5*

2.3.2 *Special Education (SPED)*

Access to SPED services helped parents feel less alone in their child's developmental journey. Knowing that their child was being taught by professionals trained in autism support provided hope and reassurance. Participants shared that connecting with other parents in SPED settings and building trust with professionals gave them a sense of relief and emotional support. These experiences are strongly supported by current research.

Studies show that special education environments not only offer children with autism tailored educational interventions but also create spaces where parents feel emotionally supported and understood. For instance, Lindner et al. (2022) found that parental involvement in special education is positively correlated with greater satisfaction and a stronger sense of support. Their research highlights that parents who engage with other families and collaborate with trained professionals feel less isolated and more hopeful about their child's progress. Similarly, a systematic review by Cheng & Lai (2023) emphasizes that both social and professional support within SPED settings significantly reduce parental stress and improve well-being. This is largely because parents feel reassured knowing their child is in capable, understanding hands.

> *"Nakakagaan din sa pakiramdam na may mga kapwa magulang akong nakakasalamuha sa SPED na alam kong dumadaan din sa parehong sitwasyon." (**"It's comforting to interact with fellow parents at SPED who are going through the same situation."**) P.7*
>
> *"Doon natuturuan siya ng mga propesyonal. Nabawasan ang kaba ko kasi alam kong nasa mabuting kamay siya." (**"He is taught by professionals there. It eased my worries because I know he's in good hands."**) P.9*

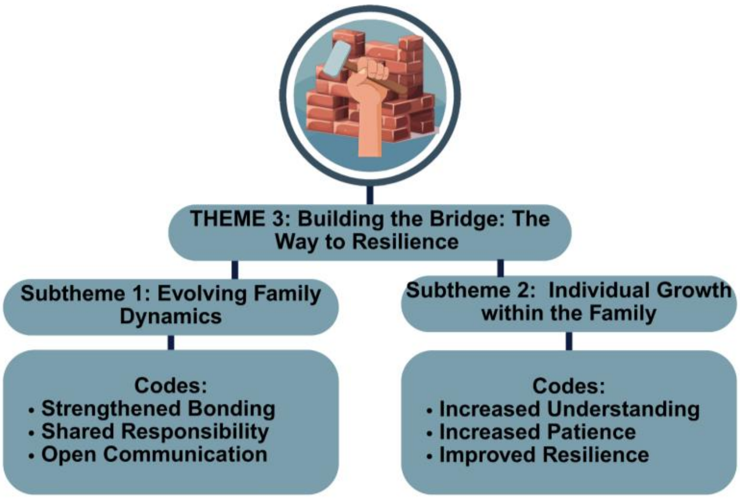

Figure 4.

Theme 3: ***Building the Bridge: The Way to Resilience***

This theme captures the collective journey of families as they navigate the complexities of raising a child with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). It reflects how families work together to build the bridge toward resilience by adapting their roles, routines, and relationships in ways that support their child's needs while strengthening the family unit as a whole. In facing the challenges of caregiving, families develop coping strategies that not only help manage stress but also promote emotional well-being and deeper connection.

The caregiving experience becomes a catalyst for growth, encouraging family members to better understand each other's needs and emotions, which in turn fosters stronger and more empathetic relationships (Chi et al., 2024). Through this shared journey, families embrace open communication, distribute responsibilities more equitably, and provide one another with emotional support.

As these changes take root, individual members also experience personal growth by developing greater patience, compassion, and emotional resilience. Ghanouni & Eves (2023) found that resilience among parents of children with ASD is closely linked to family cohesion, parental acceptance, and positive engagement. Resilient families demonstrate greater unity and adaptability in the face of caregiving challenges. This collaborative resilience is further strengthened through open communication, shared responsibilities, and mutual emotional support, all of which help reduce stress and nurture deeper connections within the family.

These meaningful adjustments were further explored and organized into two subthemes: Evolving Family Dynamics and Individual Growth within the Family.

