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CARE AGAINST THE ODDS: A NARRATIVE INQUIRY INTO THE JOURNEY OF A MOTHER CARING FOR FAMILY MEMBERS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

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Abstract

This qualitative narrative inquiry explores the lived experiences of a mother who serves as the primary caregiver for both her husband and her child with special needs. The study focuses on the emotional, physical, and social dimensions of caregiving, examining how she navigates the complex demands of dual caregiving roles. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and participant observation, capturing both verbal narratives and natural interactions within the home. Ethical considerations, including informed consent, assent, and reflexivity, were strictly observed to ensure the credibility and integrity of the findings. Analysis revealed that the participant experiences significant emotional and physical strain, as well as social challenges, yet demonstrates adaptive coping through resourcefulness and resilience. She employs strategies such as task prioritization, seeking social support, positive reframing, and creative management of household and caregiving responsibilities. Based on these findings, the study recommends the development of support programs, accessible resources, and community interventions that empower caregivers in similar situations. These insights contribute to a deeper understanding of the strengths, challenges, and coping mechanisms of families managing multiple caregiving responsibilities, offering practical guidance for healthcare professionals, policymakers, and support organizations.

Keywords: *Mother Caring for Family Members with Special Needs, Narrative Inquiry, Sto.Tomas, Davao del Norte*

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Introduction

Parenting and spousal caregiving are widely recognized as two of the most demanding responsibilities within the family system, requiring sustained emotional, physical, and psychological commitment. These roles become significantly more complex when disability is present within the household. As noted by Bao et al. (2020), the caregiving burden intensifies when a family member's condition requires continuous supervision, physical assistance, and emotional support. For mothers who simultaneously care for both a husband and a child with disabilities, caregiving transcends traditional parental and marital boundaries, evolving into a multifaceted role that demands resilience, adaptability, and self-sacrifice (Shahali et al., 2024). Despite growing awareness of the strain associated with dual caregiving, research remains limited on how these compounded responsibilities influence the well-being and family dynamics of mothers in such situations.

Across the world, such as United States, United Kingdom, and Australia, families raising children with disabilities confront substantial

financial burdens. According to Houtrow (2025), findings from the 2019–2022 National Health Interview Survey reveal that 22.3% of households with a child with disabilities report financial hardship, nearly double the 12.6% reported by families without disabled children. These families frequently struggle to pay medical bills, rely more heavily on public or mixed insurance systems, and sometimes delay or forego necessary care due to financial constraints.

In the Philippines, particularly in Sto. Tomas, Davao del Norte—parents with disabilities raising children with special needs face similarly layered challenges. According to Lasco (2023), limited access to specialized healthcare, persistent social stigma, and inadequate support systems exacerbate their burdens. Cultural perceptions of disability often result in social isolation, further affecting the mental health and well-being of these caregivers and compounding the overall caregiving strain.

Although caregiving has been widely examined in scholarly literature, Shahali et al. (2024) note that a notable gap remains in understanding the lived experiences of mothers who care for multiple family members with disabilities. Existing studies largely focus on parents of children with disabilities, often overlooking how mothers' caregiving responsibilities are shaped by the dual demands of managing a household and responding to the complex needs of both a spouse and a child with disabilities. Shahali, et. Al., (2024) emphasize that despite the expanding body of caregiving research, the voices, and perspectives of mothers in dual-caregiving roles remain underrepresented. Addressing this gap, the present study seeks to explore, through a narrative lens, the multifaceted experiences of a mother providing care for both her husband and child with disabilities. This inquiry aims to shed light on the intricate interplay of challenges, adaptations, and resilience that define her caregiving journey.

Methods

This study adopts a qualitative narrative inquiry design to explore the experiences of a mother who is caring for family members with special needs. Narrative inquiry is particularly appropriate for this research, as it emphasizes the collection and interpretation of personal stories, enabling a profound understanding of how individuals construct meaning from their lived experiences over time (Karpa, 2021). This approach allows for an in-depth examination of the multifaceted nature of caregiving, illuminating how personal, familial, and societal factors intertwine to shape the caregiving journey of mothers.

Data were collected through an in-depth, semi-structured interview, allowing the participant to share her caregiving journey in her own words and reflect deeply on her lived experiences. This method encouraged a rich and detailed narrative that revealed the emotional, psychological, and practical dimensions of her caregiving experience. To enhance the depth of understanding, the study will also incorporate field notes and, where appropriate, document analysis, aligning with best practices in narrative research (Pokhrel, 2020).

The participant was selected using purposive sampling to ensure that she met the criteria of being a mother actively caring for family members— specifically, a husband and a child with special needs. This sampling strategy is effective in identifying individuals who can provide rich and relevant insights into the phenomenon under study (Bagunu et al., 2024).

A key aspect of narrative inquiry is the relational dynamic between the researcher and participant. The researcher will engage in reflexive practices to acknowledge and mitigate personal biases, fostering an environment of trust and openness. This relational approach is essential for capturing authentic narratives and is supported by recent methodological literature emphasizing the importance of researcher reflexivity in qualitative research (Lee-Rambharose et al., 2024).

