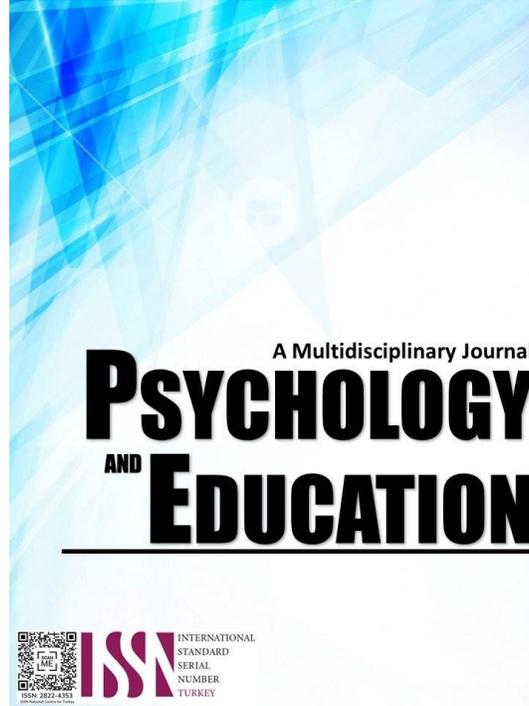


BEING A SIBLING TO AN INDIVIDUAL WITH SPECIAL NEEDS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY



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Being a Sibling to an Individual with Special Needs: A Phenomenological Study

Princess Hermione M. Cerbito,* Andrea Grace A. Gamutan, Nicole Jade J. Janiola, Jun Y. Badie
For affiliations and correspondence, see the last page.

Abstract

This study explored the experiences of being a sibling to an individual with special needs. This study aimed to gain insights on the experience of being a sibling to an individual with special needs, specifically answering the following questions; how may the experience of being a sibling to an individual with special needs be described, what is the meaning of their experience of being a sibling to an individual with special needs and what essence can be formulated based on the findings of the study. Six participants were interviewed based on the inclusion criteria of the study. This study was conducted at Barangay Zone III, City of Koronadal. The researchers utilized Colaizzi's seven-step method in data analysis. This study offers a new perspective on family dynamics and the lived experiences of siblings within families with children who have special needs. The findings reveal that being a sibling in this context is particularly challenging, as they often assume and fulfill parental roles and responsibilities. The themes that emerged from the SOP 1 are the following; self-sacrifice, selfless caregiving, compassionate caregiving, empathic understanding, and self-development. For SOP 2 the themes that emerged are fortitude, developing personal and emotional awareness and embracing optimism. The essence of this study describes this phenomenon as "a state of altruistic commitment". This study contributes valuable insights for parents, educators, and support systems in understanding and addressing the needs of siblings of individuals with special needs.

Keywords: *siblings, special needs, experiences, challenges, responsibilities, altruism, commitment*

Introduction

Being a sibling is like living with two sides of a coin—on the first side, there is joy, companionship, and a deep sense of connection; on the other, there are challenges, sacrifices, and unexpected responsibilities, and this is particularly true if the sibling has a brother or sister with special needs. There will be times when parents are not present because they have to work to support the family, the ones who would fill in their shoes as the primary caregivers are the siblings, and there exists a duality in this experience (Dariotis et al., 2023).

On the side of companionship, and a deep sense of connection, some siblings experience profound sense of love and connection with the brother or sister with special needs helping them with tasks they struggle to do themselves (Mophosho et al., 2010) and caregiving made siblings mature faster and this sense of maturity leads to personal growth and development, inspiring some siblings to pursue careers in caregiving or special education (Marks et al., 2005; Paul et al., 2022). On the other hand, they also make sacrifices (Leane, 2019), stating that siblings prioritize the needs of their disabled sibling above their own and are frequently sidelined, particularly when they require additional attention from their parents (Victor et al., 2021).

While there is a growing body of research on the sibling experience, much of the existing literature is derived from Western contexts, this creates a gap in understanding this phenomenon in other cultural settings. The researchers sought to bridge this gap by exploring the experiences of Filipino siblings in the City of Koronadal. This study is relevant as it sheds light on the perspectives of a sibling to an individual with special needs. Through this study, the researchers hoped to address critical questions on how siblings describe their experiences of having a brother or sister with special needs, and the meaning and essence of this experience. The insights gained from this study contributed to a broader understanding of the sibling experience in families with children with special needs, and the culturally relevant information served as a guide in the creation of support systems that address the needs of Filipino siblings of individuals with special needs.

Research Questions

This study aimed to gain insights on the experience of being a sibling to an individual with special needs. Specifically, it answered the following questions:

1. How may the experience of being a sibling to an individual with special needs be described?
2. What is the meaning of their experience of being a sibling to an individual with special needs?
3. What essence can be formulated based on the findings of the study?

Methodology

Research Design

The study used descriptive phenomenology by Edmund Husserl, delving into the lived experiences of individuals, specifically siblings of individuals with special needs. This approach focused less on the interpretations of the researchers, and gives much importance on the descriptions of the experiences of the participants. The researchers chose this approach, with the reason that it offers a robust

framework for comprehensively understanding the essence of these experiences as perceived and lived by the participants.

Through this research design, the researchers sought to delve into their experiences, while also contributing to a richer understanding of these experiences, its meanings and the essence of their experiences. This research approach is appropriate because it allows the researchers to uncover the intricacies of the sibling experience in the context of special needs, shedding light on the emotional, psychological, and relational dimensions of these interactions.

Participants

The participants of the study were siblings who have a brother or sister with special needs. The inclusion criteria needed to be followed to ensure the authenticity of the data are: the sibling of the individual with special needs aged between 19 to 40 years old and single with educational attainment; high school or college graduate; a working or non-working individual that is a resident of the City of Koronadal, and must be living with their siblings with special needs with at least five (5) years age gap, preferably the eldest sibling.

The age range for participants, 19 to 40 years old, was selected based on Erik Erikson's sixth stage of psychosocial development, Intimacy vs. Isolation, which typically occurs during young to middle adulthood. During this stage, the major conflict centers on forming intimate, loving relationships with other people (Macleod, 2024). For siblings of individuals with special needs, this developmental period is particularly significant, as they may be navigating the emotional and practical challenges of caregiving while also striving to establish their own identity and social connections. By selecting participants within this age range, the study aimed to capture how the experience of caregiving during this critical stage of life influences their ability to form relationships, their sense of personal fulfillment, and how they manage the dual pressures of family obligations and personal growth. The age range also ensures that participants, who are likely to be single, can reflect on the caregiving role without the added complexity of their own family responsibilities, which typically emerge later in life.

In addition, the following exclusion criteria were considered: individuals who are minors, individuals who are married, siblings who have lived apart from their sibling with special needs for an extended period, and siblings living outside of the City of Koronadal. Individuals under 19 years old are excluded in the study because their developmental stage could influence their ability to fully articulate or process their role as a sibling to an individual with special needs. According to Erik Erikson's Psychosocial stages, individuals under 19 years old are often in the stage of identity versus role confusion, where they are still exploring and forming their personal identity, including their role in the family dynamic, the core questions is centered around "who am I". By excluding individuals under 19, researchers ensured that participants who are included in the study are likely to have a more developed sense of self and maturity, which is crucial for providing deeper insights into the sibling experience in relation to someone with special needs.

Moreover, married participants are excluded because their experiences may be influenced by the additional responsibilities and priorities associated with their own family. This could introduce dynamics, such as balancing their family's needs with their sibling's, which falls outside the study's focus. Moreover, siblings who have lived apart from their sibling with special needs for an extended period are also excluded in the study. This ensured that participants have an insistent, ongoing relationship with their sibling, which is essential for understanding current experiences rather than past or more detached perspectives.

Lastly, siblings living outside of the City of Koronadal were excluded. This criterion ensured that all participants shared a similar community and environmental context, maintaining consistency in factors such as access to resources, social support, and local cultural dynamics.