Subtheme 3.1: ***Evolving Family Dynamics***

This reflects how families undergo changes in their interactions and relationships as they adapt to the demands of caring for a child with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). The experience often brings family members closer together, reshaping the way they connect, communicate, and collaborate in daily life. The presence of ASD in the family often necessitates a reorganization of family roles and responsibilities, which reshapes the way members connect, communicate, and collaborate in everyday life. Although the experience presents emotional, financial, and logistical challenges, it can also foster deeper bonds among family members. A study by Amate & De La Rosa (2024) found that families of children with ASD experience profound shifts in their daily routines and emotional landscapes, often resulting in enhanced family cohesion as a response to shared caregiving responsibilities and emotional resilience.

3.1.1 ***Strengthened Bonding***

Families often develop deeper emotional connections as they navigate challenges together, and the journey of caregiving can play a vital role in strengthening these bonds. The study by Hayes et al. (2023) emphasizes that while caregiving for a child with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) presents significant emotional and logistical challenges, it can also foster increased family resilience. Their findings suggest that with adequate community and emotional support, families often strengthen their communication, cooperation, and collective problem-solving abilities. These shared caregiving responsibilities contribute to a greater sense of unity and mutual support, helping families navigate the ongoing demands of daily routines and emotional stressors.

This dynamic is reflected in the experiences of many caregivers who report a greater sense of closeness and improved family harmony as they work together to care for their child. As they witness progress in their child's condition, some families become more connected and supportive of one another. These experiences highlight how the caregiving journey, despite its challenges, can become a meaningful source of emotional growth and family solidarity.

> *"Naging malapit kami sa isa't isa dahil sa pagtutulong-tulong namin kung papaano namin siya aalagaan." (**"We grew closer to each other by helping one another care for him."**) P.3*
>
> *"Mas tumibay ang samahan ng pamilya namin dahil nagkakaisa kami sa pag-aalaga sa kaniya. Naging mas buo at malapit kami sa isa't isa." (**"Our family bond became stronger because we were united in caring for him. We became more whole and close to each other."**) P.9*

3.1.2 *Shared Responsibility*

Within families raising a child with autism, caregiving naturally transforms into a shared responsibility that involves not only the parents but also siblings and extended family members. This collective involvement helps distribute caregiving tasks and emotional support among family members, promoting unity and creating a more manageable and emotionally sustainable environment. The presence of supportive relationships, such as a dependable spouse, engaged siblings, and active in-laws, helps reduce the sense of isolation that often comes with caregiving. Families who experience this kind of support tend to handle daily struggles with greater ease because responsibilities are divided and emotional burdens are shared. Even when one's own parents are not available, the involvement of other relatives fills the gap and further strengthens the family's ability to cope.

As the child grows older and becomes more independent, the family adjusts to these changes. The parental role may shift from direct caregiving to offering guidance and emotional support. This shift allows the family to regain a sense of balance and create more space for their individual needs. The evolving dynamic reflects both the development of the child and the family's capacity to adapt and work together in sustaining long-term care.

Recent research highlights the importance of shared responsibility among family members as a key coping strategy for caregivers of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). A study by Rizzo et al. (2024) found that a strong social support system, which includes fair distribution of caregiving tasks, involvement of siblings, and assistance from extended family, significantly reduces caregiver stress and emotional burden. When caregiving duties are shared, families report improved emotional resilience, better problem-solving skills, and a higher quality of life. This collective approach makes daily responsibilities more manageable and reduces the sense of isolation often felt by primary caregivers.

> *"Hindi ako nag-iisa sa pag-aalaga; may kapatid ako, asawa, at mga bayaw. Katuwang ko sila, kaya nakakayanan namin ang hirap." (**"I'm not alone in caregiving—I have my sibling, spouse, and in-laws. They support me, and that's how we manage the hardships."**) P.3*
>
> *"Dahil sa sitwasyon niya, mas natutunan naming magtulungan at magdamayan bilang pamilya. Naging malalim yung koneksyon namin sa isa't isa." (**"Because of his condition, we learned to help and support each other more as a family. Our connection with one another became deeper."**) P.7*

3.1.3 *Open Communication*

The emergence of open communication reflects the evolving dynamics of families who have adapted to the ongoing realities of caring for a child with autism. Rather than being a reactive coping strategy alone, open communication became a hallmark of the family's new normal, a way of life that developed over time as family members adjusted to their roles and redefined their relationships. Participants described a shift toward emotional openness, mutual understanding, and non-judgmental dialogue, indicating not just short-term coping but long-term transformation in how the family functions and connects.

