



Perceived Social Support and Mental Health Help-Seeking Attitude of Parents of Learners with Intellectual Developmental Disorder: Inputs for Psychosocial Support Program

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Abstract

Lack of psychosocial support programs for parents of children with disabilities leaves them highly vulnerable to stress, financial hardship, and social isolation. Therefore, this study aimed to analyze the level of the participants' perceived social support from family, friends, and significant others and their mental health help-seeking attitude in terms of psychological openness, help seeking propensity, and stigma indifference. The study employed a correlational design to gather the research data, and utilized the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) and the Attitudes toward Seeking Mental Services (IASMHS). The participants in this study were 207 adults (aged 18-65) who have children with intellectual developmental disorder enrolled in a special education curriculum in a public school in the city schools division of Bacoor, Cavite; they were selected using a purposive method because of their shared criteria that fit the study. The findings determined that there is significant positive monotonic relationship between perceived social support and mental health help-seeking, with Spearman rank correlation coefficient of 0.156 and p-value of 0.024. This suggests that as perceived availability of social support increase, confidence to seek professional mental health assistance also increase.

Keywords: Developmental disability, parenting, perceived social support, mental health-help seeking

Abstrak

Kurangnya program dukungan psikososial bagi orang tua anak-anak penyandang disabilitas membuat mereka sangat rentan terhadap stres, kesulitan keuangan, dan isolasi sosial. Oleh karena itu, penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis tingkat dukungan sosial yang dirasakan keluarga, teman, dan orang-orang terdekat, serta sikap mereka dalam mencari bantuan kesehatan mental dalam hal keterbukaan psikologis, kecenderungan mencari bantuan, dan ketidakpedulian terhadap stigma. Penelitian ini menggunakan desain korelasional untuk mengumpulkan data penelitian, dan menggunakan Skala Dukungan Sosial Multidimensi (MSPSS) dan Sikap terhadap Pencarian Layanan Kesehatan Mental (IASMHS). Peserta dalam penelitian ini adalah 207 orang dewasa (berusia 18-65 tahun) yang memiliki anak dengan gangguan perkembangan intelektual yang terdaftar dalam kurikulum pendidikan khusus di sekolah negeri di divisi sekolah kota Bacoor, Cavite; mereka dipilih menggunakan metode purposif dengan kriteria bersama yang sesuai dengan penelitian. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa terdapat hubungan positif yang signifikan antara dukungan sosial yang dirasakan dan pencarian bantuan kesehatan mental, dengan koefisien korelasi Spearman sebesar 0,156 dan nilai p sebesar 0,024. Hal ini menunjukkan bahwa seiring meningkatnya persepsi ketersediaan dukungan sosial, kepercayaan untuk mencari bantuan kesehatan mental profesional juga meningkat.

Kata kunci: Disabilitas perkembangan, dukungan sosial, pencarian bantuan kesehatan mental, pengasuhan anak

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1. Introduction

The Republic of the Philippines acknowledges that every citizen has a right to high-quality education; therefore, Republic Act (RA) No. 7277, or the "Magna Carta for Disabled Persons," underscores the State's obligation to provide disabled individuals with adequate access to high-quality education and opportunities to develop their skills. Moreover, to fulfill these state commitments, the Department of Education (DepEd) is

accountable for ensuring that every Filipino learner with special education needs, irrespective of age or socioeconomic status, has access to high-quality educational programs that support their holistic development and enable them to become functionally literate citizens. Additionally, the City Ordinance No. CO 2-2016 Section 36.6 of Bacoor, Cavite mandates the development of specific training programs for educators and health professionals to ensure they have the skills,



knowledge, and procedures needed to effectively support and manage children with special needs.

In a local study conducted by Degamo and Sano (2021), parents of students attending Roxas, West Roxas, and Central Schools, as well as Isabela, shared problems and challenges during the pandemic. The researchers found that the parents were having trouble managing their time and handling their children's lessons. In a similar local qualitative study conducted by Borro and Ceballo (2023) during the new normal or post-COVID period, six female parents of children with special needs experienced increased caregiving responsibilities towards their children, difficulties with limited to no virtual learning, social isolation, and financial strain. In addition, the study found that the parents used building a support network, creating structured activities and routines for their children, and optimism and acceptance to cope with these challenges.

City Schools Division of Bacoor doesn't have a psychosocial support program for parents and learners in the special education curriculum, who also face difficulties with the modular mode of studying, according to F. Demero, a special education teacher (personal communication, 16 May 2022). Such as behavioral difficulties of the learners that interfere with their study and the mental well-being of their parents, are the reasons they would need a psychosocial support program that would help them acquire mental health help, and their children foster a healthy relationship inside the home and school.

