

**[Exploring the causes and coping strategies of stress on caregivers who take care
of SEN children]**

An Undergraduate Honours Project/Thesis

Submitted to

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Gratia Christian College

Hong Kong

In partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

[Bachelor of Social Work (Honours) Programme]

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[4-5-2022]

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Abstract

Taking care a child is a stressful duty, especially caring of SEN children. Caregivers who take care of SEN children face to different kinds of stress. Nowadays, Hong Kong issue on SEN children and caregivers become serious. This article explores causes of stress on caregivers who take care of SEN children. Moreover, it also analyzed the coping behavior on caregivers when they are facing to those stress. By using Richard Lazarus and Susan Folkman theory, to analyzed the coping behaviors in problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping.

Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge and thanks to my Supervisor HO Helen Kit Wan and LI Kim Chuen. Their guidance and advice carried me in every stage of this research. It is truly to appropriate them for helping me in social work learning.

I would like to give thanks to my church friend and SEN teachers who work in NGO. Their wide social connection facilitates discover many of interviewees. Also, I would like to give special thanks to all interviewees. Their truly sharing make research become concrete and realistic.

List of Abbreviations

1. Special Need Education: SEN
2. Specific Learning Difficulties: SpLD
3. Autism Spectrum Disorders: ASD
4. Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder: ADHD
5. Social Welfare Department: SWD
6. Education Bureau: EDB

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CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION

1.1 Rationale of the study

Nowadays, the numbers of SEN children are increasing. This issue on SEN become serious in Hong Kong. Not only those children, but also their caregiver burden a lot of stress when taking care of their children. Because of serious issue, it is important to analysis the causes of stress on SEN children's caregivers. Moreover, the investigation coping behaviors is also important to understand resources which provided to caregiver in Hong Kong.

1.2 Problem formulation

Under the pandemic situation, parents and children have a lot of interaction. Parent may need to work from home, while children need to have lesson at home with Zoom. The caring stress on parents must be increased. According to the HK01 news, it pointed out there are around 80% of SEN children were abused during the pandemic. The reason of abuse is parent face to a lot of stress, and it is difficult to release of it. Therefore, this research is going to investigate the causes of stress.

1.3 (Research objectives and research questions)

Research Question

Which stress are parent who taking care SEN children facing? What are their coping strategies?

General Aim of the Study

The general aim is to explore the details of causes and coping method on SEN children's caregiver.

Objectives of the Study

1. To understand different stress on parents who take care of SEN children
2. To understand the coping strategies of parents when they have stress on caring
3. Recommendation on the provision in order to face to parent stressful issue

Relevant Literature

It is unclear of the definition of stress. This is because it is difficult to point out specific stuff of stress. Different human face to different stress, which increases the difficulty to define stress. Hans Hugo Bruno Selye, who is the “father of stress”, he is the pioneer on stress investigation by observation on his patients. (George F, 2016)

Selye developed General Adaptation Syndrome (GAS) in order to explain three stages responses when human faces to stress. The first stage is to recognize the environmental changes and pressures. Biologically, human responses with higher heart beats and blood pressure. The second phase is to adapt and resist the stress. Human starts adapting the stressful environment. Human works with high effectiveness and without exhausted. The third phase is decay. The persistence of human becomes lower and the energy is burn out. Human feels tired in this phase.

However, the investigation is insufficient on stress explanation on other aspects such as cognitive and emotional. Other definition in details in Stress in Health and Disease by Selye was mentioned, the perception of threat could be other meaning of stress which influences emotional condition such as anxiety, discomfort or emotional tension. The stress response is strongly connected with the brain function. The fight and flight response, which was purposed by Cannon in 1929, is a basic series human

reaction when human face to threat (McCabe .E, 2015). Both of actual and chronic stress are threat to human. When human face to stress, amygdala in brain boost hormone in order to activate different part of bodies. For instance, hormone can increase the blood pressure, heart rate or sweating (Milosevic. I, 2015). The fight and flight response as an alarm which ready up body to face to the threat and it is an instinct in human. However, the long-term alarm activation causes the exhausting and feeling depression.

The earliest use of the terms, which was special educational needs, was appeared in late 1960 (Gulliford, &Upton, 1992). Due to the term of handicapped student caused the increase of dissatisfaction from public. The term of SEN was started to be used for the replacement of the word “handicapped”. In fact, the definition of SEN tends to use the classification. The categories of SEN are used for legalization and are developed a system for services provision. In Hong Kong, according to the categories which are classified by Education Bureau, there are total nine categories (Lifetime development, 2022). There are Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLD), Intellectual Disability, Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD), Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder, Physical Disability, Visual Impairment (VI), Hearing Impairment (HI), Speech and Language Impairments (SLI) and mental illness (Education Bureau, 2022).