A study by Kierenko & Prokopiak (2025) explores how personal resources like post-traumatic growth, gratitude, and coping styles influence family dynamics. The study found that mothers' family cohesion was strongly linked to coping mechanisms and emotional support, while fathers' cohesion was shaped by diverse aspects of interpersonal relationships and self-perception. These findings suggest that open communication and emotional support are integral to family adaptation in the context of raising a child with autism.

> *"Mas naging malapit kami bilang pamilya. Ngayon, mas bukas kami sa isa't isa." (**"We became closer as a family. Now, we're more open with one another."**) P.2*
>
> *"Dati kasi hindi kami masyadong nagkakakwentuhan tungkol sa nararamdaman namin. Pero ngayon, kapag mabigat ang loob ng isa sa amin, sinasabi namin sa isa't isa."*
>
> *(**"Before, we rarely talked about how we felt. But now, when one of us is struggling emotionally, we open up to each other."**) P.10*

Subtheme 3.2: *Individual Growth within the Family*

This subtheme highlights the personal development experienced by individual family members as they adapt to the realities of raising a child with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). The challenges they face often lead to meaningful changes in mindset, behavior, and emotional strength. Individual growth within the family often unfolds in moments of quiet realization, when tempers cool, perspectives shift, and love deepens not despite the challenges, but because of them. The journey is rarely smooth; it is shaped by emotional push-and-pull, misunderstandings, and unmet expectations. Yet through these, individuals begin to change not to become someone new, but to become more whole. There is a growing ability to pause before reacting, to listen instead of defending, and to understand the "why" behind a loved one's actions. Patience becomes a practiced virtue, not just toward others, but inwardly as well. As one navigates the ups and downs, resilience takes root. This is not the hardened kind of resilience, but the quiet strength of someone who has learned to bend without breaking.

It was found in the pilot study of Napitupulu & Kurniawan (2021) that caregivers of autistic children exhibit personal growth as a key dimension of their psychological well-being. Using Ryff's psychological well-being scale, the study identified that many caregivers develop greater autonomy, environmental mastery, and positive relations with others as they adapt to caregiving challenges. The authors note that caregivers who focus on managing daily activities and learning from new experiences report higher levels of personal growth, patience, and self-regulation. Similarly, Feng et al. (2025) found that parents of autistic children who demonstrated higher levels of mindfulness experienced significantly lower parenting stress, a relationship fully mediated by psychological flexibility and resilience. These findings highlight that psychological flexibility—an aspect of personal growth—is not only a buffer against stress but also a catalyst for better emotional regulation and adaptive parenting. Within the evolving dynamics of family life, this growth enables parents to love with clarity, forgive with intention, and stay grounded even through emotional challenges. Rather than being a short-term coping mechanism, such flexibility becomes a long-term transformative resource that reshapes how families relate, endure, and grow together.

3.2.1 *Increased Understanding*

Families raising a child with Autism Spectrum Disorder undergo a meaningful transformation as they develop a deeper understanding of their child's unique behaviors and needs, as well as a broader appreciation for human diversity. This evolving awareness nurtures a more profound sense of empathy and acceptance, allowing family members to shift from a mindset of control to one of connection. As they let go of unrealistic expectations and begin to embrace their child's individuality, they foster an environment where openness, emotional growth, and mutual respect can thrive. This shift not only strengthens the parent-child relationship but also transforms the entire home into a space of compassion and emotional freedom. Over time, caregiving becomes more than a duty, it becomes a path for inner growth. This transformation is echoed in the findings of the study of Koziarz et al. (2021), which revealed that families raising a child with ASD tend to develop a deeper appreciation not only for the child's unique qualities but also for diversity in general.