According to Taylor (2011), perceived social support refers to a person's sense of being taken care of by others and having a solid support system to turn to in regular circumstances or during particular crises, and it also describes how people view their close friends, family, and significant others as sources of general help and support when they need it. In connection with this, parents raising children with special needs have reported that support from their networks is sufficient to manage caregiving stress and promote positive outcomes. They have done this through nonjudgmental discussion of their concerns, receiving empathy from others, expressing negative emotions, and seeking counseling (Peer and Hillman, 2014).

In 1985, Ajzen stated that an essential element of the help-seeking construct that motivates treatment-seeking behavior is the intention to seek help. In line with this definition, attitudes affecting

psychological support-seeking behaviors of parents of children with special needs depend on many complex psychosocial factors. Although people's inclination to seek psychological support may be influenced by their knowledge and views about mental health, this process is not determined by awareness of available services. From a clinical standpoint, this emphasizes the significance of stigma-reducing and motivation-boosting interventions targeted at altering attitudes in addition to information provision (Kacan et al., 2025).

Social support was positively correlated with help-seeking attitudes, such that individuals receiving greater social support from friends and family exhibited more positive attitudes toward seeking professional help (Seyfi et al., 2013). In support of the previous study, a strong positive relationship exists between perceived social support and mental health help-seeking attitudes, where individuals who feel they have reliable support from family, friends, or significant others generally hold more positive attitudes toward therapy and are more likely to seek professional psychological assistance when needed (Thomas & George, 2022). Thus, these variables will play an important role in this study and as inputs for a specialized program for parents of learners with intellectual development disorder.

Upon inquiring about the available psychosocial support programs for the Bacoor city school divisions in Cavite, there was no such program for special education, and due to limited quantitative and local studies about perceived social support and mental health help-seeking attitude of parents of children with intellectual developmental disorder, this study was conducted to give inputs for psychosocial support programs. A specialized psychosocial program may be part of the educational system, providing services and promoting well-being for parents, guardians, and individuals with special needs; it is also their right to access these mental health programs, which will strengthen their interpersonal relationships and provide access to mental health services.

This study's primary goals were to investigate the respondents' attitudes toward seeking mental health treatment and their perceptions of social support to identify their willingness to seek mental health support and the available social support from their environment, so that they would be able to utilize the psychosocial support program made for

them in the near future, and because there is a lack of information on these psychological variables when it comes to the parents of children with intellectual development disorder. It also aimed to characterize the relationship between the variables of concern and to provide input for a psychosocial program for the Bacoor, Cavite school division. The participants for this study would be limited to parents of learners with intellectual development disorder enrolled in public schools under the city school division of Bacoor, Cavite.

The study utilized a descriptive correlational design to determine the relationship and difference between perceived social support and mental health help-seeking attitudes of parents and guardians of students with an intellectual developmental disorder. The study used a statistical correlation test to characterize the degree of association between participants' mental health help-seeking attitudes and perceived social support. It also involves comparing sex, perceived social support, age group, and mental health help-seeking to determine which has the higher mean value or stronger association, without implying causation from these comparisons. In addition, the study used a descriptive design to identify the participants' sex and age, levels of mental health help-seeking attitude, and perceived social support. This study supports its hypothesis that there is a relationship between the perceived social support and the mental health help-seeking attitude of parents of learners with intellectual development disorder.

2. Method

The researcher used a correlation analysis to assess the degree of association between participants' mental health help-seeking attitudes and perceived social support. The study also involves comparing and ranking sex, perceived social support, age group, and mental health help-seeking to determine which has the higher mean value or stronger association, without implying causation from these comparisons. In addition, the study used a descriptive design to identify the participants' sex, age, levels of mental health help-seeking attitude, and perceived social support.

The researcher utilized a non-probability sampling method, particularly a purposive sampling on selecting the two hundred seven (207) participants; consisted of 44 males and 163 females, 21 of them had age range of 18 to 29 years old, 117 were ages between

30 to 45, 40 were ages between 46 to 55, and 29 of them were ages 56 to 65, whose children are diagnosed with intellectual developmental disorder and were enrolled under the special education curriculum at a public school in the Division of City of Bacoor at the time of the study. The research focused on a specific population in creating a basis for a specialized psychosocial program exclusive to the special education curriculum. In addition, the selection criterion was one participant per student who was willing to participate in the study.

