

Impact of a Parent Support Group on Parents of Children with Disabilities in Enugu Metropolis Nigeria

Okoroikpa Njideka Ifeoma
 Department of Educational Foundations
 Ebonyi State College of Education
 Ikwo, Ebonyi State, Nigeria
 njideokoroikpa2@gmail.com

Abstract—This study examined the impact of “a parent support group” in empowering parents in Enugu metropolis Nigeria in improving the management of their children with disabilities. The study adopted a survey research design. Five research questions were asked and two (2) hypotheses were developed. The sample of the study was (20) parents, who have children with disabilities. Data were collected through questionnaire named Parent Support Group Questionnaire (PSGQ). A test of internal consistency, using Cronbach’s Alpha method, yielded a reliability index of 0.88. Analysis of data was done through simple percentages, mean and standard deviation. The hypotheses were tested with t-test analysis at 0.05 level of significance. Findings of the study suggest that interactions in activities of parent support group have positive contributions to parents and their children’s upbringing. The researcher recommends, along with other suggestions that parents of children with disabilities should form support groups or join existing ones for empowerment.

Keywords—Parents; Children with disabilities; Parent support group; upbringing; and empowerment.

I. INTRODUCTION

Becoming a parent can be a time filled with anticipation and elation. Prior to the birth of the baby; parents visualize what the child may look like; the role he or she will play in the family; and whether the child will be an engineer; a medical doctor or go into sports or theater. Maybe the new baby will even join his or her parents’ trade or occupation. When the infant is diagnosed with a disability; the parents are left devastated; grieving and in a vulnerable state of mind due to the difficulties that come with raising a child with disability. Parents have described this feeling as one of helplessness devoid of hope [1]. The transition from feeling helpless and overwhelmed to believing in and acting on their ability to parent a child with disabilities is an ongoing process for

families [2]. The behavioral challenges associated with a child with disability can leave families feeling isolated [3].

Helping parents who have children with disabilities by providing them with supportive services to help them adjust to their children’s needs is essential. These supportive services could empower parents in the upbringing of a child with disability. Most parents require supports and resources to feel competent in parenting skills and to learn to advocate as part of parenting a child with special needs [4]. This paper attempts to inform the literature on parents by examining the impact of belonging to a parent support group in raising children with disabilities. The next paragraph will provide background information and further context for this study by reviewing some relevant literature.

Literature reveals that parents of children with disabilities undergo a substantial amount of difficulties in the management of their children; especially in a society where there is still discrimination against children with disabilities and their parents. To reduce the difficulties associated with raising a child with disabilities; parents needs a buffer; and “a parent support group” may offer a solution. By carrying out the study; the researcher wants to find out how parents of children with special needs are empowered through participation in a Parent Support Group (PSG) as against parents who do not belong to a Parent Support Group (NPSG).

A. Aims And Objectives Of The Study

The general aim of the study is the impact of a parent support group on parents of children with disabilities in Enugu Metropolis Nigeria. Specifically; the study is designed to achieve the following specific objectives:

1. To find out how demographic characteristics of parents whose children have disabilities and are members of PSG differ from those who are NPSG members?
2. To examine how stressful it is to manage a child with disabilities by members of PSG and NPSG.
3. To examine coping strategies of PSG members compared with NPSG members.
4. To determine whether belonging to PSG increase parents of children with disabilities advocacy strength than those of NPSG.
5. To find out if exposure to information bank by PSG members differ from NPSG.

B. Research Questions

1. How do the demographic characteristics of parents whose children have disabilities and are members of PSG differ from those who are NPSG members?
2. How stressful is management of a child with disability/ies on parents who belong to PSG and NPSG?
3. How do the coping strategies of members of PSG compare with NPSG members?
4. How does advocacy strength of membership of PSG compare with NPSG members?
5. How does exposure to information bank of members of PSG differ from NPSG members?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Empowerment

Empowerment is authority given to someone to have control over one's life by taking action to get what one wants and needs. Empowerment involves increasing one's knowledge and skills and boosting motivation to achieve a desirable outcome; and it refers to a continuum of experiences that offer the individual opportunities to utilize his or her own competencies to learn new information and skills [2]. Thus; this paper focuses on empowerment of parents of children with disabilities.