Caring of SEN children face to a lot of challenges and difficulties. Those of challenges and difficulties cause a lot of stress. The research from Against Child Abuse on March in 2021, it pointed out the pressure of parents who take care of his or her SEN children. The research pointed out that the parenting pressure score was 4.3 out of 5 in the past year (Against Child Abuse, 2021). Parents claimed that the issue which give the most pressure is the misbehaviors from their children. There was 80% parents frustrated on their children's misbehaviors. 64% and 63% of them felt stressful on their children's academic issue and electric devices addiction respectively. Especially under the pandemic situation, children were stopped to go to school. Children stayed at home all day. The increase of conflict causes a lot of pressure to parents. The parenting stress should be the main pressure in their daily life. The poverty in Hong Kong is serious, so the grass root family with SEN children are facing to huge challenge. According to the research from Society for Community Organization, they interviewed 147 interviewees. There are 71.4% of interviewees have one SEN children (Society for Community Organization, 2019). 61.9% is SEN male and 36.1% is girl. Based on above data, the parenting on SEN children become normal in Hong Kong. Grass root family face to stress on daily life. Some of SEN children needed to meet doctor and take medication regularly. The expensive expenditure causes a lot of pressure on caregivers.

In fact, parenting give a lot of burden to parent. Especially having children with special needs. According to the survey of Parenting stress among mothers of children with different physical, mental, and psychological problems, the research showed different parent's burden. The survey was done in Isfahan, Iran. They interviewed around 285 mothers with 6 to 12 years old children. These children respectively have different needs which are sensory-motor, mental problems, chronic physical disease and psychological disorder. It was concluded there are few areas of pressure which parent with SEN children face to. For example, low social support pressure, the weak parent-child relationship, negative influences on mental and emotional function. From above research, it showed parent with SEN children lead to more stress from different area. Moreover, it also mentioned a tendency which is that mother bear more pressure on parenting SEN children.

Everybody has different method in order to fight against stress. Coping behavior divided into two big general groups based on Lazarus and Folkman's purpose. The first type of coping is problem-focused, while the second is emotion-focus. However, there were some professions thought the distinguish between problem-focused and emotion-focused are difficult. Therefore, 13 dimensions of coping were proposed. 5 of dimensions belong to problem-focused, 5 of dimensions belong to emotion-

focused, the rest of three are ineffective coping such as emotional venting. For the problem-solving, parent may seek help from other professions in order to deal with the misbehaviors. The coping behavior which is specially point at the solution seeking. The emotion-focused example which is parent seek emotion ventilation. For instance, they may talk to their trustworthy people in order to express their depressive feelings. According to the news from HK01, nearly 40% parents interviewee physically and verbally punish their SEN children when face to their misbehaviors. This negative response is an ineffective coping. Parents have emotion venting on their children (Liu Ying Man, 2021).

CHAPTER THREE METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research design

This proposed study will be conducted in Hong Kong. The interviews will take place at the uncertain place which is comfortable to respondents. The sampling would be done by qualitative research. The purposeful sampling is used. The interview will be the main data collection method in this research. The questions will be prepared and have discussion with 10 interviewees.

For the selection of samplings, it is suggested to set some criteria in order to narrow down the target. It is important for the research to select a suitable interviewee in order to provide accurate data to researcher. The definition is important for research to limit the interviewee discovery

Target: caregiver who take care of SEN child

Definition 1: Caregivers are limited to parents only.

Definition 2: Caregivers take the main caring role on taking care of SEN children.

The caring duties include mainly Clothing, food, shelter and transportation

Definition 3: Caregivers have SEN children which are limited into specific three

types: 1. Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLD), 2. Autism Spectrum Disorders

(ASD), 3. Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

Table 1:

在公營中、小學就讀的 SEN 學生情況

學年	學校級別	特殊學習困難	智障	自閉症	注意力不足/過度活躍症	肢體傷殘	視障	聽障	言語障礙	精神病	總數
2018/19	小學	10,370	760	5,690	5,110	110	40	360	2,510	60	25,010
	中學	11,430	830	3,840	6,780	150	60	310	360	310	24,070
	總數	21,800	1,590	9,530	11,890	260	100	670	2,870	370	49,080

The reason of these three types of SEN is because these three types are the most numbers of students appeared in Hong Kong. According to research on the numbers of SEN students in primary school from Society for Community Organization. In 2018 to 2019, the total numbers of SEN students in primary school are 25,010. There are 10,370 of SpLD, 5,690 of ASD and 5,110 of ADHD respectively. Above three types of SEN have the most proportions in all types of SEN. Therefore, researchers decide to discover caregivers who have any three of above SEN children (Society for Community Organization, 2019).