The following are the six (6) participants who met the inclusion criteria of the study:

Ivan is a 26-year-old who helps in their family business, and has been taking good care of his younger brother, who was diagnosed with a mental disorder, for the last 22 years. His long-time caregiving role began during his early childhood.

Emma is a 23-year-old worker, and has been taking good care of her younger sister, who was diagnosed with cerebral palsy, for the last 19 years. Her long-time caregiving role began during her early childhood.

Cristine is a 19-year-old student, and has been taking good care of her older brother, who was diagnosed with cerebral palsy, for the last 19 years. Her long-time caregiving role began during her early childhood.

Mark is a 22-year-old student, and has been taking good care of his younger sister, who was diagnosed with cerebral palsy, for the last 18 years. His long-time caregiving role began during his early childhood.

Paula is a 23-year-old student, and has been taking good care of her older brother, who was diagnosed with intellectual disability, for the last 23 years. Her long-time caregiving role began during her early childhood.

Angel is a 29-year-old worker, and has been taking good care of her older sister, who was diagnosed with intellectual disability, for the last 33 years. Her long-time caregiving role began during her early childhood.

Instrument

To obtain the data for this study, the researchers used an interview guide questionnaire (IGQ) to describe the experiences of being a

sibling to an individual with special needs. This was formulated meticulously so that it aligns with the research objectives and this underwent validation from various experts to make sure that it is reliable. The IGQ contains a series of open-ended questions, and through the use of IGQ, it enabled the researchers to gain insights into the participants' experiences of being a sibling to an individual with special needs.

Procedure

In the beginning, researchers asked permission from the City of Koronadal Social Welfare and Development (CSWD) Office to obtain information about the cases of individuals with special needs. Following this, researchers identified the barangay with the highest number of cases. Barangay Zone III was selected as the focal point of the study due to having the highest number of cases. In addition, the researchers provided a permission letter to the office of PWD-Barangay Zone III to ask if they can access the necessary information that is needed for the study, which included any identifying information such as the name, age, and address, together with this, a letter of request to conduct the study on the said barangay addressed to the barangay captain was also provided.

Afterwards, the researchers generated a list of individuals with special needs, aiming to identify at least 20 potential participants. The list was based on the data provided by the Barangay Zone III. Following this, the researchers conducted initial visits to the families of these individuals to gather more information engaging in a brief one-on-one conversation with the sibling of the individual with special needs. This conversation served to explain the study, assess their eligibility and willingness to participate in.

Focusing on the selected participants who specifically fit the inclusion criteria of the study, 10 eligible participants were chosen to participate in the interviews. Upon identifying eligible participants through the inclusion criteria, researchers provided them with information about the nature of the study through informed consent which consists of details about what the study is about, the procedure, and the risks and benefits, and then asking if they are willing to be a part of the study.

After the consent has been given, researchers gathered the informed consent from the participant, and researchers scheduled an interview session that is mutually convenient to their part, this included time and location where the interview was conducted. Before the interview, participants were informed that they may withdraw from the study at any time if they no longer wish to participate in. Participants may be vulnerable sharing personal experiences that are related to their brother or sister with special needs, however they were informed of their right to refuse participation or withdraw study at any time, this may be due to their own personal reasons (i.e. emotional distress when recalling or discussing their experiences, they feel uneasy about sharing personal information etc.) but are not obligated to share them with the researchers. The researchers respected the participants' decision and did not collect or use any data from those who chose to withdraw.

Prior to the interviews, researchers developed an Interview Guide Questions (IGQ) based on the research objectives and variables of interest, ensuring that it is structured appropriately, comprehensively, and making sure that it is aligned with the study's objectives. During the interview sessions, researchers used the IGQ to guide the conversation, encouraging and probing the participants to share their experiences of being a sibling to an individual with special needs. The interviews were recorded using an audio recording with participants' consent and transcribed verbatim for data analysis.

Also, the researchers made sure to practice saturation in the research by continuing data collection and analysis until additional information no longer reveals new insights or themes, ensuring that the findings are comprehensive. Lastly, the researcher interpreted the data through Colaizzi (1978) after doing so, researchers interpreted the findings in relation to the research objectives.

Data Analysis

This study used the Colaizzi's (1978) method of data analysis in interpreting the data. This method includes 7 steps. The first step involves the transcription of the audio recorded from the in-depth interview conducted from each of the participants, followed by the extraction of significant statements related to the phenomenon being studied from the transcribed responses of the participants, third is the formulation of meanings based from the identified significant statements extracted from the responses of the participants.

The fourth step comprises the organization of the formulated meanings into clusters of themes to describe the experiences of the participants, and the fifth is developing an exhaustive description. This step involves creating a comprehensive description of the phenomenon based on the themes and their meanings, and this description should reflect the essence of the participants' lived experiences. Sixth is drawing out the core essence of the experience or the phenomenon, it involves a creation of a concise summary that represents the fundamental structure of the phenomenon.

Lastly, researchers returned to the participants to validate the findings of the study.

This step is crucial to ensure that the analysis of their responses accurately represents their experiences. This process involves sharing the exhaustive description or fundamental structure with the participants, asking for their feedback and making adjustments if needed and ensuring that the final analysis aligns with the participants' perspectives and experiences.

This method of data analysis was appropriate for the study to provide a clear and structured approach in exploring the lived experiences. It allowed researchers to gather rich, detailed data from interviews, identified key themes, and derived deeper meanings, all while ensuring rigor and validation through participant feedback.

Ethical Considerations

One ethical consideration in this study is informed consent, wherein the participants become fully informed about the study's purpose, procedures, and potential risks through a clear and concise description, ensuring they understand their right to voluntary participation and the ability to withdraw at any time without consequence. In addition, confidentiality and privacy was strictly accessible to the researchers only, with all identifying information and data being anonymized and securely stored.

Moreover, the emotional and psychological safety were addressed, and the participants were allowed to take breaks or skip questions if they felt uncomfortable. Furthermore, after the interview the participants were given the right to review their responses, particularly any sensitive information, and have the chance to request any changes or removals from the data.

The study ensured cultural sensitivity and fair treatment of all participants, allowing them to share their experiences openly. The researchers adhered to ethical standards from NDMU Ethical Review Board and complied with data protection protocols, ensuring the responsible handling of all information gathered.

Results and Discussion

This part of the study presents the tables that contain the significant statements from siblings of individuals with special needs, centered on the problems of the study. These responses underscore how the participants' experiences reflected a significant shift in their lives, revealing how their experiences shape their daily decisions, goals, and emotional well-being. Furthermore, the findings provide insight into the deeper meaning of their experiences, highlighting how their roles as siblings have influenced their sense of self, personal values, and perspectives on relationships and responsibility. Ultimately, these insights contribute to the formulation of the essence of their experience, capturing the core of what it means to be a sibling to an individual with special needs.

The experience of being a sibling to an individual with special needs

This section shows the analyses of the different themes that emerged from the experiences of the participants on being a sibling to an individual with special needs. The following are the themes; Burden of the Caregiving Responsibility, Assumption of the Primary Caregiving Roles, Compassionate Caregiving, Empathic Understanding, and Self-development.

The theme burden of responsibility stands out as a key narrative among the siblings of those with special needs, who frequently encounter significant challenges that change their personal lives and priorities. The participants experienced burden on taking the caregiving responsibilities resulting them to experience limited childhood, juggling both their academic and caregiving responsibilities and it even requires them to mature early. Emma reflects on the heavy burden she carries as a sibling in a broken family, where she is left to assume full responsibility of caring for her sister.

She expresses a sense of obligation, emphasizing that her role was not something she chose but rather something she had to accept due to her family's situation. But nevertheless, despite her challenges caring for her sister, Emma sees her as a source of unexpected blessings, even in difficult times. As there are times someone would reach out to them during moments of scarcity.