B. Children with disabilities

In a legal term; Americans with Disabilities Act ADA; defines a child with disability as a child who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activity. Medically; it is defined as an umbrella term; covering impairments; activity limitations; and participation restrictions. Thus; disability is a complex phenomenon; reflecting an interaction between features of a child's body and features of the society in which he or she lives [5] .

This study involves all categories of children with disabilities in Enugu metropolis.

C. Parent support Group

Parents Support Group is a group or an association formed by parents or for parents who have one challenge; an issue or another concerning their children or ward. [6]; points out that parent support groups exist to help parents care for their children in the best ways possible; there is not one singular type of "support group". This study further stated that from parent-to-parent support to professionally facilitated group counseling; these groups serve all kinds of caregivers who find parenting a challenge.

D. Stress in management of children with disabilities

Stress is an individual's way of responding to any kind of demand or threat. When one senses danger; whether it is real or imagined; the body's defenses kick into high gear in a rapid; automatic process known as the "fight-or-flight" reaction or the "stress response." Many parents experience predictable periods of stress as they adjust to the demands of parenting a child with disabilities [7] . Researches according to [8] show that parents of children with disabilities are particularly vulnerable to stress. High levels of distress have been found in up to 70% of mothers and 40% of fathers of children with severe disability. This paper aims at discovering how parents manage these stressors.

E. Coping strategies

Children with disabilities create stressful events for parents. How parents respond to the stresses of raising children with disabilities depends on a variety of factors influencing their ability to cope; such as their interpretation of the stressful event; their sources of support; resources available in the community; and family structure. Additionally; parents may experience the impact of financial burden; restricted social interactions; and mental worries and so on [9]. Parents are eager to learn better coping strategies and parent groups can provide both skill training and emotional support for parents of children with disabilities Family friendly fun (2019). This study hopes to establish how a parent support group can provide skills and emotional support to parent of children with disabilities in Enugu Metropolis.

F. Advocacy

Advocacy is an act by a person or group of persons that aims to influence decisions within economic; political and social systems and institutions. The achievements gained under the Education for the Handicapped Act Public Law 94-142 in [10] and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in [11] were clearly strengthened by the IDEA Amendments of 1997 [12]. A fundamental provision of these special education laws is the right of parents to participate in the educational decision-making process [13] . [14] opines that the major part of being an advocate involves talking with officials and staff of agencies and organizations; as well as government representatives; who really can make a difference in the lives of your loved ones. The advocacy strengths of parents of children with disabilities will be x-rayed by this study.

G. Information Bank

Parents are often baffled by the problems presented by a child with disabilities. Some disabilities do not become obvious until a child reaches school age. Parents need a wealth of information in understanding disabilities; negotiating the special education process; and helping their children and themselves in coping with raising a child with disabilities. One of the first things a parent can do that may prove enormously helpful; now and in the future; is to collect informations about the child's disability; about the services that are available; and about the specific things they can do to help the child develop to the fullest extent possible [15] . Collecting and using the information available on disability issues is a critical part of being a parent of a child special needs.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A. Research design

The study adopted descriptive survey design; as it used the opinion of parents of children with disabilities in Enugu metropolis.

B. Permission to conduct the study

To enable the researcher conduct the study; she sought and obtained permission from the school authorities and management teams of the three schools used for the study. Consent forms were filled by the parents involved in the study.

C. Area of the study

The study was conducted in three schools in Enugu metropolis where children with disabilities are admitted and the parents in focus for the study accessible.

D. Population of the study

The population of the study comprised 20 respondents: 10 parents who belong to Special (Needs) Parent Support Association; a parent support group which is the only parent support group known to the researcher in Enugu metropolis and 10 parents who do not belong to the support group from the three schools.