> *"Natutunan naming wala talagang perpekto, kaya kailangan talagang tanggapin ang pagkakaiba ng bawat isa sa amin." (**"We learned that no one is perfect, so we really need to accept each other's differences."**) P.8*
>
> *"Lumawak ang pang-unawa ko, hindi lang sa pangangailangan ng anak ko, kundi pati na rin sa ibang tao. Tinuruan niya ako maging maintindihin na tao." (**"My understanding grew—not just for my child's needs, but also for others. My child taught me to be more compassionate."**) P.10*

3.2.2 *Increased Patience*

The daily demands of caring for a child with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) gradually teach family members to become more patient, composed, and emotionally resilient. Over time, they learn not just to manage frustration but to respond with calm and understanding, even in difficult or overwhelming situations. Patience, in this context, is more than simply waiting, it means being present, focused, and emotionally available. It is developed through the routines, emotional ups and downs, and challenges of daily caregiving. Love becomes more intentional, and resilience is quietly built through consistent, caring effort. Supporting this, a phenomenological study of Hidayat et al. (2023) found that parents of autistic children develop patience not only by enduring challenges but by consciously practicing self-control and emotional awareness, showing that patience is an evolving strength, deeply rooted in their everyday caregiving journey.

3.2.3 *Improved Resilience*

Through ongoing challenges, family members gradually build emotional strength and adaptability. They become more capable of handling stress, adjusting to unexpected situations, and maintaining a positive outlook despite difficulties. Individual growth often takes root not in grand gestures, but in the quiet struggles and unspoken compromises of daily life through small, consistent acts of understanding, empathy, and care. The result is a deepening resilience: the capacity to be patient not only with others but also with oneself, and to embrace acceptance as a pathway to peace. Growth, in this context, is not about separating oneself from the family, but about evolving within it, learning to navigate conflict, extend compassion, and find strength amid shared imperfection.

This process of transformation is echoed in the findings of Koziarz et al. (2021), who observed that caregiving fosters a growing sense of resilience rooted in empathy, acceptance, and shared vulnerability. Rather than creating distance, the experience brings caregivers closer to one another, as they learn to recognize flaws, resolve conflicts with understanding, and remain emotionally grounded through unpredictable circumstances. (Hayes et al., 2023) emphasized that resilience in autism caregiving does not stem from avoiding challenges, but rather from embracing imperfection through emotional flexibility and strong interpersonal connections. Their findings highlight that support systems—both internal and external—contribute significantly to the well-being of caregivers. This inner transformation strengthens not only the individual emotional health of family members but also the overall unity and resilience of the family system as they adapt together to ongoing demands. Together, these findings affirm that patience and acceptance are not fixed traits but evolving capacities, shaped over time through emotional labor, meaningful interaction, and a shared commitment to love, understanding, and personal growth within the family.

> *“Sa palagay ko ngayon, kahit na anong hamon pa ang dumating sa pamilya namin, hindi na kami matatakot, dahil nasubok na kami ng panahon.” (**"I think that now, no matter what challenges come our way, we won’t be afraid—because we’ve already been tested by time."**) P.6*
>
> *“Marami pa kaming haharaping pagsubok, pero marami na rin kaming nalampasan, at doon kami humuhugot ng lakas para magpatuloy.” (**"We still have many trials ahead, but we’ve also overcome so many—and that’s where we draw strength to keep going."**) P.9*

4. CONCLUSION

This study revealed that caring for a child with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) presents ongoing emotional, physical, and social challenges for parents and guardians. Despite these stressors, caregivers demonstrate remarkable adaptability through various coping mechanisms such as acceptance, faith, self-care, and seeking support from family, professionals, and community resources. These strategies help them maintain balance and sustain their well-being amid the demands of caregiving.

Beyond managing daily challenges, caregiving emerges as a transformative experience that fosters emotional growth, patience, and stronger family bonds. Families who embrace flexibility and a positive outlook develop resilience that allows them to thrive despite adversity. Ultimately, caring for a child with ASD is not only a test of endurance but also an opportunity for personal and relational growth, highlighting the need for sustained social and institutional support to further empower these families.

