

## THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF LIVING WITH A SIBLING WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

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### Abstract

Disabilities are diverse and these vary in severity. This phenomenological study attempted to generate data that answered the question of how siblings of individuals with special needs construed their lives in terms of a) fond experiences or advantages, and b) challenges or limitations. Data gathering was executed in-person and through online semi-structured interviews with siblings of individuals with disabilities who had high functional autism, Marfan Syndrome, and Down's Syndrome.

Findings showed that challenges were many and can be overwhelming. These are manifested in: dealing with unpredictable behavior and expressions of frustration, being disheartened over sibling's inability to experience normal activities, bearing the stigma due to obvious physical limitations, managing their siblings' limited ability to fully articulate needs, the dilemma of not doing enough for their sibling while attending to their own personal or family needs, having to absorb sibling's depression, restrictions in going to places and engagement with peers, having to worry about leaving their sibling behind, coping with financial challenges, and resorting to self-harm in channeling frustrations. However, the participant's current relationships with their siblings overcome these complexities and troubles. Thus, they still see their lives positively.

In addition, the participants aspire that the general public understands that individuals with special needs have different abilities from which the community or general society can benefit from.

This research is relevant as it sheds light on how home and community life can be viewed from the lens of a sibling with a family member who has special needs – their challenges, limitations, and their triumphs. They call for the awareness and participation of the community as it takes a home and a caring social network to support an individual with special needs.

**Keywords:** Special Needs, Sibling Relationships, Disability Studies

### INTRODUCTION

Children with special needs have been often overlooked in terms of programs and policy-making. This deprives them and their families a full participation in productive social and community life UNICEF (n.d).

Individuals with special needs need a wide range of support from the family and the community to ensure that they are able to live optimal lives (De Araujo, et al., 2016; Kwok, K. 2022; UNICEF, 2021). This espousal comes from the family, being the first agent of socialization, that greatly influences how an individual survives and thrives in society.

Bronfenbrenner introduced his earliest work in 1977. His Ecological Systems Theory, which later on became the Process-Person-Context-Time (PPCT) Model is a very influential framework in early childhood development and in the field of education (Tong & An, 2023). His theory also asserted that the family, which includes parents and siblings, play a crucial role in child development. This microsystem generates meaningful interactions and helps foster support in different life stages (Evans, 2023).

Specifically, siblings play a valuable role in this ecosystem of support. Sibling relationship is an important component in a person's upbringing as they can be playmates, a source of comfort, companionship, annoyance, or ambivalence (Furman & Giberson, 1995; Bedford, 1995 in Soysal, 2016). In addition, siblings who are also in the midst of emotional, mental, and psychological struggles have to be assisted in their coping. Thus, it is vital that disability research include those who are affected or are crucially affecting the lives of individuals with special needs.

This research looks into the lived experiences of siblings of individuals with special needs. It describes how they perceive their lives not only in terms of challenges and limitations but in celebrations, accomplishments, and successes as well. Their experiences in providing and needing support for individuals with special needs are highlighted. This collection of stories can provide a transformed awareness towards more inclusive communities.

## **Problem Statements**

A press release of the Singaporean Ministry of Social and Family Development (2016) has laid out their program "The Third Enabling Masterplan" in reaching out to support caregivers. The support services include access to information, planned respite, training, and provision of linkages with support groups and agencies. This program was also designed to do relevant research that will be a source of evidence-based practices that will further improve support for caregivers. On the other hand, the Silahis Centers were established in the Philippines to serve the inclusion policies of the national government (Inciong & Quijano, 2013). This was further solidified as the RA 11650 was enacted in 2022. The law is "an act instituting a policy of inclusion and services for learners with disabilities in support of inclusive education...". Though programs and laws may be in place, what matters most is the depth and breadth of its implementation. Individuals with disabilities and their families are in urgent need for assistance as they face their realities.

In addition, as proclaimed by the seventh principle of the United Nations General Assembly (1959), highlighted how parents are primarily tasked to take the best interests of the child as a guiding principle for his or her upbringing and nurturing. Needless to say that these parents have a colossal task before them. The ecosystem of support needs to be in-place effectively and efficiently.