Although narrative inquiry enables an in-depth exploration of individual lived experiences, it is not without limitations. The findings may have limited generalizability since they are influenced by the participants' unique circumstances, context, and personal perspectives. Nevertheless, the depth and richness of the narrative provide valuable insights that can inform nursing practice, guide policy development, and inspire further research in the fields of disability, caregiving, and family resilience.

This research study was conducted at Sto. Tomas, Davao del Norte, Philippines, a municipality with an estimated population of 141,000 (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2020). Known for its vibrant agricultural community, Sto. Tomas serves as a key area within Davao del Norte, with its population spanning both rural and urban

settings. The researcher selected Sto. Tomas as the study setting because of the observed challenges faced by parents with disabilities, particularly mothers who care for both a spouse and a child with special needs. In this community, limited access to healthcare resources, rehabilitation services, and social support systems often intensifies the physical, emotional, and financial strain experienced by such families. This context makes Sto. Tomas a meaningful location for exploring the lived experience of a mother navigating dual caregiving responsibilities within a setting marked by constrained support. The choice of Sto. Tomas as the research setting was essential to this study, as it provided an authentic context for exploring the lived experience of a mother caring for both a husband with left-sided paralysis and a child with autism. In this community, parents with disabilities often face limited access to healthcare, rehabilitation services, and social support, which intensifies the demands of caregiving. The area reflects the everyday realities of many Filipino families who rely on personal resilience and resourcefulness to meet their loved ones' needs despite scarce assistance. By situating the study in Sto. Tomas, the researcher, was able to gain direct access to a participant who embodies these challenges, allowing for a deeper understanding of how dual caregiving responsibilities are managed within a setting marked by social and economic constraints.

Moreover, Sto. Tomas is characterized by a limited availability of specialized healthcare and support services for parents with disabilities, which makes this study particularly relevant. This scarcity of resources influences how mothers, like the participant in this study, manage their dual caregiving responsibilities for both a spouse with physical disability and a child with autism. The setting highlights the everyday struggles of families who must rely on personal resilience, faith, and informal community support to meet their caregiving demands. By focusing on this context, the study sheds light on the intersection of disability and caregiving within a community where such issues are often underrecognized, emphasizing the urgent need for more inclusive and accessible support systems.

This study utilized purposive sampling to select a single participant who best represents the phenomenon under investigation. The participant is a mother who Provides primary care for both her husband, who has left-sided paralysis, and her child, diagnosed with autism. The husband requires full assistance in performing daily tasks due to his physical limitations, while the child needs ongoing emotional guidance, supervision, and behavioral support. Purposive sampling, also known as judgmental sampling, enables the researcher to deliberately select individuals who can offer rich, relevant, and detailed insights consistent with the study's objectives (Crossman, 2020). The participant was identified based on specific inclusion criteria focusing on mothers who are the main caregivers of family members with special needs. To locate a qualified participant, the researcher sought coordination and referrals through the local organization of persons with disabilities in Sto. Tomas, Davao del Norte.

Additionally, purposive sampling was solely employed to ensure that the selected participant genuinely represented the lived realities of mothersmanaging multiple caregiving responsibilities. The participant was carefully chosen based on her ability to provide meaningful and in-depth insights into the experience of caring for both a husband with a physical disability and a child with autism. In narrative inquiry, the emphasis lies on the depth and richness of individual stories rather than the number of participants. As noted by Bekele and Ago (2022), a narrative study can be effectively conducted with a single participant when the aim is to explore a complex and deeply personal phenomenon. Thus, this research prioritizes the quality, emotional depth, and contextual understanding of the participant's narrative to achieve a holistic and authentic portrayal of her caregiving experience.

For this study, the inclusion criteria are: (1) mothers with disabilities or chronic health conditions who serve as the primary caregivers for both a spouse and a child with special needs, and (2) a willingness to participate and share their lived experiences. The exclusion criteria include: (1) mothers who do not fulfill the caregiving role as defined, (2) those who decline to participate, and (3) family members who do not provide consent or assent for involvement in the study. To maintain ethical rigor, informed consent will be obtained from participating mothers, and assent will be sought from children when appropriate. The consent process will clearly explain the study's purpose, procedures, duration, and any potential risks, ensuring that participation is fully voluntary and based on a comprehensive understanding.

Results and Discussions

This chapter presents the results and discussion of the study titled "Care Against the Odds: A Narrative Inquiry into the Journey of a Mother Caring for Family Members with Special Needs." It explores the lived experience of a mother who serves to provide a holistic understanding of the phenomenon under study.

For Lyn, life did not unfold along the smooth path she once imagined. Her home became a universe of overlapping roles—mother, wife, caregiver, provider—each demanding not only her time and energy but also the very essence of her heart. Her husband, Erwin, has lived with left-sided paralysis and a leg disability since a vehicular accident in 2002, and her eldest son, EJ, was diagnosed with autism, adding layers of complexity to her daily existence. Mornings blurred into evenings, filled with routines of medication, therapy sessions, household chores, and quiet moments of watching over her loved ones.