Definition 4: Caregivers who have at least one SEN child, but not more than two.

Definition 5: SEN children who is 6-9 years-old

3.2 Target informants and sampling

For the original design, researcher decided interview around 10 interviewees.

However, researcher stopped interview after finishing the 7th interview. This was

because there were no new information or opinions. The data saturation was

presented. Therefore, research interviewed seven interviewees. All interviewee are

female and have at least one but not more than two SEN children. The sampling

would be done by qualitative research. The purposeful sampling was used. The

interview was the main data collection method in this research. The questions were

prepared and have discussion with 7 interviewees. In seven interviewees, 5 of them

have one SEN child only, 2 of them have 2 SEN children. There are 6 caregivers have

ASD child, while 1 caregivers have ADHD child.

3.3 Data collection

Pilot tests were conducted with two respondents so as to ensure the questions are

relevant, appropriate and friendly before the actual interviews are taken place. The

interview was conducted by the researcher and it lasted for 45 minutes to one hour in

Chinese and will be recorded by a tape recorder. Transcripts will be prepared by data

analysis. However, under pandemic the interviews were held though zoom meeting.

Data Analyses:

The data will be analyzed basically by means of thematic content analysis.

Ethical Issues and Confidentiality

The researcher will ensure confidentiality and that written informed consent is obtained from the participants. The participants can withdraw at any time during the interview process. An information sheet will be designed so that the participants will know exactly what they have consented to. They also have a choice of the venue for the interview. Ethics approval will be sought from College's Ethics Committee. All raw data will be destroyed after completion of the project. Due to Zoom meeting, the limitation would be the consent form signature. Therefore, it was replaced by asking consent through Zoom meeting.

CHAPTER FOUR RESULTS/ FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

In Hong Kong, parents who have SEN children face a lot of stress. After seven interviews, researchers analyze the following causes which enlarge stress on parents when they take care of SEN children. There are total seven causes analyzed.

Cause 1: The feature of SEN

It is known that all SEN children have their own feature. According to DSM-5

Sub-cause 1: Child insufficient emotional control (ASD)

From the information of interviewees, ASD child is emotional and sometimes they get emotions easily. The emotion expression may not be appropriate from an ASD child. For example, self-harm. They probably hit themselves in order to express their negative emotions. Therefore, caregivers need to deal with their emotion and teach them the appropriate way for expression.

As respondent 4 said “The biggest challenge is to teach him how to express emotion in correct way, and stabilize the correct expression.”

As respondent 7 said “His emotional aspect is nothing special. But he is ASD, one of

features is weak on verbal expression. Sometimes he will be emotional when he cannot express what he thinks. For example, he will feel annoyed and get bad temper.”

Sub-cause 2: Rigidity (ASD)

One of feature on ASD is stubborn. The fixed concept in children’s mind is difficult to change. For example, the win-lose concept is important for children to learn.

Caregivers need to deal with their stubborn feature in order to reduce conflict and help them change their minds.

As respondent 2 said “He must follow games rules. He cannot let you win. If you win the game, he will feel sad. He will get bad temper and mess up everything. I have already tried to discuss win-lose concept with him, he will tidy up everything.”

As respondent 6 said “He knows you are tired and sick. But he still wants you to stay with him. He does not understand that you are tired and sick even you tell him. He is self-central.”

As respondent 6 said “The biggest difficult is the failure of interaction with people.

For example, he knows you are tired and uncomfortable. But he wants you to stay

with him such as reading books. He cannot understand to let me take a rest when I am

tried and uncomfortable. He is self-central and think of himself only.”

As respondent 7 said “The most trouble is his rigidity. His rigidity causes me to feel annoyed. No matter I have told him about it for many times. For example, he needs to sort every dishes. Sometimes, we are getting rush and want to finish meal as soon as possible. But he must sort it. Sometimes I don’t have patient and I will punish him.”