In a nationwide study in Japan by Yamaoka, et al. (2015), it was revealed that 44% of parent caregivers exhibited psychological distress while 8.9% might have severe mental illness. They further recommended that communities give due attention to parents' mental health especially those who have weak social support and those belonging in the lower income bracket. Further, in a study about families of children with autism, Alsagaff (2020) asserted that it is valuable for the immediate environment, composed of teachers and school personnel, to understand the process of accessing interventions, and the critical role that schools play in their lives. However, the complex needs of parents for continued support are often taken for granted by organizations and society in general in their roster of existing services (Tétreault et al., 2012 in Matthews et al., 2021). Therefore, there is a necessary movement towards enhancing organizational and institutional support for family members of individuals with special needs.

The Washington Post (2021) wrote that there can be a number of advantages to having a brother or sister with special needs which enable them to feel more for others, become more dependable, and more adaptable to different circumstances. The role of siblings in the overall functioning and well-being of the family unit cannot be discounted. The population of siblings of individuals with special needs hurdle a number of limitations, and are faced with unique challenges.

As family members live closely and engage deeply with each other, siblings of individuals with special needs face challenges that can last for life. Specifically, studies revealed that people who had siblings with mental illnesses were 63 percent more likely to report having a depressive episode during their lifetime. A depressive episode includes feelings of being sad, irritable, and empty lasting for a few days and about two weeks. Its manifestations can be a cause for many difficulties in different aspects of life (World Health Organization, 2023). This same study also found that participants were more likely to live closely with their siblings with disability but reported less emotional attachment. The authors emphasized that families especially siblings of individuals with mental illness must become conscious of their own mental health needs throughout their lives.

Thus, giving research attention to what siblings of individuals with special needs go through is a relevant field to explore in order to promote authentic people empowerment and a more inclusive society.

## **OBJECTIVE**

This research aims to illuminate the lived experiences of siblings of individuals with special needs. Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. How do siblings of individuals with special needs construe their lives in terms of advantages or fond experiences; and
2. How do siblings of individuals with special needs construe their lives in terms of challenges or limitations?

## **METHODOLOGY**

The design of this study is a phenomenology consisting of four cases. Data was gathered through semi-structured interviews. Participants were invited through purposive sampling starting with SPED (special education) centers and other organizations that render intervention programs within and around Los Baños, Laguna in the Philippines. Conversations revolved around the participants' lives as siblings of individuals with special needs, highlighting on fond experiences and their challenges. Discussions also underscored on people and organizations who have assisted them in their difficulties.

There were four participants in the study, all of them females ages ranging from 21 to 32 years old. Two of them were college students, one was in medical school and another a working mother in the IT profession. They all had one sibling with disability diagnosed with Cerebral Palsy, Down Syndrome, Autism, and Marfan Syndrome.

The research locale spanned from two towns in Laguna and a city in Metro Manila in the Philippines. The research sites were an effect of the selection of participants through purposive sampling. The study was initiated by seeking possible participants from known intervention centers, friends, and co-workers of the researcher. The given leads were pursued by contacting them through their Facebook accounts for a general introduction of the researcher and the purpose of the communication. After the initial exchange, formal communication was made. An informed consent detailing the purposes and procedures of the study were sent online or handed to them in-person.

Data collection was guided through a set of semi-structured questions which were either read to them or the participants read themselves. The pre-determined questions served as a guide for probing to serve the purposes of the study. Interview transcripts were subjected to content analysis for classification and tabulation of data. The different stages of coding were applied on classified data to see patterns and emerging themes that served as answers to the research questions (Qualitative Data Analysis, n.d). Interviews with the participants lasted from 40 to 120 minutes.

In this research, non-probability sampling was used due to selecting participants that have specific characteristics. The Government of Canada (2021), cited snowballing or network sampling is employed when the researcher knows of a few individuals who have the required characteristics of potential participants in the research. These initial individuals, then refer other participants who may be interested to engage in the study. Further, this method is used for hard to find samples such as individuals with special needs and their families.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Findings for Research Question 1: How do Siblings of Individuals with Special Needs Construe Their Lives in Terms of Advantages or Fond Experiences?