REFERENCES

ALBusaidi, A. M. S., ALMasroori, S. A. S., Awladthani, B. M. S., ALKhaldi, S. A., Al Alawi, N., & Al Salmani, A. A. (2022). Quality of life and coping strategies used by parents of children with autism spectrum disorder in Oman. *Autism & Developmental Language Impairments*, *7*, 23969415221142262. https://doi.org/10.1177/23969415221142262

Alimohamadi, A., Ghasemzadeh, M., Fooladi, F., Abdolmohamadi, K., Killikelly, C., & Janghorbanian, Z. (2024). Living-loss: A narrative synthesis review of the grief process in parents of children with autism spectrum disorder. *Journal of Pediatric Nursing*, *77*, e97–e107. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pedn.2024.03.036

Bradshaw, J., Wolfe, K., Hock, R., & Scopano, L. (2022). Advances in Supporting Parents in Interventions for Autism Spectrum Disorder. *Pediatric Clinics of North America*, *69*(4), 645–656. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pcl.2022.04.002

Center, C. M. (2025). *National Autism Consciousness Week*. Capitol Medical Center, Inc. | Quezon City.

https://capitolmedical.com.ph/event-sannouncement/national-autism-consciousness-week/

Cheng, A. W. Y., & Lai, C. Y. Y. (2023). Parental stress in families of children with special educational needs: A systematic review. *Frontiers in Psychiatry*, *14*, 1198302. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyt.2023.1198302

Chi, N.-C., Han, S., Lin, S.-Y., Fu, Y.-K., Zhu, Z., Nakad, L., & Demiris, G. (2024). Resilience-enhancing interventions for family caregivers: A systematic review. *Chronic Illness*, *20*(2), 199–220. https://doi.org/10.1177/17423953231174928

Cordero, D. A. (2024). Children with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities in the Philippines: Challenges

and interventions. *Global Pediatric Health, 11*. https://doi.org/10.1177/2333794x241240955

Da Silva Neto, J. A. (2020). Therapeutic Interventions and Their Benefits in the Autism Spectrum Disorder. *Biomedical Journal of Scientific & Technical Research*, *27*(5). https://doi.org/10.26717/BJSTR.2020.27.004555

Feng, Y., Lu, D., Ng, T. Y. C., Chau, P. H., Chan, L. M. L., & Kwok, J. Y. Y. (2025). Mindfulness and parenting stress among parents of autistic children: The mediation of resilience and psychological flexibility. *Autism*, *29*(7), 1849–1863. https://doi.org/10.1177/13623613251328465

Gagat-Matuła, A. (2022). Resilience and Coping with Stress and Marital Satisfaction of the Parents of Children with ASD during the COVID-19 Pandemic. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, *19*(19), 12372. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph191912372

Ghanouni, P., & Eves, L. (2023). Resilience among Parents and Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder. *Mental Illness*, *2023*, 1–10. https://doi.org/10.1155/2023/2925530

Goodwin, J., Rob, P., Freeston, M., Garland, D., Grahame, V., Kernohan, A., Labus, M., Osborne, M., Parr, J. R., Wright, C., & Rodgers, J. (2022). Caregiver perspectives on the impact of uncertainty on the everyday lives of autistic children and their families. *Autism*, *26*(4), 827–838. https://doi.org/10.1177/13623613211033757

Hayes, K. N., Rossetti, K. G., & Zlomke, K. (2023). Community support, family resilience and mental health among caregivers of youth with autism spectrum disorder. *Child: Care, Health and Development*, *49*(1), 130–136. https://doi.org/10.1111/cch.13025

Hidayat, A., Azhar, M., Anis, M., Purnomo, H., & Muliadi, R. (2023). Characteristics of Patience in Parents with Autistic Children: A Phenomenological Study. *International Journal of Islamic Educational Psychology*, *4*(1). https://doi.org/10.18196/ijiep.v4i1.17498

Hock, R. M., Rovane, A. K., Feinberg, M. E., Jones, D. E., & Holbert, A. A. (2022). A Pilot Study of a Co-parenting Intervention for Parents of Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, *31*(8), 2091–2107. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-022-02278-1

Karimi Moghaddam, Z., Rostami, M., Zeraatchi, A., Mohammadi Bytamar, J., Saed, O., & Zenozian, S. (2023). Caregiving burden, depression, and anxiety among family caregivers of patients with cancer: An investigation of patient and caregiver factors. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *14*, 1059605. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1059605

Kierenko, J., & Prokopiak, A. (2025). Personal Predictors of Family Communication, Cohesion and Adaptability of Mothers and Fathers of a Child With Autism Spectrum Disorder. *International Journal of Special Education (IJSE)*, *40*(1), 37–48. https://doi.org/10.52291/ijse.2025.40.4