Enduring Motherhood Amid Intersecting Roles and Responsibilities

Lyn's life is a tapestry woven from multiple, overlapping caregiving roles—wife, mother, household manager, and economic provider. Each thread pulls her in a different direction, yet none can be left unattended, and none are easily separated. Her days begin before sunrise, guided by routines that blend the needs of her husband, her child, and the household she sustains. For Lyn, there is no clear line between mothering, spousal support, and managing the household; the boundaries are fluid, constantly shifting with each challenge that arises.

Her husband, Erwin, has lived with left-sided paralysis and a leg disability since a vehicular accident in 2002. Lyn assists him with daily activities, from helping him move around the house to ensuring he takes his medications on time. At the same time, her eldest son, EJ, diagnosed with autism, requires careful guidance, understanding, and structured attention throughout the day. Lyn monitors his behavior, supports his learning, and works to nurture his emotional development, knowing that each small success comes after patient, persistent effort. On top of these responsibilities, she manages a small home- based livelihood to help meet the family's financial needs, juggling the pressures of income generation alongside caregiving. The physical, emotional, and financial demands converge in ways that are sometimes overwhelming.

Researcher: What is it like being a mother and a wife caring for family members with special needs?

Lyn: "It's not easy to live a life where you have a husband from whom you can hardly get support, and then you have a child you need to guide and understand because he has autism"

Lifting, assisting mobility, completing household chores, managing her son's therapies, paying medical bills, and keeping the household running all demand constant energy. Each task carries a weight of responsibility, and yet Lyn moves from one to the next with quiet determination, sustaining her family through sheer resilience and devotion.

Lyn's story portrays the demanding reality of being a mother, wife, and provider all at once. Her days revolve around caregiving for both a husband with a disability and a child with autism while also keeping the household and finances in order. These overlapping responsibilities often lead to emotional and physical exhaustion, yet she continues to persevere. Her strength is rooted in determination, adaptability, and faith. Within the Filipino family setting, motherhood is seen not just as a role but as a lifelong calling that defines her identity and purpose. Her statement reflects the emotional and physical strain of managing overlapping responsibilities. The participant embodies what Watson (2008) refers to as caritas, the moral and compassionate commitment to care for others despite personal hardship.

This finding aligns with the Social Model of Disability (Oliver, 1996), which emphasizes that caregiving challenges are often compounded by inadequate societal support rather than by disability alone. n the Filipino cultural context, prevailing norms that valorize maternal sacrifice and family duty further shape how caregiving is enacted and experienced — turning caregiving into both a moral vocation and a socioeconomic necessity (Ybáñez, 2025). Resilience in this setting is therefore not an extraordinary trait but an emergent property of everyday adaptive practices: as Masten (2001) argues, resilience often represents "ordinary magic," the cumulative result of repeated problem-solving, resourcefulness, and meaning-making under stress.

The Weight of Unseen Struggles and Social Isolation

Beneath Lyn's calm and composed

exterior lay a hidden world of struggles that few could see. Each day was a careful juggling act—caring for her husband, Erwin, who could no longer walk independently after a debilitating accident, attending to her son EJ, diagnosed with autism, managing household responsibilities, and trying to sustain a small livelihood to make ends meet. The weight of these responsibilities often left her physically drained and emotionally exhausted. Sleepless nights, financial strain, and the relentless demands of caregiving created a profound sense of isolation, making her feel as though no one truly understood the life she lived.

Researcher: What are the challenges you experienced in your journey of caring for both your husband with left side paralysis and your child with autism?

"It's very difficult… other people don't understand my child. Only parents like me do," Lyn confessed, her voice tinged with quiet resignation.

She often cried when the pressure became too much, lamenting, "Sometimes I just cry when I'm tired. It's hard when no one really understands what I'm going through.".

The lack of empathy from those around her, coupled with minimal institutional support, amplified her sense of invisibility. Financial worries, paying for medications, therapies, and daily necessities, added another layer of strain, leaving her perpetually anxious about how to make ends meet. Yet amid these silent burdens, Lyn experienced a moment of clarity that would forever shape how she viewed her life. She realized that her endurance, though often unnoticed by others, had become a source of quiet strength and purpose. She began to see that the very struggles that weighed her down were also teaching her resilience, patience, and the depth of her own capacity to love. In this revelation, Lyn understood that caregiving was not only a duty but also a journey of personal growth and profound meaning.

According to the Social Model of Disability, the greatest barriers faced by persons with disabilities and their families do not stem solely from the disability itself but from social neglect and environmental inaccessibility (Oliver, 1996). The participant's experience mirrors this concept, her struggles are worsened by the absence of societal understanding, the stigma associated with autism, and the limited welfare systems available to support families like hers. The feeling of isolation is also magnified by cultural expectations that caregiving should be a private family responsibility, leading many Filipino mothers to bear their suffering silently (David & Ong, 2020).

Research conducted by Lorenzo et al. (2021) supports this finding, emphasizing that Filipino mothers raising children with developmental disabilities often experience "emotional fatigue, social withdrawal, and financial deprivation," as their needs are frequently overlooked by healthcare systems. Similarly, Estrella and Reyes (2022) highlight that the lack of institutional support for parents of children with special needs in the Philippines results in "emotional loneliness and decreased social participation." These studies affirm Lyn's experience as emblematic of the broader societal neglect faced by caregivers in similar situations.