E. Sample and sampling techniques

The purposive sampling technique was employed in this study to select parents who belong to the parent support group because they have only few active members and simple random sampling for those who do not belong to the support group.

F. Instruments for data collection

The instrument used in this study was a questionnaire named Parent Support Group Questionnaire (PSGQ); which was developed by the researcher. This was used to elicit information from respondents. Questionnaire was used because some of the respondents are more likely to write than speak. The instruments comprised 24 items in a five-point scale response format (5 – strongly agree; 4 – agree; 3– undecided 2 – disagree and 1 – strongly disagree). The instrument was designed to investigate the impact of a parent support group on parents of children with disabilities.

G. Validation and reliability of the instruments

The face validity of the instrument was established by three research experts in special education; psychology; measurement and evaluation from the Faculty of Education; University of Nigeria Nsukka. A trial test was conducted using 10 respondents from a school for children with disabilities in Ebonyi state. A test of internal consistency was done by using the Crombach Alpha Method and yielded an alpha value of 0.88. This measured the reliability of the instrument.

H. Method of data analyses

Analysis of data was done through simple percentages; mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions. The hypotheses were tested with t-test analysis at 0.05 level of significant.

IV. RESULTS

Table I shows the demographic characteristics of parents whose children have disabilities in Enugu State; out of twenty (20) parents: 19 parents have children with disabilities while one of the parents does not have. The results are from parents with children with disabilities. Based on relationship 14(73.7%) are mothers and 5(26.3%) are fathers; 6(31.6%) of the Parents between Age group 46-50 years are the majority; 9(47.4%) of the parents had HND/Degree; 10 (52.6%) of the parents are from Middle Class socio-economic status and 12(63.2%) of the parents are civil servants; were the majority.

TABLE I. DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF PARENTS OF CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

Extent	Do you belong to a parent support group (PSG)?		Total
	PSG	NPSG	
Low Extent	0	1 (10.0)	1 (5.0)
Moderate Extent	2 (20.0)	1 (10.0)	3 (15.0)
High Extent	8(80.0)	8(80.0)	16 (80.0)
Total	10 (100)	10 (100)	20 (100)

Table II revealed the extent of stress parent experience in management of children with disabilities; 50% of the parents had a low extent stress in management of these children; 40% had moderate extent and 10% had high extent stress. This implies that majority of the parents in Parent Support group to high extent can manage the stress.

TABLE II. EXTENT OF STRESS IN MANAGING A CHILD WITH SPECIAL NEEDS BY PSG AND NPSG

S/N	Parent Status	Description	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Relationship Status	Father	5	26.3
		Mother	14	73.7
2	Age Group (years)	36-40	2	10.5
		41-45	4	21.1
		46-50	6	31.6
		51 and above	7	36.8
3	Highest Education Qualification	FSLC	1	5.3
		WAEC/SSCE	2	10.5
		OND/NCE	2	10.5
		HND/DEGREE	9	47.4
		MASTERS	4	21.9
		Ph.D	1	5.3
4	Socio-Economic Status	Lower Class	3	15.8
		Middle Class	10	52.6
		Upper Middle Class	4	21.1
		Upper Class	2	10.5
5.	Occupation	House Wife	1	5.3
		Civil Servant	12	63.2
		Business	3	15.8
		Others	3	15.8

Table III revealed the extent of Coping Strategies of parent of children with disabilities; 5% of the parents to a low extent had coping strategies of caring for these children; 15% had moderate extent and 80% to a high extent had Coping Strategies. This implies that majority of the parents in PSG had high extent coping strategies.