Sub-cause 3: Insecure (ASD)

Although attachment between caregivers and children, ASD specially feel anxiety and insecure when they face to unfamiliar situation. Therefore, when their caregivers do not stay with them, they request caregivers to surround them all the time. In fact, caregivers are impossible to stay with them all the time. Caregivers need personal time for resting. The fulfill of children’s insecure brings stress to caregivers.

As respondent 4 said “I don’t know whether having time to interact with him or not.

He will feel insecure if I disappear for 1 minute. I cannot go have lunch and toilet.”

Sub-cause 4: Non-Concentration (ADHD)

It is difficult for ADHD child to focus on tasks. When ADHD child need to finish a task, it is difficult for them to accomplish it concentratedly. Because of the sidetrack, caregivers need to keep drawing their attention back to the current task. Sometimes, the feature may affect daily life, caregivers need to deal with it.

As respondent 1 said “For example dinner time, because of ADHD, he is active and unstoppable. He takes so long time to finish his meal. So I limit him to finish it within 20 minutes. If without time limitation, he takes so long due to playing everything on table such as spoon.”

To conclude, different SEN children have different features. ASD has different feature which caregivers need to handle, while ADHD has their own feature as well. It is difficult for caregiver to improve their features issue. It should be a long-term intervention. Therefore, the feature of SEN children produces some behavior which sometimes are not appropriate. Stress will be occurred on caregiver.

Cause 2: Physical demand on caring

Most of caregivers felt exhausted when taking care of their child. This was because SEN children need to go to join different training classes. caregivers need to bring

them to different places. It is exhausting for caregivers to go to different places all the time. Some caregivers need to work, they are tired during working, Therefore, they seldom have time to relax. Some caregivers are full-time housewife. Although they have a lot of time to interact with their children, the caring carries on 24 hours with non-stoppable. The physical demand is huge.

As respondent 2 said “I do not have job. But my daily living is affected. I have to take care of him 24 hours, sometimes I feel exhausted, it is non-stoppable. I need to take care of him when I wake up, I feel tired all the time. Besides going to training lesson, we go to playground as well. I feel tired. Sometimes I want to take a rest, but he wants me to stay with him.”

Cause 3: Heavy psycho-social-emotional demand

The worse emotional condition influences the interaction between caregivers and SEN children. There are a lot of factors affect the caregiver’s emotions. Caregivers who stay in the negative emotion for long term. The worse emotional status brings stress to caregivers.

Sub-cause 1: Dealing with the repetition of SEN features

As above mentioned, some features of SEN children may bring stress to caregivers.

Most of the time, the features of SEN may influence daily life. Caregivers have to deal with it. It is difficult to handle SEN children features such as emotional exploration. However, the conflict with children keeps looping and happening every day. Sometimes, caregivers psychologically exhausted and impatient.

As respondent 6 said “Especially SEN children, I have to remind and teach him continuously in order to change their behavior such as hand washing.”

Sub-cause 2: Unseeable improvement on SEN children

Many SEN children are delay development such as the development of language.

Compare with same age children, SEN children need more training in order to enhance their development. Caregivers supposed their children may have improvement and changing after receiving training. However, the unobvious improvement disappointed caregivers. Caregivers is impatient on waiting the improvement, they will be nervous on their children’s development.

As respondent 2 said “One of stress come from the present of improvement. This is a big stress on me. Sometimes when I see him without improvement, I feel heartbroken.”

Sub-cause 3: Fear about the future

The fear of children's future bring a lot of stress to caregiver. Most of caregivers think SEN children will be difficult to take care of themselves when they grow up. For example, caregivers worried about ASD children cannot communicate with other in the future. Especially SEN children cannot have good self-caring when caregivers are older.

As respondent 3 said "When he grows up, people do not know he is ASD. I am worried about he will be beaten when he is impolite."

As respondent 7 said "I will worry about his future if he is SEN child. I will also worry about the bullying on him at school."

Cause 4: Financial Burden - Training fee

Most of caregivers mentioned that the personal training lessons are expensive. Most of SEN children waited the NGO training service. However, the long waiting forced caregivers to discover personal training services. The personal training is expensive.

Around \$800 per lesson. Sometimes, SEN children need to have training lesson twice a week. The expenditure of training is large. Most of caregivers mentioned the high expenditure is happened when their children were waiting the government services.

For example, the application of NGO training. During the waiting time, caregivers need to use their own money to apply some personal training for their kids. The maintenance of training is important for children to stabilize the changing on their behavior and development.