#### *Government discount and programs*

Participants cited government privileges, such as having purchase discounts, and receiving occasional dole outs, as an advantage of having a sibling with special needs. The Philippine government with RA 10754 which refers to the Act Expanding the Benefits and Privileges of Persons with Disability declares that the State intends to give “full support to the improvement of well-being and integration into mainstream society of persons with disability”.

The State further aims to have this special population the opportunity of fully participating in “mainstream society by granting them least twenty (20%) discount and exemption from the value added tax on the sale of certain goods and services identified under Republic Act No. 9442 for the exclusive use, enjoyment or availment of persons with disability (Rule II, Section 4)”.

#### *Family trips and gatherings*

Interview transcripts revealed that family trips and gatherings were sources of fond experiences. These were considered as times to take a breather from daily family routines and participate in enjoyable activities. They were considered celebratory and an opportunity for the person with special needs to engage in pleasurable occasions with an expanded circle such as the extended family. The participants recounted,

**Original transcript:** “For example, *may mga* family gathering *kami* or *may party*. *Parati siyang nag i-intermission*. *Nagbibigay siya ng song* or dance presentation. It’s nice to see *na* people are enjoying watching him and he’s also enjoying the crowd.”

**Translation:** “For example, we have family gatherings or parties. He always has an intermission number. He renders a song or dance presentation. It’s nice to see that people are enjoying as they watch him and he’s also enjoying the crowd.”

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**Original transcript:** “*Siguro po yung pag nag gagala po kami*. *Dati po kasi* when she was still young *po napunta po kami dyan sa Baker kasi nga po taga LB lang po*. *So, kasama po siya* and then *naglalatag po ng yun lang... banig po*. *Kasi po dati po nasasama pa po talaga namin siya sa gala nung maliit pa po siya*.”

**Translation:** “Perhaps, whenever we hangout. Before, when she was still young we would go to Baker because we’re just from LB (Los Baños). So, she comes with us and we lay out a banig (native cot). ‘Coz before, we are really able to bring her to hangout with us when she was little.”

#### *Being able to provide for medical and other needs*

It was cited that being able to provide for their sibling’s needs gives joy and a sense of accomplishment. It was also a means to assure the atypically developing sibling that things will be fine and she will be taken care of. Rae narrated that:

“A few years back, because I had money, I was earning (giggles) I was able to get (name of sibling) a full body check-up at (name of hospital). So, for the first time in years we really got to know what’s going on with her. Like... everything *nya pati yung* (everything about her including her) psychological health. For me that was my way of... My way of telling her that everything will be fine. I am here for you. I just thought maybe *rin* (also) my parents were going to follow through...continue the medical treatments.”

However, it was conveyed with some regret, that this was not something that their family was able to sustain.

*Being trusted to witness activities, and to work together in a project.*

Working with her sibling with special needs in a school project is an uplifting occurrence for a participant. It is a rare occasion that EJ's sibling allows other people to witness him engage in special interests and projects. Consequently, it gives a sense of satisfaction and even pride to be trusted to be able to see what he does not readily reveal to other people. For EJ, it was deemed to be a position of privilege to be able to share a fun, and enjoyable activity that they can share together. Her sibling with special needs is extremely shy, even among immediate family members and closest friends. Thus, these experiences, though rare and far in-between, are priceless and highly cherished.

*Sibling with special needs is integrated in small social circles*

Though lasting friendships are very rare, it is a source of delight to see a handful of peers sustaining relationships that go beyond transactional. These are observed when their siblings go out with a small circle of friends like house visits, going to town fiestas, and keeping communication beyond school.