“we can call her a blessing gid dai.. tuod-tuod gid na siya. Nang pag wala kami bugas, may mag tawag nalang sa amon nga ‘te, diba ikaw tung may bata nga may cerebral palsy.. te may gihatag ang simbahan..’ daw first time nga wala na kami kaunon.. daw OA man sa wala kaunon pero ng as in hindi na namon bal’an kung may kaunon pa ba kami pag ka next namon na meal.. nga gin tawgan kami sang daw head sang.. pinsan gyapon namon sa church nga nag hatag sila sang groceries kag isa ka sako nga bugas. Didto gid dagdag blessing kami ba ng although hindi kami swerte sa mga raffle pero ano ng.. matawag gid namon siya nga blessing kay daw wala kami ginapabay’an ni Lord nga mahubsan kay bal’an niya may special needs ang manghod ko..” (Emma)

Similarly, Mark feels that he has no choice but to take care of his sister with special needs, as his aging mother can no longer manage the demands of caregiving. Despite being a graduating student, Mark must fulfill his responsibilities toward his sister while simultaneously passing the requirements of his subjects. He finds this challenging to balance these responsibilities, but he accepts that he cannot avoid this kind of responsibility. Nevertheless, Mark still finds it rewarding, as he experiences joy in caring for his sister, who is very affectionate and consistently shows her love for him.

“pero, biskan amo ni amon situation, happy gid ko nga I am of service sa akon sister. Maskin may disability siya, nalipay gid ko and I find joy everytime na gina bantayan ko siya because of her laughs and random na mga kisses..clingy abi siya kag sweet, maka dula kapoy.” (Mark)

Cristine and Ivan share the same sentiments as Emma and Mark, as they also sacrificed their opportunity to fully experience and enjoy their childhood. Instead of playing with other children, they had to stay home and look after their sibling, who required consistent care and attention. This responsibility left them with no choice but to prioritize caregiving, leading to early maturity and a restricted childhood.

“hindi man sa kalain siya anohon pero daw burden siya like on some ano kay growing up you will be restricted nga mag hampang ka sa gawas kay bantayan mo anay ang manghod mo kay may tindahan abi kami so ang nanay ko sa tindahan siya tapos ako sa balay ti bantayan ko ang manghod ko.” (Cristine)

“budlay gid ang magka-sibling nga may special need kay ikaw as a brother kailangan mo gid mag mature at a young age kay syempre may ara sang manghod nga irintindihon pagid kag mas kailangan tuonan sang pansin kag syempre all eyes in him kay hindi siya reliable nga siya lang isa. So ikaw as a magulang di ko gid actually na-enjoy ang childhood kay most of the time ara lang gid sa iya ang oras ko.” (Ivan)

However, despite not having the chance to experience their childhood life, over time, Cristine and Ivan have found joy in caring for their sibling. This shift in perception highlights their growing sense of acceptance and emotional connection to their role as a caregiver. They express a sense of fulfillment in their caregiving role, stating that they now embrace it and no longer sees it as a burden. Despite the limitations it imposes on their social life and personal freedom.

“early in the morning ang manghod ko kailangan mo siya like i- bugtawon.. na halin sa bed niya i-ano mo siya.. dako man abi siya.. so dagkuan abi kami. So pag.. hindi siya makabalo nga.. I mean kabalo siya mag bangon pero like hindi niya bal-an nga after nya mag bugtaw ma ano siya.. so kailangan mo gid siya iguide nga butungon mo siya out of the bed tapos i-guide mo siya sa cr. Kay daw we develop our routine nap ag bugtaw niya ma cr tapos breakfast, after breakfast mag cr naman siya, pag naog niya sa cr maligo siya. Then snacks tapos cr na naman siya ulit tapos.. pag tapos niya sina ma play play tapos lunch.. tapos ma cr na naman siya”

“gipangita ko bala ang joy sa pag take care asta nga na enjoy ko na siya nga daw wala ko na siya gina isip nga burden. Kay uhhh.. I think gina embrace ko nalang siya kung sa school didto ko siya ginabawi nga ay mahampang ko sa mga classmate ko kay karon pagpuli ko sa balay ko hindi na ko sugtan mag gwa kay bantayan ko na naman siya so amo na.” (Cristine)

“Siguro ang very rewarding nga feeling nga makuha ko kay at the end of the day, siguro ng hindi siya magtantrums kag taga adlaw siguro ng safe siya healthy siya. Nang healthy siya ng wala siya gamasakit ng amo na. Amo ng rewarding nga mahambal ko, alagaan ko siya permi sang maayo.” (Ivan)

Aside from not enjoying his childhood, he also shared that he sacrificed many opportunities that came his way, such as his dream of becoming a flight attendant.

“may times gid na nga maisip ko gid na nga, ang manghod mo, paano ang manghod mo? Gina isip ko gid kis a nga, “ako ya pano ko ya?” mga amo na, damo opportunity nag abot sa life ko pero damo damo gid ko sang gi turn down, honestly. Isa na dira ang dream ko nga maging flight attendant, magflight attendant dapat ko stress lang ko subong dahil sa amo na, pero sang una sang nagaprepare na ko, te kay didto man sa Manila abi, te amo na eh, mga opportunity nga layo sa balay, gwas sang South Cot, nang hindi kaya byaheon within, hindi kaya byaheon mga amo na. Usually mga opportunity nga hindi kaya, puli puli-an adlaw adlaw gina ano ko na, gina turn down” (Ivan)

Angel also shared that she had to sacrifice her own dreams and comfort due to her caregiving responsibilities for her sister. As the youngest, she experienced guilt knowing she had the ability to help but couldn't do as much as she wished. This guilt motivated her to strive harder, not just for herself but to support her older sibling, who also struggled with their shared circumstances. It was not easy, but she learned to prioritize her family's needs over her own, even when it meant letting go of her personal aspirations. Taking on this role became a significant part of her identity, shaping her sense of responsibility and how she views herself within her family.

“growing up medyo budlay gid siya kay aga kami nadulaan sang mother so budlay ang pagdako tapos di man kami well off, maka kaon kami three times a day or less amo na ang standard of living namon sana nga time, nga si papa hindi man stable sa work niya. So growing up, medyo budlay gid siya lalo need nga maka support kaman sa family mo, kay may ara abi na siya feeling of guilt gani nga sa imo man nga able ka pero ngaa hindi ka man makahelp man sa family mo, so more on sa imo sina nga as the youngest I need to strive harder to support man kay ate growing up.” (Angel)

The burden of the caregiving responsibility, as experienced by siblings of individuals with special needs, profoundly influences their self-concept, a core framework of identity described by Carl Rogers' Self-Concept Theory. This theory posits that self-concept is shaped by the interaction of the real self (how individuals perceive themselves), the ideal self (who they aspire to be), and the external expectations imposed on them. For these siblings, caregiving responsibilities often become an integral part of their real self, sometimes conflicting with their ideal self. Balancing familial obligations, academic pressures, and personal aspirations forces them to prioritize their sibling's needs, leading to a self-concept rooted in selflessness, resilience, and a deep sense of duty. However, this dynamic also creates internal struggles, as the sacrifices they make often come at the expense of personal dreams and experiences, such as childhood play or career opportunities.

This also aligned with the theory of Urie Bronfenbrenner, the Bioecological Systems theory. Specifically, the concept of the microsystem, which focuses on the family of the participants. Within this context, their caregiving responsibilities are often placed upon them, leaving them with no choice and fostering a sense of familial obligation. In addition, the dual demands of caregiving and academic responsibilities require some of the siblings to juggle multiple roles, leading them to mature early and not having the chance to experience their childhood life. These interactions within their family emphasize their evolving identity as caregivers, highlighting how they have sacrificed themselves in aspects such as childhood, career, and priorities for their siblings with special needs. However, despite this, their situation as caregivers to their siblings with special needs has profoundly influenced them and contributed to their personal development as individuals.