As respondent 2 said “I was waiting Heep Hong Society. The cost of services was expensive. When he was three, he needed to have intensive lesson. From Monday to Friday for 3 hours. The monthly expenditure was around \$7000 to \$8000. The cost brought me stress. ”

As respondent 6 said “My child needed to have ABA lesson. He had 3 days lessons per week. Every lesson lasted for 3 hours. I had to pay around \$15000 each month.”

As respondent 7 said “The expenditure was very large. Because he had physiological training and sensory integration training. Both of lessons lasted for 80 minutes. \$800 to \$900 for each lesson. At least, he had to go to lesson twice for week. Plus other training lesson, the cost was very large.”

Cause 5: Marriage

Although both of father and mother have responsibility to take care of their child, according to my interviews, mother always is the main caregiver. Therefore, some expectations difference between father and mother are appeared.

Sub-cause 1: Father spent not many times for kids

Most of caregivers is female and they are mother. Caring responsibilities are fully handled by mother. On the other hand, their husband needs to work in order to earn money for daily living. Father is busy on work and exhausted after working, Therefore, they cannot spend a lot of time for their kids. However, mother expect husband spend times for their kid.

As respondent 2 said “Sometimes, my child does not understand Math homework. I requested my husband to teach him. My husband requested me to teach. I felt a lot of stress. He seldom plays play with kid. So I got mad sometimes.”

Sub-cause 2: Husband’s expectations

As above mention, most of caregivers (mother) take the fully caring role on children. Even academics issue, kid’s behaviors or daily living. Husband expects wife to have well caring of their children. Since mother have the most time to interact and

communicate with kids, father think they focus on their work only. Parenting responsibilities burden bring a lot of stress on mother.

As respondent 3 “For example, if my child has misbehaviors, my husband will say that he is naughty. That’s mean he is blaming me. Sometimes I think he is a father, I have responsibilities to report the situation of our child to him. He sometimes thinks that I am a full-time housewife, I have a lot of time to interact with child, but I do not take goo responsibilities on caring child. So, I have stress on it.”

Sub-cause 3: Different parenting style between caregivers

In fact, both of father and mother have responsibilities on parenting include modification of misbehaviors and correction values education. Some interviewee’s family are good that both mother and father can share parenting responsibilities.

However, due to the different parenting styles and opinions, they may have conflict.

Therefore, the conflict brings a lot of stress to caregivers. Caregivers need to deal with conflict with spouse in order to provide good care to their children.

As respondent 4 said “In my case, my husband accepts SEN child, he loves our son.

My husband and I face to it actively. Stress is happened on parenting, such as the style of parenting. He has his own method, while I have mine.”

Cause 6: Children's academic's issue

Sub-cause 1: Weak understand on academic

Most of SEN children have needs on academics. Including the influences of their SEN feature which enhance the difficulties on their learning. caregivers sometimes take responsibilities for educate knowledge to their children. However, caregivers feel stress when they spend long term for helping their child to understand the academic knowledge. The repetition of same concept education brings a lot of stress to caregivers.

As respondent 5 said "Therefore, the challenge is on academic education. I need to educate him with more patient. And sometimes he is forgettable. I teach him a concept today, he will forget in the next day. So, I have to keep teach him the same thing again and again."

Sub-cause 2: Children's inappropriate time allocation

Especially under the pandemic situation, children are not necessary to go to school. Most of children have Zoom lesson at home. Many caregivers set timetable to their children in order to encourage them to spend times for revision and doing homework. However, the operation is difficult. Many caregivers worry about their academics,

because of not going to school.

As respondent 1 said “There are a lot of things that he has to review. But he doesn’t like it. He buys time for do other things, but not focus on academics. Time is wasted until the last minute. He needs to go bed. Sometimes, I think they need to sleep more.”

Sub-cause 3: Insufficient of school support

Some caregivers worry about the academic issue on their children. Therefore, they try to negotiate and corporate with school. The transparency of school academic’s syllabus is low. For instance, caregivers want to understand the content of syllabus, in order to teach their child by themselves when caregivers are free at home. Some caregivers care about their children’s academics result, they want to teach them at home in order to improve their academic. The low transparency of syllabus brings stress and anxiety to caregiver on their children’s academics.

As respondent 4 said “So the stress of learning effectiveness, I do not have syllabus to know what my kid is learning. Even I am willing to teach my kid, I have no idea to teach.”

Cause 7: Public scandal

It is known that the features of SEN children is very difficult to handle. It is good easy to handle it at home. However, if children have behaviors and emotions in public.