Despite these invisible burdens, Lyn's endurance illustrates emotional strength grounded in love and faith. Her quiet perseverance embodies what Watson (2008) describes as the moral dimension of caring — a form of compassion sustained even when external validation and support are absent. Rather than succumbing to despair, Lyn transforms her isolation into inner resilience. As Masten (2001) describes, resilience is not extraordinary but rather an "ordinary magic" that emerges from enduring hardship through meaning, faith, and connection. Lyn's ability to continue caring amid invisibility reflects a deeply human capacity to find strength in love, even when the world fails to recognize it.

Faith and Spiritual Resilience as the Core of Survival

Amid the relentless demands of caregiving, faith became the unwavering foundation of Lyn's life. For her, prayer was not simply a ritual, but a sanctuary—a place where she could release her fears, frustrations, and exhaustion, and find clarity and courage in return. Every hardship, every sleepless night, every moment of doubt became more bearable because she placed her trust in God. Spiritual resilience emerged as her greatest source of healing, guiding her through pain and uncertainty with steadfast determination. Faith was not just a coping mechanism; it was the core of her strength, sustaining her through years of continuous caregiving for a husband with a disability and a son

with autism.

Researcher: How do your roles as a wife and as a mother of a child with special needs shape the way you provide care?

Lyn described how, in moments when despair threatened to overwhelm her, she would turn to prayer.

Lyn: "I prayed to God and entrusted everything to Him. Faith gives me courage to make the impossible possible."

This statement reveals how her spirituality functioned as an internal compass, helping her navigate the unpredictable challenges of her daily life. Through prayer, she found courage, clarity, and meaning, transforming her struggles into a source of purpose and resilience. Her faith allowed her to face seemingly insurmountable obstacles with a heart strengthened by hope and trust.

Throughout the interview, Lyn repeatedly emphasized that her relationship with God served as her anchor in times of pain and emotional crisis. Lyn: "When I feel like I can't handle things anymore, I just pray. I always ask God to give me more strength because He knows my heart."

These words capture the essence of how prayer acted as an emotional lifeline, providing comfort, renewal, and perspective amid constant pressure. Surrendering her struggles to God allowed her to transform distress into peace, reinforcing both her psychological endurance and spiritual resilience.

Through Lyn's story, it becomes evident that faith was not merely a support during hardship; it was the lens through which she understood her journey. Spirituality offered her a profound sense of purpose, hope, and perseverance, empowering her to continue caregiving with love, patience, and unwavering devotion, even when the weight of responsibility felt almost unbearable. Her faith was the quiet but powerful core of survival, illuminating the path through darkness and guiding her toward enduring strength.

The participant's deep faith aligns with the broader Filipino cultural framework in which spirituality and religion are integral to daily life and coping (Del Castillo et al., 2020). For Lyn, faith is intertwined with purpose; it allows her to find meaning in suffering and perceive caregiving not as punishment, but as a divine calling that strengthens her family and spirit. This worldview is reflective of the Filipino concept of pananampalataya—a form of faith that merges endurance, gratitude, and trust in divine providence even in the face of adversity.

According to Lee and Park (2022), spirituality fosters emotional resilience by providing individuals with a sense of control and acceptance in circumstances beyond their power. It allows caregivers to reframe pain as part of a greater spiritual journey, promoting mental well-being and endurance. Similarly, Watson's (2008) Theory of Human Caring identifies spirituality as an essential element of holistic care, wherein faith and compassion become healing energies for both the caregiver and the one receiving care. In Lyn's case, her belief system not only nurtures her inner peace but also influences her approach to caregiving, offering care infused with empathy, patience, and love.

Furthermore, Villanueva and Santos (2021) observed that Filipino mothers caring for children with disabilities often rely on spirituality as their primary coping mechanism, interpreting challenges as spiritual tests meant to strengthen familial bonds. Faith, therefore, becomes both a survival tool and a transformative force that sustains emotional equilibrium. As Masten (2001) asserts, resilience is frequently grounded in ordinary adaptive systems such as belief, hope, and connectedness. For Lyn, faith represents this "ordinary magic" that turns vulnerability into courage and transforms daily struggles into opportunities for growth and meaning.

Ultimately, Lyn's story illustrates that spiritual resilience is not the absence of suffering, but the ability to endure and transcend it through faith. Her steadfast belief allows her to maintain a sense of purpose and hope even in times of despair, reaffirming that caregiving, when rooted in spirituality, becomes an act of both devotion and healing.

Adaptive Coping Through Resourcefulness and Resilience

As the demands of life grew heavier, Lyn discovered that survival required not only strength of heart but also adaptability and ingenuity. Caring for a husband with left-sided paralysis and a son with autism while managing a household meant that ordinary solutions were often insufficient. She learned to navigate these challenges by developing creative strategies, balancing caregiving with a small

home- based business, and making the most of limited resources. Over time, Lyn transformed adversity into growth, refusing to see herself as a victim of circumstance.

Researcher: How did you cope with the challenges of caregiving and managing your family's needs?