Assumption of the Primary Caregiving Roles

The assumption of the primary caregiving role includes stepping up in caregiving responsibilities, taking full charge of caregiving responsibilities. The participants described that they fill in the gaps of responsibility left by their parents. They assumed these roles despite their young age.

Ivan shared that his parents only provided them with their basic needs and the rest of the caregiving responsibilities fell on his shoulders. His statements emphasize how he took on the full responsibility of taking care of his sibling with special needs. He attends to the needs of his siblings for 24 hours every day and felt that most of his life was spent taking care of his sibling. His caregiving roles started when he was a child until today. He added that it is challenging for him because he needs to balance both his caregiving responsibility and personal life.

Cristine also shared the same sentiments as well wherein, she also took all the responsibilities of taking good care of her brother with special needs such as waking him, guiding him to the bathroom, and preparing his breakfast. However, in her situation they were able to develop a routine that made her caregiving responsibilities manageable and less burdensome.

Moreover, Mark's responsibilities were the same with Ivan and Cristine wherein he also took full responsibilities on his sibling with special needs. However, due to these responsibilities he became an advocate of people with special needs, and also considered her sister with every decision that he made in his life. Paula also shared that she takes on several caregiving tasks for her sibling such as feeding her and washing her clothes. She also added that she bathed her before, stepping in to provide the care he needed. She even felt that she was the second eldest sibling instead of her brother

“Challenging kay hindi mo siya mabay an nga siya lang...maghimos man sa balay, atipanon ang business amo na magclean up. Magclean up sa balay sa iya kag syempre sa sarili ko man. Ang parents ko wala man gid na sila ga kwan ba, ga atipan sa iya ah... Usually, ga provide lang man na siya, gabakal lang sila pagkaon kag ang needs mo ihatag nila. Most of the hours sa isa ka adlaw, sa 24 hours, kumbaga akon gid ng 24 hours nga shoulder ko gid na siya...eversince gamay ko amo na gid ng ginahimo ko, ng bantayan siya nga amo na, amo to wala ko gid na experience ang gina tawag nga childhood...Kumbaga ako lang gid kay feeling ko gani daw most of my life ako lang gid sa iya biskan diin...” (Ivan)

“Kay daw we develop our routine na pag bugtaw niya ma cr tapos breakfast, after breakfast mag cr naman siya, pag naog niya sa cr maligo siya, nagdevelop na lang kami sang routine nga para hindi kami mabudlayan ... nadevelop niya na nga after ko magkaon kailangan ko magbawas ara ma limpyuhan ko...balik balik lang gid na nga ano namon sa balay...” (Cristine)

“May mga days nga akon tanan.. ang ga-alaga sa iya like.. magpakaon sa iya, magpaligo, magkarga sa iya. These responsibilities kay naghelap gid sakon para maging advocate sa ila, then gina consider ko gid ang sister ko in every decision nga gina himo ko sa akon nga life...”(Mark)

“Gabantay ko te sa iya.. tapos ako ang gasukad sang kan'on kay hindi siya kabalo.. kay.. tapos ako pud may time pud nga ako galaba sang bayo niya.. tapos may times pud nga kung mag laba ko sang bayo ko gina apil ko man pud ang iya.. tapos ng ano.. ako pud gapaligo sa iya dati pero karon siya na kay kaya niya naman. Na realize te nga na ang ikaduha nga panganay, kay siya man ang ikaduha...” (Paula)

Emma's experience in her caregiving responsibilities makes her responsible because her mom can no longer attend to the needs of her sibling with special needs due to weakness caused by aging. This is how she assumes the responsibility of taking good care of her sibling with special needs.

“Gapangluya naman si mama, forty years old gapangluya na siya. Wala na siya naga hakwat. Responsibility ko ang vitamins kag ilagaw-lagaw siya. Energetic ka man o hindi may responsibilidad ka nga hakwaton siya, paliguan siya, pakan on siya...” (Emma)

Furthermore, their selfless efforts show how well they navigate their assumed responsibility and filling in the gaps left by their parents. They become selfless and take the responsibility on their shoulders even at a young age. A study from Kale et al. (2020), which is about the participation of children in caregiving of their siblings with special needs and peer relationship in rural Turkey, stated that siblings with special needs mostly encounter different roles and responsibilities to support their brother or sister with special needs. They often adapt to the demands of the responsibility of being the primary caregiver and assuming the roles of their parents. Commonly, elder siblings assume roles like attending to their basic needs such as, feeding, bathing, and even carrying their brother or sister with special needs when needed. These roles extend in providing constant support reflecting a deeper emotional and practical commitment they do in their family.

Compassionate Caregiving

Compassionate caregiving explains how siblings with a brother or sister with special needs develop genuine affection, empathy and motivation for them to improve the quality of life in their family. It reflects how their roles influenced their full understanding of the roles and responsibilities that they take on as a sibling.

Ivan develops compassionate caregiving in a way that he can sacrifice his personal goals to provide the needs and best medications for

his brother with special needs. Along with this, he becomes empathetic towards others as well as patient and understanding regardless of the situation they are in. He also added that in every decision that he makes his brother will always be in consideration.

“Most of the plans nga gina himo ko kay, ang decision ko dapat maka benefit gid ang manghod ko. Gusto ko magmanggaranon para maprovide ko ang best healthcare nga pwede sa case niya , nang maka live man siya comfortably... at least safe man ang tao nga palibot sa iya... (Ivan)

Despite the burden that she feels, Cristine always finds joy in her experiences together with Mark and Angel as they share their journey of understanding responsibility. Their stories show how the roles of caregiving responsibilities for their siblings have shaped them into responsible and compassionate individuals. To them, becoming a compassionate caregiver becomes a fulfillment.

This has made them advocates for their sibling's needs and challenges. Such a sense of responsibility creates deep commitment to the well-being of their sibling, influencing their decision-making processes and character. In balancing their caregiving roles with personal aspirations, they show the transformative power of caregiving in making you love the commitment that they share with their siblings.

Mark shares his experience both rewarding and challenging. He is happy that he can serve his sister and he find joy as well every time his sister laughs and randomly kisses him. However, it is difficult to take good care of her especially if he needed to carry her, he added that her clinginess can ease the burden that he feels. He can feel the gratitude of his sister through her smiles.

“Happy gid ko nga I am of service sa akon sister. Miskan may disability siya, nalipay gid ko and I find joy every time na gina bantayan ko siya because of her laughs and random na mga kisses, maka dula kapoy. Although truth be told, budlay gid mag- alaga, pero okay lang. If may occasion, gina karga ko gid siya and bug at gid bala siya. Amo na nang challenging gid siya nga part eh.” (Mark)

Angel's experience was no different. For her being responsible means to be accountable, she shows the love and genuine affection towards her sister by being an emotional supporter, at the same time a provider of their basic needs. She also has this compassion wherein she can relate to others regardless of their condition. To her, one should treat everyone with equality. No one should be left out. She has compassion towards them because she is aware of what it feels like to be in their situation.

“It's not about lang giving sa iya sang kung ano man ang kinahanglanon niya, more likely emotional. Marelate mo ang sarili mo with other people and also hindi lang sa other nga same sa kay sister mo with special needs but also to those people nga related bala sa ila haw. You can have this compassion man sa ila nga maintindihan mo bala nga may correlation kamo, magkaroon ka sang heart of being a giver and be compassionate to that person kay bal an mo man kung ano ang feeling man nila...” (Angel)

In relation to Urie Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological theory, the microsystem refers to the direct environment where individuals interact daily. The participants, through their daily interactions with their sibling, particularly as a primary caregiver, experience a profound impact on their personal lives. These experiences enable them to develop genuine affection, a deep sense of loving commitment, and enduring patience, which extends to their interactions with others. Their involvement highlights how they grow into better individuals who nurture others and maintain a positive perspective, even during the most challenging times.