Caregivers need to burden other's eyes. Sometimes, caregivers may receive negative comment from public. These kinds of comment bring a lot of stress. Caregivers need to deal with incident, also they are afraid of the influences on other.

As respondent 2 said "When he was young, I brought him to go to playground. Other children said that their parent thought my kids are psycho. Their parent did not allow their kids to play my mine."

As respondent 7 said "Yes! Always! Even I take transport with him, he sometimes talks somethings weird. Other people will look at me."

Coping behavioral:

According to Richard Lazarus and Susan Folkman theory, coping behaviors divided into two main dimension which are problem-focused coping and emotional-focused coping (Encyclopedia of Adolescence, 2011). As the mention in literature review, human have different responses when facing to stress. As a human, coping is an inborn ability in order to eliminate stress. The life event and daily hassle bring a lot of stress to people. Similar with SEN caregivers, the news of SEN diagnosis as a life event. It forces caregivers to decide future plan on caring their children. The features and caregiver's emotion could be the daily hassle which caregiver must overcome. During interviews, interviewees shared a lot of coping behaviors in order to reduce their stress.

Problem-focused coping:

The problem-focused coping includes strategies which acting with environment or self. The problem-focused coping effectively removes or eliminates the stressors (Dubow. E.F & Rubinlicht. M, 2011).

1. Information seeking

The term of information seeking which is “communicating with other people to obtain

help in terms of understanding, advice, information, treatment, and general support in response to a problem or distressing experience” (Rickwood, Deane, Wilson, & Ciarrochi, 2005). The target of asking information can be formal and informal. For the formal target, SEN caregivers seek information from professional. For the dealing with SEN children’s features, caregivers seek information and method through training professors and training course. The professional opinions are important and effective for caregivers to handle their children SEN features.

As respondent 4 said “I remembered a training about frustration. Parents need to distinguish the level of control from your kid. If he controls your mealtime and toilet time, it is unacceptable. But if it is unacceptable. We must compare the level of frustration. Do I have bigger frustration? Or him? Obviously, my kid. So, he wants to control you and stick with you. That’s thinking is learn from course. Because I define that my kid has bigger frustration than me. So, I said to him that I must go to toilet. During the toilet time, I close the door and keep talking to him. I also request him to wait for me outside. In fact, if he can listen to your voice, he will feel secure.”

As respondent 7 said “My kid has a lot of Rigidity make us feel trouble. Even we remind for many times, he does so. If you do not know the technical skills, do not

know what he thinks, or do not how to guide him. For example, one of skills is called ignorance. It means just like put the conflict incident into freezer, we talk to him later. When he calms down, he can accept it. That's technical skills."

From above interviewees experience, it is proved that the opinion from professions is effective to handle the features of SEN children. As respondent 4's opinion, she did not know how to handle the insecure on his son. When she wants to have personal time, his son got his temper. Interviewee 4 had conflict with his son. After learning from professional lesson, she can handle the challenge. Interviewee 7 worked at school, she has a lot of social connection to seek information in order to deal with features of SEN.

For the informal target, friends and family are include. In fact, rather than technical skills, informal target tends to provide experience sharing to caregivers. For example, the peer group support. The share group is important for caregiver to build social connection. Sometimes, the share group gather members with similar situation.

Caregiver can receive experience from other in order to build method for dealing with difficulties which they are facing to. For example, ASD caregiver support group.

Caregivers can share their personal experience. All members can learn and give

experience by exchanging of it. Moreover, some resources can be received by other members. These kinds of information are important for caregivers to widen their views in order to design and organization better caring plan and method to SEN children. In fact, the peer support group belong to both of problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping. During the experience exchange, the sharing contains feelings and emotions. The peer support provides emotional support to caregivers. The undergoing of same emotions and feelings are important to echo caregivers to received comforts. This provides energy for caregiver to keep taking good care of their SEN children.

As respondent 4 said “I remembered I was upset before, and I cried. Honestly, I was crying while I was teaching him. It was uncontrollable. But actually, I had to move forward. Being a parent, I had to try my best to help my boy. If I do not help my boy, there is no one can help him. I was upset, and depressed. However, I joined course later and listen to the experience sharing from other parents. People in church are good that to share different method and provide direction to me.”

As respondent 6 said “I joined different kinds of parent’s course in order to understand more about ASD. And I went to other church, which is the church I

usually go to now. The church has a group for mother who have SEN child. I met a lot of people with similar experience. Although their children are bigger than mine, they have similar experience with me and same religious with me. They can support me. This group is a huge support for me. We have regular gathering, which is a good support to motivate us to share and release negative emotions.”