Lyn: "The challenges forced me to learn how to manage my time, to find ways to earn income, and to start again even when everything was lost"

These words reveal her determination to rebuild her life despite physical exhaustion, financial strain, and emotional fatigue. Through trial and error, she crafted her own coping mechanisms, adjusting daily schedules, multitasking, improvising household tools, and managing a business from home, all to ensure that her family's needs were met while she fulfilled her caregiving duties.

Over the years, Lyn's efforts cultivated a profound sense
of empowerment.

Researcher: How have your experiences caring for your husband and child shaped your personal growth and sense of strength?

Lyn: "I became stronger because I had no choice. I learned to do things I never imagined I could"

Her resilience was not passive; it was an active, ongoing process of transformation. By taking control of her circumstances and employing problem-solving skills, she redefined herself from a dependent homemaker to an empowered provider.

Lyn's resourcefulness exemplifies adaptive coping, showing how necessity can become a catalyst for personal growth. Whether budgeting carefully, balancing care with livelihood, or creatively managing household challenges, she demonstrated that resilience is cultivated through action, innovation, and determination. Her story illuminates how adaptive coping allows caregivers to not only survive but also grow stronger in the face of relentless challenges.

This theme resonates strongly with Masten's (2001) conceptualization of resilience as "adaptive systems functioning under stress," emphasizing that resilience involves dynamic adjustments and creativity in the face of adversity. Similarly, Bonanno (2004) described resilience as a flexible capacity that allows individuals to recover and even grow following prolonged challenges. Lyn's experience illustrates how adaptive coping enables her not only to survive but to transform adversity into a catalyst for self-mastery.

Within the Filipino context, her coping practices reflect the cultural concept of diskarte—a term denoting ingenuity and the practical wisdom to make do despite limited resources. According to Cruz et al. (2021), diskarte is a deeply embedded Filipino value that underlies everyday survival strategies, particularly among mothers who carry the dual responsibility of caregiving and income generation. This cultural framework situates Lyn's adaptability

not as mere individual effort but as part of a broader social pattern of Filipino resilience grounded in creativity and optimism.

Over time, hardship has reshaped Lyn's identity. Her daily encounters with difficulty have nurtured patience, persistence, and confidence in her ability to overcome obstacles.

Researcher: How has your emotional response to caregiving changed over time?

Lyn: "Before, I used to cry a lot, but now I just do what needs to be done."

This evolution signifies a form of self-transformation, moving from emotional dependence toward emotional maturity and self-efficacy. Her journey affirms that resilience is not only the ability to endure but also the capacity to grow, reflecting the transformative potential of human strength forged through adversity.

Love, Compassion, and Advocacy as Pillars of Caregiving

For Lyn, caregiving was never simply a duty, it was an expression of love. Her care for her husband and son extended beyond meeting daily needs; it was a force that shaped her actions, decisions, and sense of purpose. Love became the foundation of her endurance, guiding her through exhaustion, emotional strain, and physical challenges.

Researcher: How does love for your family influence your ability to manage the challenges of caregiving?

Lyn: "When you love your family, you gain the courage to do even the impossible"

Capturing how her deep affection transformed the burdens of caregiving into a mission of devotion and resilience. This love was inseparable from compassion. Lyn did not confine her care to her

household; it extended outward, motivating her to advocate for her son, EJ, who has autism. She educated relatives, neighbors, and others in her community, striving to foster understanding and prevent judgment or discrimination.

Lyn: "I explain to them that my child is not being disrespectful, he just sees the world differently. I want people to understand him"

Through this advocacy, Lyn's caregiving became a social act, one that nurtured empathy in others while protecting her child from misunderstanding. Her caregiving journey demonstrates that love is active and transformative. It fuels patience, nurtures empathy, and empowers her to persist even when external support is minimal or absent. Every task, from assisting her husband to guiding her son, was performed with intention and care, turning what might have been overwhelming responsibilities into acts of purpose and meaning.

Ultimately, Lyn's story reveals how love, compassion, and advocacy are interwoven in caregiving. Her devotion is both personal and communal, it sustains her family while promoting understanding in her wider environment. Love, in her experience, is not just a feeling, it is the guiding principle that shapes her resilience, informs her actions, and transforms the challenges of caregiving into a journey of hope, protection, and connection.

This manifestation of love as a caregiving force aligns with Watson's (2008) Theory of Human Caring, particularly the humanistic-altruistic values that view caring as a moral ideal grounded in kindness, compassion, and commitment. Watson argues that genuine care involves emotional connection and moral intent qualities that Lyn exhibits in her daily caregiving. Her love, expressed through action and advocacy, sustains not only her family's well-being but also her sense of self-worth and purpose.

From a cultural standpoint, Lyn's caregiving reflects core Filipino values such as utang na loob (debt of gratitude) and malasakit (empathy), which bind family members through mutual care and moral obligation. According to Agaton et al. (2022), these cultural values transform caregiving into a moral and emotional responsibility that is deeply rooted in the Filipino sense of family solidarity. Love, therefore, is not merely emotional; it is ethical — a commitment that compels continuous giving even in the face of hardship.