Emphatic Understanding

Emphatic understanding focuses on being inclusive, kind, respectful, patient and a sense of compassion. This deals with how their experience influenced their values, behaviors, and decision making. Emma experienced that other people would think low of you especially if you have a disability. However, Emma did not agree with this, instead she thinks that one should be there to protect them. She describes that her values stand for a purpose which is treating others fairly. It shows that Emma develops respect from her experience of being a sibling to an individual with special needs that influence her values, behaviors and decision-making.

“Dapat very formal ka kapag tupad mo ang may disability, ng dapat may boundaries bala. May ara iban nga daw gina take nila as low ang may ara disability... dapat ikaw nga ara sa likod satung may disability ang mag up, maghambal nga hindi niyo na basta basta. Dapat ikaw gid magstand, ang values mo sa life bala, tuod tung hambal ko gina nga maskin sin o dapat fair ang treatment.” (Emma)

Cristine develops her understanding of responsibility in a way that she becomes kinder and considerate. She also makes sure that the values and behavior she shows to her sibling is good rather than violent attitudes. She feels that it shaped her behavior because it caused her to be composed all the time and does not act aggressively towards her sister. She always makes sure that her sibling will instill good values and behaviors. In addition, when deciding on something she prioritizes the condition of her sibling because she is her utmost priority all the time. Paula, however, feels different but she still understands the condition of her sibling with special needs, she was able to develop a sense of compassion from her experience. She was able to relate with others who had the same condition as her brother.

“Pirmi ko may ara reservation towards my action kay sa balay kailangan ipakita mo sa iya kung ano ang tama para in a same manner magaya ka niya. Nagshape gid siya sang behavior ko kay daw budlay man nga magpakita ka sang violent na aggression sa balay kay basi sun on niya.” (Cristine)

“more on understanding gid kag patience, kay kis-a may time nga malagot gyud ko te pero gina intindi ko na lang na ana, imbes na masuko ko gina pabay-an ko nalang. Pagmakakita ko na anon ga pareha sa akong kuya nang maluoy ko sa ila tapos nami akon treatment

sa ila..." (Paula)

Moreover, Mark shares that because of his experience he becomes empathic. He was able to develop an understanding of the situation first before doing something. He would weigh the situation first before taking a step. He does not also act on impulse and would think twice on what should be his next step. Just like the other participants, he always puts his sibling utmost priority in everything that he does. He would see to it that his sibling would be comfortable with the situation. It helped him develop an enduring patience that leads him to rethink his actions and decisions in life.

"Nakabulig gid siya sakon day-to-day life kay gina try ko gid siya intindi kay para hindi ko maka himo sang mga bagay nga hindi dapat..." (Mark)

In relation to Carl Rogers' Self-Concept Theory, focusing on self-image wherein it refers to how individuals perceive themselves, influenced by their roles and experiences. The participants' caregiving role profoundly shapes their self-image, as they see themselves not just as a sibling but as a nurturer and decision-maker, balancing their personal dreams with their siblings' needs. Over time, however, these challenges foster emotional growth, resilience, and a sense of purpose. By prioritizing their siblings in every decision and providing unconditional love, their self-image evolves to encompass qualities like empathy, inclusivity, and adaptability, ultimately reinforcing their identity as an empathic, compassionate and responsible individual.

Self-development

The theme self-development captures how caregiving responsibilities profoundly shape the personal growth of siblings of individuals with special needs. This journey of self-discovery is marked by their evolving roles. Emma's caregiving responsibility to her sister taught her to become independent and a resourceful individual. She learned to find ways to survive on her own, which made her realize she could take care of herself without relying on others.

Her caregiving experience also boosted her confidence in caring for others, such as the elderly since she already knew how to take care of those ill people. This experience contributed significantly to her personal growth, increasing her resilience, independence, and emotional strength.

"daw mas naging kaya ko mag buhi sa sarili ko... Daw gitudluan niya ko nga.. you can live without others nga ako lang gid... gin tudluan niya ko paano makapangita paagi para maka survive. Gin tudluan niya ko pano maging strong, maging independent" (Emma)

Similarly, Angel was influenced by her sister to approach life with greater gratitude, especially for the simple and often overlooked blessings. Her experience shows her growth in becoming more compassionate and appreciative, and that being a sister to someone who has special needs shaped her into someone who values patience, kindness, and gratitude for her own circumstances. She expressed that serving and supporting her sister not only brings her joy but also allows her to show appreciation for the small things in life.

"..maging compassionate ka kay naintindihan mo nga bless ka in more.. in most ways pagid bala haw, kay te syempre ikaw able ka, maka lakat ka anytime.. mas marealize mo ang blessings nga may ara ka dahil may tao ka nakita nga may ara sang kakulangan, amo bala na haw.." (Angel)

Ivan's experience of being a sibling to his brother with special needs has also taught him to be more observant and aware of small, often overlooked details. He described his brother as being highly unpredictable, which means Ivan has to pay close attention to his brother's actions. Despite spending many years together, Ivan admits that there are still moments when his brother's actions leave him surprised, which emphasizes the constant learning process in caregiving. By observing these behaviors, Ivan has developed a deeper sense of attentiveness, understanding that small details are crucial, especially when it comes to taking care of someone with special needs. This heightened awareness has allowed him to become more vigilant and responsive to his brother's needs, further developing his personal growth as a caregiver.

"Maging observant gid, amo gid nang nalearn ko sa iya.. siya abi kay very unpredictable gid siya nga bata gid tana ya. Grabe gid, very ano gid siya, makahambal ko kis a daw may magic, nga ang hulag niys di mo gid mabantayan, kis a, kis a. Pila na kami ka years updanaya ha, may times gid kis a, masurprise gid ko sa iya. Amo na ang pagiging observant gid sa iya." (Ivan)

Cristine and Paula both reflect on how their caregiving roles have deeply influenced their self-perception and sense of responsibility as well. For Cristine, taking on the role of caregiver has pushed her to move beyond her former, more immature self. She now views herself as reliable and dependable, realizing that her sibling's well-being relies on her. This responsibility has made her more mature, guiding her to adopt a more responsible identity that extends into her future. Similarly, Paula, once the younger sibling or manghod, found herself shifting from a position of following others to one of providing care and support.

Through her experiences, Paula now recognizes her growing importance within the family and the necessity of stepping up to fulfill this new, more mature role. Both siblings' caregiving experiences highlight a crucial transformation in their self-concept, from dependence and immaturity to maturity and responsibility, shaping their identities as reliable and responsible individuals.

"..like seeing myself as someone na reliable na kay I can't be immature as I was before kay looking at him daw ma realize ko nga.. hindi man sa ano nga.. hindi siya mabuhi kung wala ko sa sunod. So kailangan i-build ko gid ang sarili ko to be a person that is reliable

kay para.. kay bal-an ko nga sakon lang siya mag salig. So yeah.. great impact gid siya sa kung paano ko i-build ang sarili ko for today kag for the future..” (Cristine)

“Ano te.. mas naging more on.. more on responsible ko, kay dati ano nang ako ang manghod tapos imbes nga gakuya saiya, siya dapat.. ako dapat magsunod sa iya, more on siya na jud ang gasunod sa akon, dapat ano.. dapat caring nagid ko karon kay imbes manghod na ko, gi ano na nako maging .. gi accept ko na sa sarili ko na, narealize ko na “ay” ikatlatlo lang ko nga bata pero ika duwa ko nga panganay...” (Paula)

Carl Rogers' Self-Concept Theory explains how individuals' perceptions of themselves evolve through experiences, roles, and interactions with their environment. For siblings of individuals with special needs, their caregiving responsibilities significantly influence their self-concept, fostering personal growth and shaping their identities. These roles challenge them to adapt and develop qualities such as independence, resilience, and self-reliance. As they navigate caregiving, siblings begin to view themselves as capable and strong individuals who can handle complex responsibilities. This shift in self-perception is a direct result of their caregiving role, which requires them to be resourceful and dependable, thereby reinforcing their self- image as responsible individuals prepared for future challenges.