**Original transcript:** “*Ah – graduate na po siya. Opo. Tapos ano po, siguro po tatlo po ng kanyang HS (High School) friends, ano... tinuring siyang friends. Kase nag-fiesta po sa amin nung April. Pinuntahan po talaga siya sa bahay tapos in-invite po siya.*”

**Translation:** “Ah, he already graduated then. Yes. And he had three HS (High School) friends... treated him as friends. They attended our fiesta last April. They really went to our house and invited him.”

There is also relayed information about the atypically developing sibling being infatuated with one of his classmates.

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**Original transcript:** “*Parang niloko ko nga po siya, uy crush mo yan noh? Kasi nga po gusto ko nga pong mang-asar. Kahit di ko nga po alam kung crush nya ng aba yun. Tas sabi po nya, “uh mmm.” Parang ganun po. Parang umamin siya sa sarili nya. Parang ano kasi siya eh... parang okay kasi siya. Parang nakaka-amaze kasi siya. Sabi nya na kahit hindi namin siya makakasama, parang ang positive nya parin. Parang meron po siyang ganun. May hinahangaan po siya.*”

**Translation:** “I would tease him, ‘You have a crush on her, noh?’ I just want to annoy him even if I really don’t know if he has a crush on her. Eventually he admitted it himself. ‘It’s like eh... she’s like okay. She’s like amazing.’ He said that the girl is still very positive even when she is not with her circle of friends. He has that. He admires someone.”

These indicators of inclusion are comforting for the participants.

*Affectionate, playful, and loving relationship*

It is a source of pleasure for the participants that they have warm relationships with their siblings. They have been playmates since they were very young, and three out of four of them have reported that they relate deeply and lovingly with each other. External expressions such as being given drawings, being told “I love you”, waiting on her and other family members when they arrive home bring the participants a happy recollection. Playful teasing and fighting, and being present in important life events or milestones was also cited.

Overall, having a family member with special needs can draw out an array of positive emotions. Parents and siblings of these individuals have been reported to show manifestations of hope, empathy, love, care, and compassion. The family unit can also display resilience or favorable coping mechanisms towards stress (Downey, 2016).

On the other hand, this same situation exposes negative emotions and behaviors among individual family members and the unit as a whole.

## **Findings for Research Question 2: How do Siblings of Individuals with Special Needs Construe Their Lives in Terms of Challenges and Limitations?**

### *Unpredictable behavior and expressions of frustration*

Participants lament how their siblings with special needs can behave unpredictably. This may be in the form of tantrums, biting objects, or suddenly becoming aloof in the presence of relatives and friends. There would be times when EJ's sibling will be lost in his own world and be absorbed with his electronic gadget. It can take a lot of convincing for the sibling with disability to engage back with the people he was currently with. EJ further narrated that it saddens her that she would want to engage in a conversation but her sibling appears engrossed with his phone.

This can also be manifested in not wanting to mingle with other people such as relatives and friends, especially in taking photos or in extended conversations. Further, tantrums have been most commonly cited as one of the participants' concerns. The University of Victoria (n.d.) reported that 84% of siblings of youth with autism had challenges dealing with their siblings' aggressive behavior and witness manifestation of detachment and dehumanization. This behavior was referred to by Ela as a major reason why her sibling is no longer brought outside for picnics or other similar family activities. Unpredictable behavior in the form of self-injurious behavior also occur at home for no known reason, and when medications are not provided. This becomes a real difficulty for the household as a participant's sibling resorts to either biting objects or biting herself.

### *Disheartened over sibling's inability to experience normal activities*

For participants with siblings who had physical disability, they expressed being saddened that their siblings cannot participate in simple day-to-day affairs such as participating in family outdoor activities, in-person school events, attending concerts, and even having coffee. Being easily exhausted, having palpitations, needing special assistive devices and equipment were mentioned as hindrances to joining these activities and events. A participant expressed that she would have wanted her sibling to experience these but her physical condition prevented her.