Moreover, the participant's transformation of pain into advocacy mirrors findings by David and Ong (2020), who observed that Filipino mothers of children with special needs often channel their suffering into acts of awareness and community education, finding empowerment in the process of helping others. In Lyn's story, love and compassion are inseparable from advocacy, they are active forms of resistance against stigma and misunderstanding.

Through love, Lyn demonstrates what Masten (2001) describes as "resilience through connection." Her strength does not stem from isolation but from relational bonds and emotional reciprocity. Love becomes both a source and a product of resilience — enabling her to transform pain into purpose, endurance into empathy, and caregiving into an act of advocacy. Ultimately, Lyn's story illustrates that caregiving, when anchored in love, becomes more than a duty; it becomes a profound expression of humanity and moral grace.

Transformation Through Acceptance and Meaning- Making

Over time, Lyn came to understand the power of acceptance. She realized that peace would not come from changing her husband's paralysis or her son's autism, but from embracing their realities. Accepting their conditions allowed her to find balance and redefine happiness, not in material comforts, but in love, faith, and togetherness. What once felt like a burden gradually transformed into a profound source of meaning and strength, marking a pivotal turning point in her caregiving journey.

The process of acceptance was not instantaneous; it unfolded gradually through emotional struggle, reflection, and spiritual faith

Researcher: How did you come to accept your husband's and son's conditions, and what did that process feel like for you?

Lyn: "At first it was hard to accept, but I told myself, this is who they are. I have no choice but to accept and love
them"

Her words reflect the inner shift from resistance and grief toward peace and understanding. Acceptance became a form of emotional release, allowing her to focus on what she could control rather than the limitations imposed by her circumstances.

For Lyn, acceptance did not equate to resignation. Instead, it became a conscious decision to embrace

her reality and find meaning within it.

Researcher: How has accepting your family's situation influenced the way you view your life and purpose?

Lyn: "When I accepted everything, I started to see things differently. I realized that God gave me this life for a reason."

This realization illustrates how acceptance opened the door to spiritual and psychological transformation, enabling her to reframe suffering as purpose and hardship as an opportunity for love and growth. By acknowledging her family's challenges, Lyn discovered a deeper sense of peace, redefining happiness through gratitude, faith, and the enduring bonds of family.

This transformation aligns with Frankl's (1985) theory of meaning-making, which posits that individuals can find purpose even in the midst of suffering by reinterpreting pain as part of a meaningful existence. For Lyn, meaning was derived from the belief that her caregiving role was both a divine calling and a testament to love. Her perspective embodies what Watson (2008) refers to as transpersonal caring—a deep relational connection in which empathy, acceptance, and compassion transcend the boundaries of self and other, leading to mutual healing and self-discovery.

Empirical studies affirm the link between acceptance and psychological resilience. Abdelmageed et al. (2021) found that acceptance plays a central role in promoting emotional regulation and overall well-being among caregivers, as it allows them to reconcile loss and stress with a sense of inner calm. Similarly, Del Castillo et al. (2020) noted that in the Filipino context, acceptance is often intertwined with faith, serving as a moral and emotional compass that helps individuals endure hardship with grace. Lyn's story exemplifies this synthesis of faith and acceptance; her peace emerges not from external solutions but from the internal act of embracing her life with love and humility.

Acceptance, therefore, represents not only psychological adjustment but also moral and spiritual growth. It signifies the evolution of Lyn's caregiving identity from one centered on obligation and survival to one defined by meaning, love, and transcendence. Through this transformation, she discovered that genuine happiness lies not in escaping pain but in understanding and embracing it. Acceptance allowed her to transform adversity into strength and to live each day with serenity grounded in purpose and faith.

Hope and Future Orientation Amid Adversity

Despite the relentless challenges of caregiving, hope continued to illuminate Lyn's path. Her dreams for her children's education and future fueled her perseverance, giving meaning to each day of sacrifice and exhaustion. Even in moments when life felt overwhelming, she held onto the belief that her efforts were laying the foundation for a better tomorrow. Hope, for Lyn, was not a passive feeling, it was an active source of resilience, a conscious choice to keep moving forward despite uncertainty.

Researcher: What are your hopes, dreams, or goals for your family's future as you continue your journey as both a parent and caregiver?

Researcher: "Every sacrifice today holds the promise of a brighter tomorrow."

Expressing the conviction that her endurance had purpose. This hope was deeply intertwined with her love for her family; every act of care, no matter how physically or emotionally draining, was directed toward creating opportunities and security for her children. It transformed her daily struggles into a meaningful pursuit, reminding her that the hardships she faced were steps toward a brighter future. Lyn's hope was also future-oriented and anchored in her vision for her children's lives.

Lyn: "I just want EJ to finish school and have a better life. That's what keeps me going even when I'm tired".

This statement illustrates how her hope is both motivating and sustaining, it provides direction, emotional purpose, and a sense of mission. For Lyn, hope became the lens through which she framed her caregiving journey, turning daily challenges into acts of love, responsibility, and unwavering faith in the possibilities that lie ahead. This orientation toward the future embodies what Johnson and Williams (2023) refer to as future-oriented resilience, the ability to maintain perseverance and emotional stability by focusing on long-term goals despite ongoing adversity. Hope allows individuals to endure pain not by denying reality but by envisioning a meaningful future that makes current suffering bearable.