TABLE III. EXTENT OF COPING STRATEGIES OF PARENTS OF CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS BY PSG AND NPSG

Extent	Do you belong to a parent support group (PSG)?		Total
	PSG	NPSG	
Low Extent	4 (40.0)	6 (60.0)	10 (50.0)
Moderate Extent	4(40.0)	4(40.0)	8 (40.0)
High Extent	2 (20.0)	0	2 (10.0)
Total	10 (100)	10 (100)	20 (100)

Table IV revealed the extent of Advocacy Strength of parent of children with disabilities; 4% of the parents had to Moderate extent Advocacy Strength of caring for these children; 16% had high extent Advocacy Strength. This implies that majority of the parents in Parent Support group had high extent Advocacy Strength.

TABLE IV. EXTENT OF ADVOCACY STRENGTH OF PARENTS OF CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS BY PSG AND NPSG

Extent	Do you belong to a parent support group (PSG)?		Total
	PSG	NPSG	
Low Extent	0	0	0
Moderate Extent	3 (30.0)	1 (10.0)	4 (20.0)
High Extent	7(70.0)	9(90.0)	16 (80.0)
Total	10 (100)	10 (100)	20 (100)

Table V revealed the extent of Information Bank of parent of Children with Special Needs; 10% of the parents to a low extent had information Bank on caring for these children; 40% of the parents had Moderate extent Information Bank of caring for these children; and 50% had high extent Information Bank. This implies that majority of the parents in Parent Support group had high extent Information Bank than parent not in Parent Support Group.

TABLE V. EXTENT OF INFORMATION BANK OF PARENTS OF CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS BY PSG AND NPSG

Extent	Do you belong to a parent support group (PSG)?		Total
	PSG	NPSG	
Low Extent	1 (10.0)	1 (10.0)	2 (10.0)
Moderate Extent	3 (30.0)	5 (50.0)	8 (40.0)
High Extent	6(60.0)	4(40.0)	10 (50.0)
Total	10 (100)	10 (100)	20 (100)

V. DISCUSSION

The results revealed from the demographic characteristics that parents of children with disabilities; based on relationship 14(73.7%) are mothers and 5(26.3%) are fathers; 6(31.6%) of the parents between age group 46 – 50 years are the majority; 9(47.4%) of the parents had HND/Degree; 10 (52.6%) of the parents are from middle class socio-economic status; 12(63.2%) of the parents are civil servants and were the majority.

Table II revealed the extent of stress in management of parents of children with disabilities; 50% of the parents had a low extent stress in the management of these children; 40% had moderate extent and 10% had a high extent stress in the management of these children. This implies that majority of the parents in PSG to high extent; can manage the stress. It is in line with [8] findings which show that parents of children with disabilities are particularly vulnerable to stress.

Table III revealed the extent of coping strategies of parent of children with disabilities; 5% of the parents to a low extent; had coping strategies of caring for these children; 15% had moderate extent and 80% had to a high extent coping strategies. This implies that majority of the parents in PSG had high extent coping strategies; this elucidates the assertion of Family friendly fun (2019) that parent groups can provide both skill training and emotional support for parents of children with disabilities. There is no significant difference between PSG and NPSG.

Table IV revealed the extent of Advocacy Strength of parent of children with disabilities; 4% of the parents had a Moderate extent Advocacy Strength of caring for these children; 16% had high extent Advocacy Strength. This agrees with [14] observation that the major part of being an advocate involves talking with officials and staff of agencies and organizations; as well as government representatives; who really can make a difference in the lives of your loved ones since parent who belong to the support group had high extent Advocacy Strength; though there was no significant difference between PSG and NPSG.

Table V revealed the extent of Information Bank of parent of children with disabilities; 10% of the parents had to a low extent information Bank on caring for these children; 40% of the parents had to a Moderate extent Information Bank of caring for these children; and 50% had high extent Information Bank. This is in line with [15] claim that one of the first things a parent can do that may prove enormously helpful; now and in the future; is to collect information.

VI. CONCLUSION

The deductions from this study reveal that parents with children who suffer from disabilities are in great need of support for more effective management of their children. These parents need support in order to deal with the continual stress due to their children's condition; advocacy for their children to receive adequate care from schools; government and the society at large and information and resources to enable them take more appropriate care of these children.

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