This restricted capacity to participate in regular daily activities can cause a certain amount of detachment or aloofness towards the sibling with disability. Growing up, Ela narrated,

**Original transcript:** "*Ayun. Nung una po parang hindi ko po gaanong nilalapitan yung sister ko. Siempre bata pa po ako nun.*"

**Translation:** "Yeah. At the beginning, I would not go near my sister. Of course I was still young then."

This was explained by the American Psychological Association (2008) imparting that siblings of individuals with disabilities may live closely with them but exhibit behaviors of disconnection. They have been found to have 13% less contact with their siblings with special needs than those in the comparison group. Budginaitė-Mačkinė and Juozeliūnienė (2022) cited that it is valuable to highlight connections and solidarity among generations, which includes sibling relationships. There is a need to determine if these relationships are truly characterized by inherent fondness and solidarity or merely obligatory. Its' determination can have effects on mental and emotional health, and overall well-being.

### *Stigma due to obvious physical disabilities.*

Jen and Ela bemoan instances where people stare or snicker at the sight of their sibling. The shaming look and other stigmatizing expressions gave them feelings that range from embarrassment, anticipation of negative judgment, and wanting to change current situations. These are few of the reasons why families that have members with disabilities can be hesitant in bringing them to outdoor activities. Ela narrates:

**Original transcript:** "*...parang nung una po talaga parang feeling ko, nahihiya po ako na ganun po yung sister ko. Pagka lalabas po kami parang yung ibang tao po tinitingnan po kami.*"

Translation: "...at first, I would be embarrassed that my sister was that way. Whenever we go out, people will stare at us."

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**Original transcript:** "*kasi po pagka may nakakausap po ako parang naaano po ako na ipaalam na ganun po yung sister ko kasi baka po mamaya i-judge, baka po hindi po sila open. Parang ganun po. Diba, may ibang tao po kasi na ganun.*"

**Translation:** "whenever I talk to someone, it's like, I feel uncomfortable to let them know that my sister is like that – they might (negatively) judge, they might not be open-minded about it. Some people are like that."

According to the American Psychiatric Association (2024), self-stigma can be manifested in the form of negative attitudes and internalized shame. This is coming from the more widespread public and institutional stigma. Self-defeating perceptions such as feelings of being incompetent, dangerous, and incapable may be absorbed by the person with disability or illness, and can be transferred to their immediate families. These are reinforced by prejudice and discrimination in the community and institutional levels. There may be a general perception that they are to blame for the manifested illnesses and disabilities. These negative attitudes may be reflected in hiring preferences, policies, and laws. This is termed associative stigma by Nieweglowski and Sheehan (2017). They defined this as how friends, family, and acquaintances of individuals with disabilities are treated differently by the general public by mere association with the stigmatized person. The researchers also reported that there is no difference whether the condition is that of a mental illness or physical disability.

Participants also explained that the general public has a choice to render bias or not, while persons with disabilities do not have a choice but to live with their condition. They wish that the larger public can be more understanding, accepting, and cease from using derogatory terms like the "R" (retarded) word. This was explained by Jen:

"They were like looking at him. And then I could see them talking about him and laughing. So, *parang* (like) that's kind of hard for me to see *na* (that), there are people judging him for his appearance... *May* (There's) stigma about it. We're like, there are people *na* (who) are still judgmental about *yung may mga* (those with) disabilities."

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"*May condition talaga siya na ganun* (He already has that condition) and yet people who are capable of choosing either to put that stigma or be more tolerant or accepting of the condition. And some people would not be accepting."

#### *Limited ability to verbalize and fully articulate needs*

The severity of physical disability greatly affects receptive and expressive communication of feelings and needs. From conveying what may be physically painful or uncomfortable to expressing feelings and establishing social networks. People who do not understand may perceive their sibling's demeanor as an attitudinal problem rather than stemming from a disability.

EJ also mentioned her sibling's difficulty in retaining or absorbing information. Instructions need to be repeated and be given one at a time especially when it comes to performing household chores. This limited capability in social engagement is compensated by being consumed by social media. Just like any other teenager, her sibling is engrossed with gadgets and needed to be reminded repeatedly of other tasks and self-care activities (sleeping on time and taking a bath). Her sibling is often difficult to convince to heed advise, and suggestions are taken as a form of nagging and a means to control. These incidents may be a source of minor conflicts. However, she was sobbing as she relayed that her sibling (and those like him) wants to socially engage, and be integrated with his peers but is limited by his level of communicative competence.