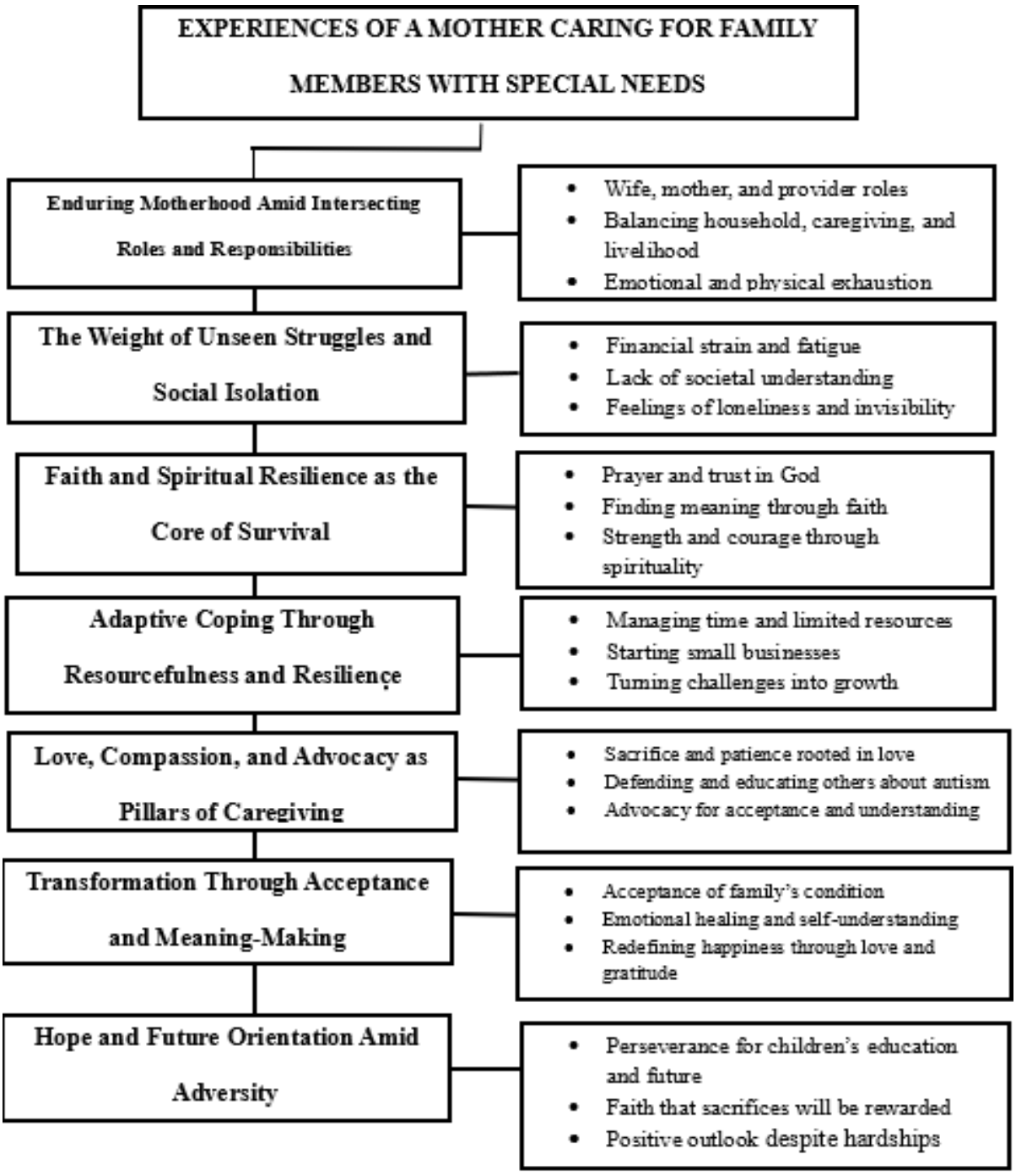

Figure 2: Thematic Map

Similarly, Snyder (2002) described hope as a cognitive and motivational process involving both goal-directed determination and the perceived capacity to achieve those goals. For Lyn, hope functions as both an emotional refuge and a motivational force, enabling her to continue despite limited social support and recurring challenges.

Her future-centered mindset also reflects the Filipino maternal ideal, where caregiving is understood as a lifelong mission of love, duty, and faith (Cruz et al., 2021). Filipino mothers often equate personal fulfillment with their children's success, viewing each hardship as an investment in their family's future. This cultural perspective reinforces the moral and emotional dimensions of hope, it is not self-centered but sacrificial, a hope that gives meaning to suffering.

Researcher: What advice, insights, or strategies can you share with others who might be facing similar challenges in caregiving?

Lyn's enduring hope is also deeply intertwined with her spirituality. She emphasized that faith gives her confidence that her sacrifices are not in vain.

Lyn: "God has plans for us. I believe that all my hard work will be worth it in time."