The Meaning of Experiences for Siblings of Individuals with Special Needs

This part of the study presents the tables that contain the significant statements from siblings of individuals with special needs centered on the SOP 2 of the study; these responses highlight how caregiving responsibilities have contributed to the siblings' deeper self-awareness and life perspectives, emphasizing how the experience has shaped their sense of identity, resilience, and personal growth.

This section presents the analyses of the different themes that emerged from the meaning of the experiences of the participants on being a sibling to an individual with special needs. The following are the themes; Fortitude, Developing Personal and Emotional Awareness, and Embracing Optimism.

Fortitude

Like any typical sibling, those with siblings who have special needs face struggles, but their challenges are often more profound and can be more demanding than those of typical sibling responsibilities. Ivan, Paula, Emma and Cristine's statement illustrate how being a sibling to an individual with special needs has profoundly shaped their understanding of themselves and their lives, and it closely aligns with the theme of fortitude.

Ivan shared that he feels cornered from all sides and also questions his self-worth, his statement reveals a sense of personal sacrifice as well as a sense of being trapped by the demands of caregiving.

“personal ako gid maipit eh sa ila, personal life kag ano, corner gid in all sides so amo na...” (Ivan)

Furthermore, Ivan also shared that he feels stressed about life, family, and personally because he still asks questions about his situation. And sometimes there are thoughts that he admits are out of his control in response to him feeling desperation due to the tiredness he is feeling.

“Nastress sa life, sa family, sa personal nga life kag sa iya eh, stress kay asta subong ma-question ko gyapon “ngaa amo ni siya?”, “ngaa ako”, “ngaa hindi na lang tung damo kwarta no nga maka afford sang best para sa iya?”, “ngaa indi nalang tung damo nga mag-utod para at least wala ga problema, wala ga pasahanay kung sino mag-alaga?”, “ngaa ako lang isa?...”

“In our own world, biskan ako kis a makapoy man ko nga mahambal ko gid nga, siguro mas nami na lang kung isa na lang sa aton nagpahuway ba, amo na. Out of desperate kag syempre sa kakapoy gid eh, hindi ko naman gid abi macontrol kis a kung ano gasulod sa isip ko...” (Ivan)

However, despite moments of desperation and the emotional toll this caregiving responsibility has on him, he thinks it is an achievement in a way that he still has not given up, and he also is thankful that he can still find a reason to continue the caregiving role.

“Achievement siguro in a way nga asta subong kaya ko pa, asta subong wala pa ko naggive up in a way...pasalamatan ko lang kay somehow ma-manage ko gyapon makapangita gyapon ko sang rason ba.. (Ivan)

Similarly, Paula also had moments of doubt where she questioned higher power about the situation, and that in truth there were times where she felt ashamed to tell the truth about having a brother with special needs, but motivates herself to be honest. When her brother is being bullied, which also affects her, leading her to express her jealousy to other people who has a brother who is normal.

“gina motivate ko na lang ang sarili ko nga ihambal ang tuod, kay may times abi nga mahuya ka bala ihambal te haw, nang ihambal.. nga may kuya ko nga amo na, tapos may times nga gina bully siya, ako nang maapektuhan man ko eh. Gina sunlog bala siya, may times aminon ko, may times nga gina tawag ko siya, kay hindi siya maka istorya tapos ano, may times man nga.. magselos ko sa mga may kuya nga normal bala.. kay gaselos gid ko sa ila nga may kuya sila nga normal tapos ako wala. Sadto makahambal ko na kay “Lord nganong dili niya man deserve Lord” nga amo na.. (Paula)

But just like Ivan, she also finds the inner strength, the internal motivation to commit in caregiving, doing everything in her power in

helping her brother.

On the other hand, Emma shared in her statement that her sibling with special needs taught her not to give up, despite the physical and financial challenges she faced in caring for her sibling, she was able to persevere due to the influence of her sibling. Her sibling's perseverance became a source of strength and inspiration for Emma, teaching her to endure and continue pushing through her own difficulties. This experience reinforced her determination to face her challenges and not give up.

“Hambal ko sang damo damo sang problema mo subong ka pa mag suko...gin pa intindi niya sa amon nga damo man problema sa kalibutan, damo man mag abot nga problema sa imo pero hindi ka dapat basta basta magsuko...” (Emma)

While Cristine shared that the birth of her brother with special needs was not what she had anticipated. She had envisioned her family as an ‘ideal family,’ but this experience taught her that life is full of uncertainties. She reflected on how her brother’s arrival made her realize that life is not always as expected, and despite the challenges, she learned to be prepared for the twists and turns that life may throw at her. This perspective, shaped by her caregiving experience, encouraged Cristine to face life’s uncertainties with perseverance and to be prepared for whatever comes her way.

“Sa buhay, like a lot of things would happen na hindi imo inaasahan. So that made life a lot more meaningful kay syempre pag magbata ang mother mo maisip mo na ah ideal family na kami kay girl-boy tapos happy tas we realize nah ala daw hindi gid siya normal. Naisip ko nga ay hindi man sa unfair gali ang life pero like damo gali siya twists and I should be ready for those twists if possible...” (Cristine)

In line with this, the study of Reimers (2016) which is about having a sibling with a disability, concluded that the participants experienced feelings of worry, confusion, and frustration. However, these stories also highlighted their resilience and proactive efforts to tackle the challenges they encountered. Furthermore, the self-concept theory offers a lens for understanding how these experiences impact their self-perception. Reflected in Ivan’s sacrifice and Angel’s self-motivation, their caregiving role helps them recognize and value their own strength.

As siblings to individuals with special needs, their experiences have shaped how they perceive themselves and the significance they place on their caregiving role.

While Mark’s acceptance of life’s unpredictability and Emma’s resilience affects their self-image or how they view themselves, it shows that they see themselves as capable individuals who endure challenges, and how Cristine view her ideal self as a person who is courageous and drive reflected in how her caregiving role shaped her to be a person who is prepared to face life’s twists, and pushes her to become stronger and more determined in facing these uncertainties.

Developing Personal and Emotional Awareness

The participants' caregiving experience have led to personal and emotional growth, shaping them into individuals who have developed a greater sense of self-awareness. In Ivan's experience, he recognized that caring for his sibling involved both challenging and manageable days. This dynamic taught him a valuable lesson about life beyond his family. He noticed that, just like in caregiving, the outside world also has its share of good days and bad days.

"Budlay budlay gid siya bantayan, siguro may mga days man nga ano siya, hapos lang, guro marelata ko ang pagview sa iya kag outside world nga, outside the family, outside sa iya kay may good days, may bad days gid..."

"Honestly speaking, may mga gakatabo sa balay nga hindi pwede i disclose mga amo bala na haw, kag amo na ang maview ko sa outside world ko nga sanay na ko sa bad days, siguro..." (Ivan)

Through his caregiving experiences, he became more attuned to the realities of life, acknowledging both its positive and negative aspects. This awareness demonstrates his ability to process and adapt to the emotional challenges of caregiving, which extends to his view of the outside world.

Through recognizing that life is a mix of good and bad days, Ivan shows personal and emotional awareness. His ability to accept and navigate these dualities reflects his deeper understanding of himself and his emotional responses to the challenges he faces and this growth is a direct outcome of his caregiving role.

Similarly, Mark's experience highlights the emotional growth he underwent, particularly in terms of empathy. He shared that his sibling's condition has made him more empathetic toward others. He no longer reacts impulsively to situations but instead takes time to assess the circumstances before responding.