Koziarz, F., Roncadin, C., Kata, A., Duku, E., Cauwenbergs, A., Mahoney, W., Di Rezze, B., Anderson, C., Drmic, I., Eerkes, J., Dekker, K., Georgiades, K., Hoult, L., Kraus De Camargo, O., Ng, O., Rosenbaum, P., Mesterman, R., Gentles, S. J., Robertson, S., … Georgiades, S. (2021). Investigating the Associations Between Child Autistic Symptoms, Socioeconomic Context, and Family Life: A Pilot Study. *Frontiers in Rehabilitation Sciences*, *2*, 748346. https://doi.org/10.3389/fresc.2021.748346

Kurzrok, J., McBride, E., & Grossman, R. B. (2021). Autism-specific parenting self-efficacy: An examination of the role of parent-reported intervention involvement, satisfaction with intervention-related training, and caregiver burden. *Autism*, *25*(5), 1395–1408. https://doi.org/10.1177/1362361321990931

Lindly, O. J., Shui, A. M., Stotts, N. M., & Kuhlthau, K. A. (2022). Caregiver strain among North American parents of children from the Autism Treatment Network Registry Call-Back Study. *Autism*, *26*(6), 1460–1476. https://doi.org/10.1177/13623613211052108

Lindner, K.-T., Hassani, S., Schwab, S., Gerdenitsch, C., Kopp-Sixt, S., & Holzinger, A. (2022). Promoting Factors of Social Inclusion of Students With Special Educational Needs: Perspectives of Parents, Teachers, and Students. *Frontiers in Education*, *7*, 773230. https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2022.773230

Memon, M. A., Thurasamy, R., Ting, H., & Cheah, J.-H. (2024). PURPOSIVE SAMPLING: A REVIEW AND GUIDELINES FOR QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH. *Journal of Applied Structural Equation Modeling*, *9*(1), 1–23. https://doi.org/10.47263/JASEM.9(1)01

Mercado, J. (2023). *The impacts of caregiving and social support on stress for multiple sclerosis: A study on informal caregivers (Doctoral dissertation)*. https://scholarworks.utrgv.edu/etd/1475/

Naeem, M., Ozuem, W., Howell, K., & Ranfagni, S. (2023). A Step-by-Step Process of Thematic Analysis to Develop a Conceptual Model in Qualitative Research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, *22*, 16094069231205789. https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069231205789

Napitupulu, L., & Kurniawan, Y. (2021). Psychological Well-being of Autistic Caregiver: A Pilot Study: *Proceedings of the 2nd International Conference on Psychological Studies*, 60–68. https://doi.org/10.5220/0010808800003347

Pascua, N. M. C., & Dizon, C. A. (2022). Recurring emotions and coping mechanisms of parents with children having autism. In M. Shelley & I. Sahin (Eds.), *Studies on Education, Science, and Technology 2021* (pp. 147–184). ISTES Organization.

Quilendrino, M. I. O., Castor, M. A. R., Mendoza, N. R. N. P., Vea, J. R., & Castillo-Carandang, N. T. (2022). The Direct Cost of Autism and its Economic Impact on the Filipino Family. *Acta Medica Philippina*, *56*(9). https://doi.org/10.47895/amp.v56i9.5005

Rantanen, T., Juvonen, T., Eklund, K., & Toikko, T. (2025). The role of financial support in preventing the need for child protection services: A mixed method study on the effects and pathways of additional income support. *European Journal of Social Work*, *28*(2), 231–244. https://doi.org/10.1080/13691457.2024.2344014

Rizzo, A., Sorrenti, L., Commendatore, M., Mautone, A., Caparello, C., Maggio, M. G., Özaslan, A., Karaman, H., Yıldırım, M., & Filippello, P. (2024). Caregivers of Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders: The Role of Guilt Sensitivity and Support. *Journal of Clinical Medicine*, *13*(14), 4249. https://doi.org/10.3390/jcm13144249