This faith-infused hope mirrors current research showing that spiritual belief and hope oriented toward the future function as critical resilience resources in caregiving contexts (Uzun et al., 2024; Shokouhi-Tabar et al., 2025). Hope thus becomes both a spiritual anchor and a practical motivator, rooted in love, sustained by belief, and enacted through sustained caregiving action.

Ultimately, this theme encapsulates how hope transforms adversity into strength. It empowers Lyn to persist not because her path is easy, but because she envisions a future where her children's happiness and independence will justify every struggle. In her story, hope is not passive waiting, it is active faith. It sustains her resolve, fuels her resilience, and defines the enduring spirit of motherhood that finds light even in life's darkest moments.

Together, these seven themes form the heart of Lyn's story—a narrative of endurance, faith, transformation, and hope. Her experiences reveal that caregiving is not merely a role, but a calling shaped by love, strengthened by faith, and sustained by meaning. Through her story, the study uncovers the depth of Filipino motherhood—resilient, spiritual, and profoundly human.

Implications

This study offers valuable insights into how healthcare professionals, social workers, and community organizations can better support parents—particularly mothers—who serve as primary caregivers of family members with disabilities and special needs. The story of the participant reveals not only the emotional, physical, and social challenges she faces daily, but also the strength and hope that sustain her. Her experience highlights the urgent need for holistic, family-centered, and faith-sensitive caregiving programs that go beyond the medical model of care.

Implications to Nursing Practice. The study emphasizes the critical role of nurses in recognizing the often-invisible burdens faced by caregivers. Caregivers frequently endure emotional, physical, and social stress without sufficient support, a reality consistent with David and Ong (2020), who describe Filipino mothers of children with special needs as "invisible caregivers." Nurses should implement structured support programs that include counseling, peer mentoring, and respite care, which have been shown to reduce burnout and improve emotional well- being (Lau et al., 2022). Additionally, integrating spiritual care and psychosocial support, such as faith-informed interventions or mindfulness-based practices, can enhance resilience, hope, and coping capacity for caregivers (Shokouhi-Tabar et al., 2025; Uzun et al., 2024).

Implications to Nursing Education. The participant's experience highlights the importance of incorporating caregiver realities into nursing education. Nursing students should be trained to understand family-centered care, the emotional and spiritual dimensions of caregiving, and the advocacy role caregivers often undertake. Case studies, simulations, and reflective exercises based on real-life caregiving scenarios can prepare students to provide empathetic, culturally sensitive, and competent care. Teaching students about empowerment strategies, advocacy, and community engagement aligns with research showing that culturally grounded interventions, incorporating Filipino values like malasakit and diskarte, improve caregiving outcomes (Cruz et al., 2021; Estrella & Reyes, 2022).

Implications to Nursing Research. The findings reveal gaps in knowledge regarding the lived experiences and adaptive strategies of caregivers managing multiple family members with disabilities. Future research should examine

interventions that promote caregiver resilience, psychosocial support, and advocacy skills. Longitudinal studies could explore how caregiver needs evolve over time, while intervention studies can evaluate the effectiveness of culturally sensitive, faith-informed, and community- based programs (Ariani et al., 2023; World Health Organization, 2023). Such research can guide evidence-based practices and policies that enhance the well-being of caregivers and the families they support.

This narrative inquiry highlights the importance of amplifying the voices of parents and family caregivers who continue to provide care despite hardship, disability, and social invisibility. The lived experience of the mother in this study reflects the untold stories of countless others in similar circumstances. Future research should aim to capture a wider array of caregiving experiences, including perspectives from fathers, siblings, grandparents, and other family members who share caregiving responsibilities. By examining multiple viewpoints within the family, researchers can better understand how love, faith, and resilience are collectively experienced and sustained in Filipino households.

Longitudinal qualitative studies are also recommended to track caregivers over time, providing insight into how coping strategies, emotional resilience, and spiritual beliefs evolve throughout prolonged caregiving. As resilience is a dynamic process (Masten, 2001), following caregivers' journeys longitudinally could reveal patterns of adaptation and highlight the mechanisms that allow them to maintain hope, purpose, and strength over years of sustained responsibility.

Future inquiries should also examine how caregiving intersects with disability, gender, and socioeconomic status, particularly in low- and middle- income countries. The Social Model of Disability (Oliver, 1996) emphasizes that societal barriers, rather than impairments alone, contribute to hardship. Comparative studies between urban and rural contexts could uncover how access to healthcare, education, and community resources shapes caregiver well-being and family outcomes. Additionally, research could explore

faith-based resilience, investigating how spirituality and religious practices contribute to emotional endurance, advocacy, and meaning-making, as suggested by Uzun et al. (2024) and Shokouhi-Tabar et al. (2025).Given the limitation of this study, which focused on a single participant, future research should include multiple caregivers across diverse settings, regions, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Such studies can deepen understanding, enhance transferability, and reveal both shared struggles and unique strategies among Filipino caregivers. Furthermore, evaluating the effectiveness of community-based support programs that incorporate cultural values like malasakit and diskarte could inform evidence-based policies, ensuring that caregiver well- being is prioritized in health systems. Overall, continuing to document these narratives will strengthen the recognition of caregiving as an act of love, advocacy, and resilience, fostering more compassionate and supportive structures for families.

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