To conclude above two interviewee’s opinions, support group participation is a good coping behavior in order to reduce stress. For interviewee 4, her support group in church can provide different information to her in order to have a better method for dealing with SEN children’s features. it also inspires her on some direction of caring a SEN child. For the interviewee 6, church support group gather people with similar experience. She mentioned that the release of negative emotions is one of function which help her to reduce stress.

2. Cognitive restructuring

The cognitive restructuring is used when people face to situation that lead to stress.

The cognitive restructuring is a good coping behavior to reframe the thoughts when people face to the stressful situation. The balance of thoughts is important for people in order to eliminate stress (Concordia University, 2022). For caregivers, sometimes

when caregivers face to the news of having SEN child. They were shocked and produced a lot of negative thoughts. In addition, the cognitive restructuring is important for caregivers to view difficulties with different perspectives.

As respondent 4 said “I remembered a training about frustration. Parents need to distinguish the level of control from your kid. If he controls your mealtime and toilet time, it is unacceptable. But if it is unacceptable. We must compare the level of frustration. Do I have bigger frustration? Or him? Obviously, my kid. So, he wants to control you and stick with you. That’s thinking is learn from course. Because I define that my kid has bigger frustration than me. So, I said to him that I must go to toilet. During the toilet time, I close the door and keep talking to him. I also request him to wait for me outside. In fact, if he can listen to your voice, he will feel secure.”

The training course not only teach skills to caregivers for the features handling, but also reframe the mind on caregivers. In the original mind, respondent 4 thought his son was unacceptable since he limits respondent 4 activities. His son wants her to stay with him all the time, and she felt annoyed. However, after the cognitive restructuring, respondent 4 review the needs on his son. She totally understands the frustration on him. Finally, she changes the handling method on his son insecure.

Situation: Respondent 4's SEN children have emotion when she left his sight.

Thoughts: I need to stay with him all the time for handling the emotional break down.

Feelings: Stressed and annoyed

Mind reframed: The frustration on child is bigger than that of her

Alternative/balanced thought: Keep talking to him when respondent 4 go to toilet in order to make his son feel secure.

Outcome: She can handle the emotional break down on his child. She no longer feels stressed about this.

During the interview, some of interviewees have background of religious. All of them are Christianity. Not only church provide different support to caregivers such as peer support group, but also the core values of Christianity influences thoughts of caregivers which facilitates them to face to caring pressure. Actually, the values transformation is similar with the cognitive restructuring.

As respondent 3 said "The Christianity makes me have the value difference with normal parents. This is because God is the most important in my daily life. Many

parents force their children to learn and study. The reason of it I think they want their children to earn more money. But for me, not many but enough. Unless my child do not work, otherwise he won't insufficient on daily living. This reduces many stresses on me. If I am similar with normal parents, I will super worry about the weaknesses on my child. I will be nervous. But finally, I trust in God, since He will handle everything. Because He is the biggest in the world.”

As respondent 4 said “The biggest difference is the bible statement. Bible statements which I forget the actual pages. One of statement means we should not have worry, put everything on God's hand, He will have a better arrangement. When I read this statement, it makes me feel calm. If I have more statements, I can be still more. When I do not read statement before, I am stubborn in some mind thoughts. Statements are helpful.”

Above respondents mentioned the Christianity provide big support to them. The influences of Christ values are important which makes them to change mind thoughts.

The changing mind thoughts help them to have a different view on stress which causes form caring a SEN child. The obvious thoughts different is the worry.

Christianity caregivers can reduce their worry by believing in God. For example, the

statements cheer them up when they face to caring stresses and difficulties.

Emotion-focus – Emotional Ventilation

To conclude all interview, caregivers were difficult to overcome the negative emotion when they know their children are special needs. Although the solution seeking is important for caregivers to discover an action plan to take care of their children, the emotion of parents sometimes still stuck in inside. In fact, the emotion status influences the interaction with their children. If caregivers have negative emotion such as depressed and anxiety, they may become impatient. It enhances the probabilities to have conflict with their kids. For example, respondent 3 has anxiety and panic. When she has a lot of stress, it affects her emotional status. She will become impatient, and conflict will be happened. Therefore, emotional ventilation is important for caregivers to adjust their status. In fact, taking care of SEN children is difficult and lost their personal time. Everyone needs personal time to take rest and adjust emotional status.