*The dilemma of not doing enough and needing to attend to own needs*

Feelings of burden and guilt persist in Rae. The thought of her supposedly going to the medical field and working abroad to afford treatment for her sister haunts her still. By not pursuing the family expectations she feels that she has not done enough as an elder sister. She feels that this has been a heavy load passed on to her as she perceives that her parents were not able to do everything they could to help her sister. Sometimes she wishes that her sister's pain be transferred to her. However, she is caught in a predicament of also being accountable to her spouse in terms of attending to her own family's needs and allocating too much of her own family's budget for that of her sister's. Rae describes how feelings of guilt still pervades,

"When we found out *nga po* (actually), at first there was guilt on our part. Coz all along we thought, she was just clumsy. But, it never left. Until now. Because... *bakit ako naiiyak? Ano.... Uhhhm... kasi...*(Why am I crying?) we could have done more... *sana* (how I wish)."

The Washington Post (2021) wrote that typically developing siblings communicated that they have to be always on their toes to do things right, that they cannot openly convey their emotions, have a divergent idea of "family" and "home", that their struggles don't seem to matter, that they are being isolated, have to cope with partiality early and often, that they are asked to take on a lot of responsibilities, and that they had to grow up too fast. This can explain the guilt that trouble the participants. Truly, there is much emotional, mental, and psychological burden that they carry within them.

*Absorbing sibling's depression*

Rae further explained that she feels her sibling with special needs questions why she has the disability. She yields to what seems to be depression as she asks why she "cannot do anything". These kinds of conversations are difficult for Rae as she attempts to explain to her sibling that the belief that she "cannot do anything" is inaccurate. Though her sibling may be limited physically, Rae had to highlight other skills which her sibling can do very well like painting, writing, and doing very well in her academic subjects.

*Worried about having to leave her sibling behind*

Family members are consistently concerned about having to pass away or leaving their loved one with special needs behind. Participants worry about their siblings not finding a lifelong partner, to how they can sustain their day-to-day necessities, who will attend to their daily engagements, and even minute details of who is going to remind them about hygiene and other activities for self-care. EJ is especially worried about not being there for her brother especially in the workplace. She recounts that she has witnessed her brother being bullied and was worried about who was going to come to his defense if he was left on his own. Siblings of persons with special needs desire to be there for them in every situation and for as long as they can. They have many apprehensions about leaving them alone. EJ fears that people around her brother can easily misunderstand his demeanor and possibly resort to unfavorable reactions such as yelling and other forms of exclusion. Individuals with special needs may be tolerated in many instances but still not fully accepted or integrated in social circles.

*Restrictions in going to places and engagement with peers*

Ela cited a number of instances when her engagement in peer activities were limited so she can attend to her sibling with Cerebral Palsy. Taking care of her sister with disability has led her to question her situation. There were times she regretted being obliged to give up being with her friends in favor of her sibling duties. This is annoyance and frustration corroborates with the findings of Barak-Levy, et al. (2010 in Mc Adams 2016) that siblings of individuals with disabilities were reported to participate in fewer extracurricular activities than their peers. Instead, they were obligated to assist their siblings and



attend to more household tasks. The parents may see these responsibilities as helpful for the typically developing child but they themselves perceive it as worrisome, troubling, or annoying and frustrating.

### *Financial challenges.*

Having a family member with special needs entail allocating a significant amount of the budget to meet medical, educational, and other assistive requirements. Thus, siblings are sometimes compelled to set aside their own needs for these to be afforded. Rae relayed that she had to work her way through college as the family resources were allotted to her younger sister. She lamented as she wondered why some people had it easy while she had to work and eventually stop schooling. Rae felt that other people had their way and she was caught in a difficult situation.

She relays,

**Original Transcript:** “Coz they started having –(name of sibling)-- checked up when I was in College. 18 ako (I was 18 years old then), second year. So we didn’t really have funds. So, I had to stop (schooling) for a semester. So... I worked *na* on my own until I finished (college)... The resources were given to her.”