This study focused on the results of the obtained data from the adapted research instruments: (1) Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) developed by Zimet et al. (1988). It is a 12-item questionnaire rated on a 7-point Likert response format, from 1 = Very Strongly Disagree to 7 = Very Strongly Agree, has a local reliability of $\alpha=0.916$, categorized into three subscales which are the factor groups relating to the source of the perceived social support, namely family, friends and significant others; and (2) the Inventory of Attitudes toward Seeking Mental Services (IASMHS) developed by Mackenzie et al. (2004), a 24-item scale which is rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 0 to 5 (0 = disagree, 1 = somewhat disagree, 2 = undecided, 3 = somewhat agree, 4 = agree), has a local reliability of $\alpha=0.730$, which measures an individual's attitudes toward seeking mental health services designed to evaluate three factors, psychological openness, help-seeking propensity, and stigma indifference, through the participants' contributions.

The following descriptive statistical methods were employed in this study: Mean. It is the sum of a set of values divided by the number of values in the set (Sykes et al., 2018). It was used to generate scores for perceived social support and respondents' mental health help-seeking attitudes. Kruskal-Wallis was used in this study to compare age groups and their mental health help-seeking attitude to determine the stronger association without implying causation from these comparisons. The Mann-Whitney U Test was used to compare two samples or groups that are from the same population: sex and perceived social support. Spearman's Rank Correlation was used to assess the statistical relationship between participants' perceived social support and their attitudes toward seeking mental health help. The statistical software used in the data analysis was Jamovi version 2.3.28.0-win and EpiData Entry and Analysis Software.

3. Results

The result of this study determined that there is a significant relationship between perceived social support and mental health help-seeking, with a Spearman Rank Correlation Coefficient of 0.156 and a p-value of 0.024, which implies there is a relationship between perceived social support and the mental health help-seeking attitude of parents of learners with intellectual development disorder.

Table 1. Age and sex distribution of the participants

	Classification	Frequency	Percent
Age	29 and below	21	10
	30 to 45	117	57
	46 to 55	40	19
	56 and above	29	14
Sex	Male	44	21
	Female	163	79

Table 1 shows that the majority of participants are female, accounting for 79 percent of the total population, while 21 percent are male. It also shows that more than half (57%) of the total participants belonged to the age bracket of 30–45 years old, followed by the age bracket of 46–55 years old with 19 percent, 56 years old and above with 14 percent, and 29 years old and below with ten percent.

Table 2. Mean distribution of perceived social support

Item	Mean	Interpretation
Family	5.67	High
Friends	5.73	High
Significant others	4.89	Moderate
TOTAL	5.43	High

Note: 1.00–2.99=Low; 2.00–5.00=Moderate; 5.01–7.00=High

Table 2 demonstrates that the participants in the study have high levels of perceived social support from family and friends, and moderate levels from significant others, as measured by the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS).

Table 3. Mean distribution of Mental Health Help-Seeking Attitude

Item	Mean	Interpretation
Psychological openness	25.01	High
Help-seeking propensity	28.82	High
Indifference to stigma	25.92	High
TOTAL	79.76	High

Note: 1.00–24.00=Low; 24.01–120.00=High

Table 3 demonstrates that the participants have high levels of perceived social support for psychological openness, help-seeking propensity, and indifference to stigma, as measured by the Inventory of Attitudes Toward Seeking Mental Health Services (IASMHS).

Table 4. The difference between males and females in perceived social support

Sex	Mean	Mann-Whitney U	p	Decision
Male	87.68	2868.00	0.042	Reject Ho
Female	108.40			

Table 4 shows the difference by sex in participants' perceived social support from family, friends, and significant others, and table 5 shows the difference among the four age groups in terms of mental health help-seeking attitude of the participants.

Table 5. Differences among age groups in mental health help-seeking

Age	Mean rank	Kruskal-Wallis	p	Decision
< 30	123.21	8.18	0.042	Reject Ho
30 to 45	108.91			
46 to 55	96.99			
> 55	79.97			

Mean rank followed by a common letter are not significant at 5% level

4. Discussion

The findings of this study indicate a significant relationship between perceived social support and mental health help-seeking, with a Spearman's Rank Correlation Coefficient of 0.156 and a p-value of 0.024. This implies that the study supports its hypothesis that there is a relationship between the perceived social support and the mental health help-seeking attitude of parents of learners with intellectual development disorder. In connection with the findings of this study, Nagai (2015) conducted a longitudinal study and found that help-seeking intentions, subjective needs, depressive symptoms, and social support can all be used to predict actual help-seeking behavior and to shed light on the moderating effects of social support. According to the study, only subjective needs had a promising impact on help-seeking intentions and actual activity. There was a strong positive correlation among children's mental health, parent-child connections, parental marital quality, and parents' perceived social support.