Salleh, N. S., Tang, L. Y., Jayanath, S., & Lim Abdullah, K. (2022). An Explorative Study of Affiliate Stigma, Resilience, and Quality of Life Among Parents of Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). *Journal of Multidisciplinary Healthcare*, *Volume 15*, 2053–2066. https://doi.org/10.2147/JMDH.S376869

Samsell, B., Lothman, K., Samsell, E. E., & Ideishi, R. I. (2022). Parents' experiences of caring for a child with autism spectrum disorder in the United States: A systematic review and metasynthesis of qualitative evidence. *Families, Systems, & Health*, *40*(1), 93–104. https://doi.org/10.1037/fsh0000654

Sánchez Amate, J. J., & Luque De La Rosa, A. (2024). The Effect of Autism Spectrum Disorder on Family Mental Health: Challenges, Emotional Impact, and Coping Strategies. *Brain Sciences*, *14*(11), 1116. https://doi.org/10.3390/brainsci14111116

Sartor, T., Sons, S., Kuhn, J.-T., & Tröster, H. (2023). Coping resources and stress due to demands in parents to children with autism spectrum disorder. *Frontiers in Rehabilitation Sciences*, *4*, 1240977. https://doi.org/10.3389/fresc.2023.1240977

Shilubane, H., & Mazibuko, N. (2020). Understanding autism spectrum disorder and coping mechanism by parents: An explorative study. *International Journal of Nursing Sciences*, *7*(4), 413–418. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijnss.2020.08.003

Stuhrmann, L. Y., Göbel, A., Bindt, C., & Mudra, S. (2022). Parental Reflective Functioning and Its Association With Parenting Behaviors in Infancy and Early Childhood: A Systematic Review. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *13*, 765312. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.765312

Sumbane, G. O. (2024). Coping strategies adopted by caregivers of children with autism in the Limpopo Province, South Africa. *African Journal of Disability*, *13*. https://doi.org/10.4102/ajod.v13i0.1384

Tathgur, M. K., & Kang, H. K. (2021). Challenges of the Caregivers in Managing a Child with Autism Spectrum Disorder—A Qualitative Analysis. *Indian Journal of Psychological Medicine*, *43*(5), 416–421. https://doi.org/10.1177/02537176211000769

Thomas Hebdon, M. C., Jones, M., Neller, S., Kent-Marvick, J., Thomas, M., Stewart, E., Aaron, S., Wilson, C., Peterson, N., & Ellington, L. (2022). Stress and Supportive Care Needs of Millennial Caregivers: A Qualitative Analysis. *Western Journal of Nursing Research*, *44*(3), 205–213. https://doi.org/10.1177/01939459211056689

Tseng, A. (2023). Brief Report: Above and Beyond Safety: Psychosocial and Biobehavioral Impact of Autism-Assistance Dogs on Autistic Children and their Families. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, *53*(1), 468–483. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-021-05410-0

Van Niekerk, K., Stancheva, V., & Smith, C. (2023). Caregiver burden among caregivers of children with autism spectrum disorder. *South African Journal of Psychiatry*, *29*. https://doi.org/10.4102/sajpsychiatry.v29i0.2079

Warreman, E. B., Lloyd, S. E., Nooteboom, L. A., Leenen, P. J. M., Terry, M. B., Hoek, H. W., Van Rossum, E. F. C., Vermeiren, R. R. J. M., & Ester, W. A. (2023). Psychological, behavioural, and physical aspects of caregiver strain in autism-caregivers: A cohort study. *eClinicalMedicine*, *64*, 102211. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eclinm.2023.102211

WHO. (n.d.). *Autism*. https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/autism-spectrum-disorders?

Yaacob, W. N. W., Yaacob, L. H., Zulkifli, M. M., & Muhamad, R. (2022). A Journey towards Resilience: Coping Strategies Adopted by Parents with Children Having Autism Spectrum Disorder in Northeast Malaysia. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, *19*(4), 2458. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph19042458

Zeidan, J., Fombonne, E., Scorah, J., Ibrahim, A., Durkin, M. S., Saxena, S., Yusuf, A., Shih, A., & Elsabbagh, M. (2022). Global prevalence of autism: A systematic review update. *Autism Research*, *15*(5), 778–790. https://doi.org/10.1002/aur.2696