She articulated feelings of anger, not on her sister, but on her situation that she didn’t easily get the things she wanted (or needed). She voiced out that though her parents supported her siblings at first, they did not follow through in her treatments and other possible solutions. Ela narrated similar situations where her sibling’s medicines had to be prioritized over her needs and wants. These instances were a source of regret and hard feelings for both. These even paved ways for conflicts to arise between Rae and her spouse.

### *Resorting to self-harm.*

These feelings of anger were escalated into self-injurious behavior. Rae relayed:

“I had slashes (signaling to her left arm)... *Parang* (It was like) it was just painful. And that time it was not really that I wanted to die. It was because I didn’t know how to channel the pain. It was really painful inside and *parang* (it was like) it felt better when I was doing that.”

She elaborated how valuable it was that she had connections or access to a counseling expert, and concerned professors who gave her sound advice. This support led her to cease these tendencies to self-harm.

These recounting of experiences emphasized that siblings of individuals with special needs carry with them a multi-faceted and demanding personal, familial, and social load. They had extra burdens to bear. Community support in the form of opportunities for counseling, programs for respite (temporary relief from day-to-day household tasks), community-led activities like parties and showcasing of talents, and skills, and even financial aid will be very beneficial for the participants and other individuals who are faced with similar circumstances.

## **IMPLICATION OF FINDINGS**

In this view, the researcher recommends that this field of study be further investigated as siblings play an essential role in the lives of individuals with special needs. As family members deal with each other closely, it is important that attention and resources are allocated equitably among them. Sibling relationships influence overall well-being, thus, typical and atypically developing individuals need to be given what is due to them.

In addition, there is still a pervading stigma and unawareness about disabilities. There is a need for the general public to become more cognizant of the different types and severity of conditions. Also, it is a must for people to understand that individuals with disabilities have different abilities from which the community or general society can benefit from. It is about time that these capacities are celebrated,

accepted, and harnessed. Public awareness can also be of help as it becomes more sensitive to the challenges of living a life with siblings with disabilities. Their unique burden, feelings of frustration, and anger that can lead to self-harm can be prevented if the much needed social support is present and consistent. This can save many family relationships from turning antagonistic and possibly resulting to irreparable disintegration.

Also, researchers doing different qualitative approaches can include more number of participants with more probing questions, while also involving other strategies such as home visits, document analyses, and focus group discussions that will generate more comprehensive data about the lives of siblings with special needs. The multi-pronged approach will be valuable as it generates validation of information and captures participant accounts from different lenses.

## CONCLUSIONS

Findings showed that participants perceived their fond memories and advantages of having a sibling with special needs in the following categories: participation in family trips and gatherings, in the form of government discounts, having the opportunity and the capacity to provide for their sibling's medical and other needs, being trusted enough by their sibling no matter how private or shy to witness activities and in working with them in important projects, and having established loving, affectionate, and playful relationships with their sibling. The participants voiced out that these memories and advantages give them joyous emotions, and as something to look forward to at the end of the day.

On the other hand, participants enumerated several challenges and limitations namely: display of unpredictable behavior and frustration especially in public; their sibling's inability to do normal, everyday activities; the stigma attached to people with disabilities and their families by the general public; their sibling's limited ability to verbalize and fully articulate their needs; the participant's torn emotions of not being able to do enough while having to attend to her own needs; having to absorb her sibling's depression over her disability and limited capacities; being constantly worried to leave their siblings behind with no one to take care of them; the financial challenges for the household brought by medical and other assistive requirements; and being engulfed by anger, frustration that has led the participant to self-injurious behavior. These detrimental outcomes have brought the participants to disheartened emotions but also explained that these were not a cause to regret having her sibling the way that she or he is.

Data reflected that though, the limitations and challenges were many and can be overwhelming, the participant's current relationships with their siblings overcome these complexities and troubles. Thus, they still see their lives positively, and in a good light.

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