Relationship conflict between parents and children was found to be significantly and negatively correlated with parental marital quality, parents' perceived social support, and children's mental health and its dimensions. On the other hand, intimacy in parent-child relationships was found to be significantly and positively correlated with these same factors. The results also showed a significant correlation between children's mental health and parents' perceptions of social support. Stated differently, the greater the parents' perceived social support, the less probable it is that young children would suffer from mental health illnesses and the more likely it is that their mental health will improve (Yan et al., 2024).

In contrast to the previous studies mentioned above, Seyfi et al. (2013) showed that more positive attitudes toward seeking professional aid were associated with lower levels of social support. When experiencing psychological issues, people who feel that their social networks are providing less social support may turn to professional assistance. Positive social support from the environment may help individuals careseek mental health help from professionals, especially in a collectivist society like the Philippines.

The majority of the participants are female, which means that most of them are often present in providing care to their children with intellectual developmental disorder. Similar findings from a study by Sharma et al. (2016) found that women perform personal care duties and give care for others more frequently than men. In addition, research has also shown that women who provide care endure higher levels of psychological discomfort, caregiver load, and physical and mental strain. These discrepancies between men and women in terms of caregiving have been present in many cultures, specifically in gender roles. Caring for the sick, disabled, and elderly is one of the women's roles even in Filipino society, but that doesn't mean that men cannot do this nurturing role. There are still men who work competently in caregiving professions; it is just that in most patriarchal societies, men are not expected to care for the children, sick, disabled, and elderly because that is a woman's job, which gives them limitations and takes away these opportunities.

More than half (57%) of the total participants were in the 30-45 age bracket, followed by the 46-55 age bracket (19%). Then, 56 years old and above

(19%) and 29 years old and below (10%). Aligned with this result, a study conducted by Gutowska (2022) on the care of adults with intellectual disability shows that the age of the caregivers was 51-82 years old, and the individuals they were caring for were in the ages between 20 and 49 years old, with an age gap of 20 to 35 years between the caregiver and the individuals with intellectual disability. In addition, caregivers of individuals with intellectual disability who are typically in their 20s to 40s have high physical energy for intensive daily tasks, better ability to manage behavioral challenges, and higher adaptability to new interventions (Bahador et al., 2023). Given this age gap, the capability and adaptability of the caregivers of people with an intellectual disability are reasonable for maintaining good well-being and supporting relationships in the lives of these individuals

Findings show that the participants have high levels of perceived social support from family, friends, and significant others, with a mean of 5.43, indicating copious socio-emotional support from these people in their lives. The range of 5.10 to 7.00 for the weighted mean score of perceived social support from family, friends, and significant others could be considered high. The weighted mean score for perceived social support from family, friends, and significant others, ranging from 3.00 to 5.00, could be considered moderate. The weighted mean score of perceived social support for family, friends, and significant others, ranging from 1.00 to 2.90, could be considered low. High levels of perceived social support also indicate that individuals can make positive interpretations and communicate effectively with their family, friends, and significant others. They regard their family, friends, and significant others as extremely important, highly valued, or necessary people in their lives. When they experience high levels of perceived social support, their mental health benefits from a greater sense of self-worth, security, and belonging. High perceived social support from family, friends, and significant others improves an individual's quality of life and contentment by reducing the impact of loneliness in romantic relationships and by building social skills through interaction (Zimet et al., 1988).

High perceived social support from family, friends, and significant others improves an individual's quality of life and contentment by reducing the impact of loneliness in romantic

relationships and building social skills through interaction, while decreased social support reported by families of children with developmental disabilities has been documented in the literature. Nonetheless, throughout the pandemic, families of children with developmental disabilities did not encounter the same disparities in social assistance available as families of children with standard development. Restrictions on government and educational help are among the restricted social supports that parents of children with developmental disabilities currently face (Da Costa et al., 2023).

The study determined that participants have high levels of mental health help-seeking attitude, with a mean of 79.76, which indicates a more positive attitude towards seeking mental health services. A lower score of 40 indicates a more negative or less favorable attitude toward seeking mental health services. A score of 40 or higher indicates a more positive attitude towards seeking mental health services. It implies that a person is more likely to recognize their psychological problems and be willing to consider getting help for them, is more likely to believe that their loved ones would think negatively of them if they seek mental health services, and have more readiness to seek out mental health care when necessary (Mackenzie et al., 2004).