“naging empathetic gid ko, amo na lang mahambal ko. Sa mga situations na ma encounter ko, I don't react easily.. mas gina try ko na lang assess ang natabo kag from that dira ko magrespond.” (Mark)

This change in behavior was driven by his desire to understand others better and to approach situations with a sense of empathy rather than quick judgment. Mark's reflection shows that caregiving has helped him develop a more thoughtful, measured approach to interpersonal interactions. While Mark shared how he became empathetic, Emma shared that her sibling's condition led her to a

profound realization about life. She came to understand that life is not just about merely existing, but about finding happiness and embracing life's challenges with a positive mindset. Her sibling's condition taught her that problems should be faced with a smile, and while it is important to solve them, it is equally crucial to do so with a sense of joy and hope.

“hindi mo lang need na mabuhay lang dapat kailangan mo man maging happy. Ng kung may mga problema kaman, need mo siya nga i-solve, siguro hindi lang on your own pero kailangan mo siya i-solve with smile...” (Emma)

Emma's experience shows how personal struggles can lead to a more optimistic outlook on life, allowing her to approach difficulties with positivity and resilience.

Meanwhile, in Angel's experience she reveals how her sibling's condition has made her more appreciative of life's small moments. She shared how, through caring for her sibling, she learned to cherish even the smallest things, recognizing the value in each moment, regardless of the challenges they face. And she now views that every pain has its own purpose.

“that's how we view the world na we appreciate smaller things gid nga kung ano man ang gina work ni lord sa amon, we see ahh.. every pain man nga kung ano ang gina agyan namon has its own purpose.” (Angel)

This shift in Angel's perspective led her to a deeper sense of gratitude and understanding of life's purpose, she now finds meaning and purpose in every situation, appreciating the lessons learned from both the struggles and joys she experienced in caring for her sibling. On the other hand, Christine shared that before they have received comments about her brother and despite this, she realized that she should not be quick to judge these people because there might be reasons as to why they behave like that, and that maybe they do not have a clear understanding. Christine learned that she should look at a person not on a shallow surface but look beneath it.

“I learned nga I shouldn't be judgmental towards those person man kay kailangan ko isipon man nga ay basi hindi lang clear ang understanding nila towards this people. Amo na I've learn to really not look into a person nga nabaw lang but to understand nga ahh.. may causes man ang certain behaviors nila..” (Cristine)

The experiences shared by Ivan, Mark, Emma, Angel, and Cristine highlight the transformative impact of caregiving for a sibling with special needs on their emotional and personal development. Each participant's statement reflects a significant shift in their emotional outlook, revealing how their experiences have fostered qualities such as empathy, positivity, and gratitude.

Ivan's recognition that the outside world also has its share of good days and bad days, Mark's development of empathy in his responses to situations, Emma's realization of the importance of facing life's challenges with a positive attitude, Angel's newfound appreciation for the small things in life, and Cristine's realization to look at a person not just on the surface, but look beneath, all illustrate the ways in which caregiving has shaped their personal and emotional awareness as well as growth as individuals.

This aligned with the study and findings conducted by Gine et al. (2022) claiming that having a brother or sister with special needs influenced identity construction, in which siblings recognize how their function as siblings has positively affected their personality and the way they provide meaning to life. Siblings consider themselves more mature and patient, and they have even become more empathetic with others. Their experiences demonstrate how the challenges of supporting a sibling with special needs can lead to profound emotional development, encouraging a deeper understanding of oneself and others. This theme encapsulates their journey toward becoming more emotionally attuned and resilient individuals, enriched by the lessons learned through their sibling relationships.

Embracing Optimism

In the caregiving role, participants in this study have shown to embrace a more optimistic approach in life through their unique sibling relationships. Revealing that it does not only shape their understanding of life but also influences how they approach it. From Cristine's experience of having a brother with special needs, it taught her the importance of courage and determination in navigating life's challenges.

Initially hesitant to assert herself, she found that her sibling's condition pushed her to embrace life with more drive and competitiveness. This shift in her perspective stemmed from her realization that her dreams were not just for herself but also carried significance for her family. The sense of responsibility and inspiration she drew from her sibling's condition became a motivating force in her pursuit of success.

“kis'a mahuya huya pa nga mag bato pero you will be forced nga mag ace sa life nga kailangan competitive ka sa real world kay bal'an ko nga ang dreams ko hindi lang siya para sa akon..” (Cristine)

While Mark shared how his sibling's condition reshaped his understanding of life.

He realized that he does not need wealth and he also learned to be content with what he has, particularly his loving and complete family.

“hindi ko kailangan ang mga wealth diri sa world, nang dapat maging kontento ko sang mga bagay nga may ara ko subong.. like.. family.. nang complete and loving family. Dahil sa iya, narealize ko gid nga there is so much more to life. Nang biskan ano bala matabo haw, life must go on gyapon, nang dapat may joy in everything nga gina himo mo...” (Mark)

His reflections highlight a deeper sense of gratitude and a resolve to find happiness in all aspects of life, reinforcing his positive outlook.

For Angel, the relationship with her sibling fostered a positive perspective in how she approaches life.

She acknowledged that the impact of her sibling's condition on her was overwhelmingly positive, shaping her mindset to view challenges and situations with optimism.

“its more on like a positive approach...positive nga perspective sa akon nga kung ano man ang naging impact man sa akon nga sister ko towards sa akon.. more on like sa positive gid siya...” (Angel)

Her statement underscores the transformative effect of this relationship in cultivating an optimistic and proactive attitude toward life. On the other hand, Emma's experience revealed how her sibling's condition deepened her empathy and compassion. She learned to value people for who they are, regardless of their abilities, and recognized her role in spreading happiness to others.

“may disability sila o wala.. kumbaga kung interesado sila sa kabuhi mo, ng eh ano mo sila.. palanggaon mo man bala sila daw amo bala sina haw.. siguro ang role ko gid diri kay mag pasadya sa iban nga tao...” (Emma)

Her perspective reflects a commitment to treating everyone equally and bringing joy to the lives of those she interacts with, illustrating a profound sense of purpose influenced by her sibling. The theory of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory and Kurt Lewin's Field theory both offer a lens on how personal development is shaped by the forces within one's environment, with the family and sibling relationships playing a significant role in influencing emotional and behavioral changes.

In the case of all the participants, the system that was evident is the microsystem where the immediate environment where siblings engage with each other, influencing their behavior and development. For instance, Cristine and Angel's experiences highlight how their sibling relationships foster personal growth, responsibility, and optimism.

Mark's appreciation for his family despite challenges and Emma's empathy and compassion are similarly shaped by their family environment. These experiences show that an individual's family environment directly influences their development, outlook on life, and social behavior.

Moreover, Kurt Lewin's Field Theory, with its focus on life space and force fields, also aligns with the participants' experiences. Cristine's shift towards greater ambition

and responsibility, Mark's positive perspective, Angel's optimistic approach, and Emma's deepened empathy all reflect how forces within their family life space guided their responses to challenges and shaped their identities. The family dynamics and sibling relationships acted as key forces that pushed the individuals towards personal growth, emotional maturity, and a positive outlook. These theories provide a framework to understand the complexities of growing up with a sibling with special needs, as well as the transformation in personal identity and values that result from these relationships, resulting them to embrace a more optimistic view in life through their experience.

Essence of the Phenomenon

A State of Altruistic Commitment

Drawing inspiration from the word 'altruism' which is a practice of putting others' needs and wellbeing above of one's own, without expecting anything in return, researchers inferred that being a sibling to an individual with special needs is a state of altruistic commitment, because this journey includes sacrifices and as well as being selfless.

This caregiving experience is seen as inherently altruistic because it is driven by the sibling's selfless love for their sibling with special needs, and in a sense that they also became selfless as individuals themselves. In this role, they often also have to sacrifice their aspirations in life and even their chance to experience typical childhood activities this is due to the sibling placing their own needs, desires, and well-being on the background, placing in the foreground their sibling's welfare. The participants in this study echo the same sentiment that their number one priority is their sibling, placing their own needs and well-being as secondary in their own lives, in every decision they have to think of their sibling first.