Research on the relationship between stigma and enabling factors and the help-seeking behaviors of parental caregivers of people with intellectual disabilities and dual diagnoses has revealed that lower levels of stigma in the family were linked to higher levels of personal enabling factors (such as awareness of available resources and prior experience seeking help), which were linked to higher levels of help-seeking behaviors. Higher professional enabling factors—such as the professional's attitude and the availability of nearby services—were associated with greater intentions to seek assistance, which in turn were associated with greater help-seeking actions. By providing families with adequate information about available resources and facilitating a more pleasant experience throughout the process, professionals can help families develop a stronger sense of self-efficacy in their help-seeking (Werner et al., 2019).

Findings of this study revealed a significant difference between males and females in perceived social support, with a Mann-Whitney U statistic of 2868.00 and a p-value of 0.042. This implies that sex

is a factor that influences the distinctions in perceived social support of parents of learners with intellectual development disorders in the city schools division of Bacoor, Cavite. A study by Kashif (2022) found a significant effect of social support (supervisor and coworker support) on stress among male and female university teachers. Moreover, female teachers have higher levels of social support than male teachers at the university level. The finding suggests that women tend to receive more social support from the environment, since Filipino society views women as delicate and vulnerable and as requiring support in every aspect of their lives, while men are expected to be tough and strong; thus, they perceive less social support from their environment. This narrative should be changed over time because men should be treated equally, seek and receive social support from family, friends, and significant others, just like women.

The study's findings revealed a significant difference among the four age groups in mental health help-seeking attitudes, with a Kruskal-Wallis statistic of 8.180 and a p-value of 0.042. This implies that age is a factor that influences the differences in levels of mental health help-seeking attitude of parents of learners with intellectual development disorder in the city schools division of Bacoor, Cavite. According to a supporting study conducted among Japanese workers, the percentage of participants who did not seek help was significantly higher in the 40-59 age group than in the 20-39 age group. This suggests that individuals who did not seek help were more likely to be experiencing severe psychological distress. This implies that encouraging help-seeking behavior is critical to enhancing these age groups' mental health (Yamauchi et al., 2020). The study findings may suggest that the younger generation, particularly those people who are 29 years of age and below, received psychoeducation about mental health awareness using different media platforms and normalized or have a positive view of mental health help-seeking behaviors and coping, which is why they have the highest mental health help-seeking attitude compared to other age groups. On the other hand, the older generation has the lowest mental health help-seeking attitude, which may be because they acquired more wisdom in life, making them more resilient. This gap between generations may play an important role in Filipino culture, as older generations help the younger generation seek mental

health support to build resilience in the midst of adversity.

Out of the results of this study, seminars on mental health literacy, mental health seeking, building an interpersonal support system, coping strategies, and free access to mental health consultation will be the inputs for the psychosocial support program that will be given solely to the participants of the study, the parents of learners with intellectual development disorder enrolled under the city schools Division of Bacoor Cavite, Philippines. Future researchers may conduct experimental research designs outside these seminars or psychosocial programs to measure their effects on perceived social support and mental health help-seeking attitudes. They can also use the variables in this study and relate them to other psychological variables, such as psychological well-being, resiliency, adversity quotient, and interpersonal relationship satisfaction, on a larger population in different research locales, utilizing different statistical analyses to determine if the variables will predict each other and yield more compelling and meaningful findings.

5. Conclusion

This study aimed to determine the relationship and gain a better understanding of the concepts of perceived social support and mental health help-seeking attitudes among parents of students with intellectual developmental disorder. Most participants in this study were 30-45 years old and female. The participants have shown high levels of perceived social support and a positive attitude toward mental health help-seeking. The research rejected its null hypothesis, indicating a significant relationship between the variables: higher levels of mental health help-seeking attitude are associated with higher levels of perceived social support from family, friends, and significant others. The study recommends conducting an experimental study to investigate the effectiveness of the suggested psychosocial programs. Also, use the variables investigated in this study to correlate with psychological variables, such as psychological well-being, resiliency, adversity quotient, and interpersonal relationship satisfaction, on a larger population in different research locales, utilizing different statistical analyses to determine if the variables could predict each other and yield more compelling and meaningful findings.

Ethical Statement: The study underwent title proposal review and preparation of a research manuscript or protocol, which were reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board of Cavite State University. The researcher presented the informed consent to each participant to obtain permission and voluntary participation, and discussed confidentiality and the protection of participants' rights and well-being. The researcher ensured the privacy of the informed consent gathered from the participants. The researcher ensured that the IRB and the thesis adviser were notified of the changes.

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