Some also expressed that they have no intention of starting a family of their own, as they see their caregiving commitment as a lifelong responsibility, and recognizing that their sibling with special needs, as well as their family rely on them. The caregiving role that participants assume is not momentary; rather, it is a lifelong commitment that becomes embedded in their identity and daily life. Over time, the act of caregiving becomes ingrained in their experience, shaping how they navigate relationships, decisions, and personal growth.

Evidently, it continuously influences their perspective on life and their personal development, and they often find themselves in this caregiving role as a defining part of their existence, resonating with the Zen teaching that altruistic commitment becomes a natural and enduring state of being (Wisdom Library, 2024). Furthermore, this lifelong commitment is made possible because it is sustained by a deep, unyielding commitment the individual feels toward their siblings with special needs. It is not fleeting but a long-term dedication that demands both emotional and physical energy as this role often demands them to consistently prioritize caregiving in their lives. However, despite its demanding nature and the significant challenges and sacrifices it requires, it allowed the participants to demonstrate persistence and resilience over time and it continues to be steadfast due to the love and responsibility they feel toward

their sibling.

Through the self-sacrifice and selflessness developed during their caregiving experience, participants not only care for their siblings but also transform their own lives, becoming stronger individuals. This sense of transformation deepens their understanding of the true depth of love, which serves as the driving force behind their dedication. As they navigate the challenges of caregiving, this profound sense of love supplements their development of resilience, shaping their ability to endure difficulties and fostering personal growth along their journey.

Conclusions

Drawing inspiration from the experiences of participants of this study, researchers realized that life will sometimes put us in roles we may not have anticipated, yet these roles help foster a profound personal growth. From the findings of this study, participants take on caregiving responsibilities, particularly at a young age fosters resilience, independence, and a deep sense of compassion reflected on their caregiving experience. Although these challenges may seem overwhelming at first, it served as an opportunity for the participants to develop qualities that define their character and influence how they relate to others. This allowed the researchers to discover that maturity is not solely a product of the progression from age, but rather a response to the circumstances navigated and the responsibilities embraced.

In addition, researchers also learned that nothing in life goes exactly as originally planned, and that acceptance plays a crucial role in overcoming the unexpected challenges life presents. They learned that sometimes, going with the flow can be a positive approach, for this would allow individuals to adapt and find meaning in uncertain situations rather than resisting change which can be emotionally draining. And there will be moments of asking “why” things unfold the way they did, there will also be moments of frustration and doubt. Ultimately, they observed that true acceptance does not happen immediately; it develops gradually over time, and although sometimes coming to terms with the circumstances may be hard and can take long, in due time they will be able to navigate life's unpredictability with courage and understanding.

Moreover, researchers learned that being a sibling especially to an individual with special needs is never easy. They discovered that it is difficult to balance personal life and caregiving responsibilities. And this caregiving responsibilities can be burdensome however these molded them to be compassionate and empathic. The struggles that they have experienced is a testament of how reality works. One can never choose what to experience however they can manage how to react to it. Also, the researchers realized that treating everyone with fairness will always be the best option in any situation. It is important to instill good values especially in these trying moments, being good will never go wrong.

Lastly, the researchers realized that every member of the family faces unique challenges, situations, and problems in life. Not only the parents are the ones who is making sacrifices but also the siblings since they have the huge responsibility to their brother or sister with special needs when their parents are not around. Also, being a sibling to an individual with special needs is not all about sacrifices but it is also about how they deeply care and love their sisters or brothers. That even in the face of difficulties, they often find moments of joy and fulfillment in their roles. Though they may feel tired and emotionally strained, they remain hopeful and positive in life.

From this study, it became evident that siblings to individuals with special needs often carry heavier responsibilities compared to those in typical families. In the study, participants became the primary caregiver of their siblings, all participants expressed assuming the role of primary caregivers for their siblings, which, while demonstrating their sense of responsibility and love, can also be emotionally and physically taxing. This significant role could have long-term implications for their well-being, development, and personal growth.

In light of these findings, it is crucial for parents to be mindful when delegating responsibilities within the family. While it is natural for other siblings to help care for a sibling with special needs, parents must ensure that the weight of caregiving is not fully placed on their shoulders. A balanced distribution of responsibilities is essential to prevent burnout, emotional distress, and feelings of neglect, which can hinder the sibling's own development.

Parents should actively engage in open communication with all their children, assessing their well-being to ensure that no one feels overwhelmed or unfairly burdened by these caregiving duties. Moreover, parents should foster an environment where each child's needs, aspirations, and personal growth are recognized and supported. This can help siblings maintain a sense of balance and identity while also contributing to the care and support of their sibling with special needs.

In the academe, the findings of this study imply a need for the development of support systems specifically centered within school grounds. This support system can take the form of a regular counseling sessions, focusing on the issues faced by students, particularly those with siblings who have special needs. The findings also highlight the potential emotional strain and difficulties that siblings of individuals with special needs may experience, which can affect their academic and social life.

Therefore, it is crucial for counselors in the academic setting to be aware of these challenges and to design more inclusive programs that support these students within the school environment, because it is equally important that within the school, students feel relaxed and heard, creating an atmosphere where they can openly express their feelings and concerns. One program could be including a follow-up support or follow-up counseling where counselors reaching out to check on the well-being of students after an initial counseling

session, asking how they are doing, are coping well with their problem, and to also address new concerns that may have arisen. This helps maintain the connection and ensures that students feel supported beyond the immediate session, reinforcing that their well-being is a priority.

To the larger community, including offices, organizations, and individuals supporting people or families with cases of special needs, as well as Persons with Disabilities (PWD), the findings of this study implies that there is a pressing need for systemic changes and the development of targeted support systems to address the unique challenges faced by siblings of individuals with special needs. Researchers suggest that significant reforms and initiatives are needed to better support both individuals with special needs and their families.

First, there is a clear need for reformations in the system, particularly in how individuals with special needs are identified and listed. Researchers have observed that current methods of listing and categorizing individuals with special needs are flawed, leading to misconceptions and stereotypes about their conditions. That is why there is a need for a more accurate and inclusive approach to categorizing and documenting individuals with special needs is essential. This could involve updating the classification systems to reflect the diverse range of disabilities and ensure that individuals are not misunderstood or misrepresented. By doing so, society can create a more informed and supportive environment that promotes better access to resources, services, and opportunities for individuals with special needs.

Moreover, the study underscores the importance of creating a comprehensive and active support system for those who assume the role of primary caregivers, especially siblings of individuals with special needs. These siblings often take on significant caregiving responsibilities, which can lead to emotional and psychological strain. As such, it is crucial to establish dedicated services to address their mental health and well-being.

One essential service could be providing access to free counseling and psychological support, allowing them to process their emotions and manage stress, more importantly to ensure that these individuals are not neglecting their own well-being while fulfilling their caregiving roles.

By offering these services, the community can help alleviate the emotional burden on siblings, fostering healthier coping mechanisms and ensuring that they receive the support they need. In addition, other resources, such as peer support groups, educational workshops, and respite care programs, could be implemented to further assist siblings in managing their caregiving duties. These services would not only enhance their mental health but also promote their personal growth and well-being. By investing in such initiatives, the larger community can create a more holistic and empathetic support network for both individuals with special needs and their families, leading to better overall outcomes for all involved.

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Affiliations and Corresponding Information

Princess Hermione M. Cerbito

Notre Dame of Marbel University – Philippines

Andrea Grace A. Gamutan

Notre Dame of Marbel University – Philippines

Nicole Jade J. Janiola

Notre Dame of Marbel University – Philippines

Jun Y. Badie, LPT, PhD

Notre Dame of Marbel University – Philippines