As respondent 3 said “I seldom have meditation before since I have to take care of my child. However, I do it every day. Moreover, I play piano such as playing song for Christ.”

“I always stay with him, I discover that I do not have personal time. Therefore, I decide to find some Me Time. I like playing piano and drawing. And I will feel better.”

As respondent 6 said “Sometimes I felt annoyed and anger. I chose to leave the situation for a while. I take away focus on him and change the focus on other stuffs. It is good that to calm me down and also clam him down.”

Both of respondents 3 and 6 use the emotional ventilation of coping behavior. For the respondent 3, she finds her hobby in order to alleviate emotions. For the respondent 6, her method is to shift the focus on other duties in order to release negative emotions.

To conclude all of interviewees, they have two big directions of suggestion on SEN children support enhancement.

According to interviewee’s opinions, Publicity Propaganda is the most important.

Parents thoughts public do not have enough understanding on SEN children. From parent feelings, they thought public do not have chance to contact SEN children. For example, the government should hold some exhibitions in order to enhance the

understanding on the details feature of SEN children such as misbehavior. As respondent 2 said, she has already undergone discrimination by another parent who have a normal child. Her son was punished by another parent and called him “stupid”. Sometimes, parent needed to deal with the misbehavior even not at home. Parent received pressure from other people. It is suggested that the public propaganda is needed. The elimination of discrimination can be done by understanding enhancement.

The second recommendation is the resources allocation. Most of parents who have child above 6 years claimed that the resources are insufficient. Especially, when their children grow up to 6 years old. Most of resources are come from their school. Schools are subsidized by Education Bureau. Schools could decide and assign the resources in order to provide services to SEN students. For example, school may employ physiology therapist to provide physical training to SEN students. However, SEN children have different needs. It is impossible to rely to school’s services only. Parents claimed that there are not many post-6 years old support in public. They are difficult to discover personal training in public. They thought the government should enhance the support in post-6 years old service. Due to the emphasize of golden period of pre-6 years old treatment, the ignorance of post-6 years old services appears.

Even parents can find personal training for their 6 years-old children, the expenditure is very large. This is a struggle that their children need to have stable training, but the expensive fee of lesson and insufficient of resources.

CHAPTER FIVE DISCUSSION

Contribution of the study

Most of research on parent who have SEN children investigate different dimensions of stress causes. The qualitative research occurs to show the proportion of parent who are facing to those stress. This research carries out the qualitative research is to have a deep understanding on SEN children's parent actual situation. In addition, many of article provide coping behavior which focus on the method on dealing with their children. However, there is less information to show how parent can alleviate their emotions and feelings. This research aims on share the coping behaviors in order to widen the view to public to provide different coping method through respondent's experience.

The research is important that to response to issue of high stress on SEN caregiver. In fact, the issue of high stress on them become a serious issue in Hong Kong, especially the increase of SEN children. This research not only concern on the causes of stress which SEN caregivers are facing to. But also, it wants to increase the aware issue on SEN caregivers in order to give more support to them through different way.

Implication to social work practice

In Hong Kong, the numbers of SEN children are increasing. Both of children and parents face to a lot of difficulties. The research is purposive to enhance the awareness in social work field. The causes analyze provide a lot of information that the actual stress which caregivers are facing to. All of causes analyze are come from real experience. It is important that to enhance the understanding the actual situation in caregivers. In addition, the research is helpful that to provide data to social worker on coping behaviors. The personal experience is real that to provide information to social worker for the intervention.

In fact, under the stress condition, the serious impact and phenomenon on caregivers occurs. According to news from HK01, the survey interviewed for 311 family. There is total 80% of caregivers are Insomnia due to the high stress. The most serious situation is that some caregivers have suicide thought (Chu Nga Seung, 2022). Under serious issue, social workers need to have better understand on SEN caregiver when they are our serves target. In fact, above impacts and behaviors are caused by high stress. Social workers are necessary to understand the causes and needs behind behaviors.

By using system theory, this research provide different level of caregivers needs such as individuals, group, family and community (Social Work Degree Center, 2020). For

the micro level, this research shows the thoughts on caregivers, it facilitates social worker to understand personal needs on caregivers. For example, caregivers do not have sufficient personal time so as to make them feel intense. For the group and family level, social worker can understand the general difficulties on caregiver. For the policy level, respondent in this research mention a lot of insufficient on policy level. Social workers need to understand all layers of environment in order to provide suitable services to clients.

Limitation of the study

The first limitation is the samples selection. In the original plan, it is decided that researcher hope to find interviewees with any limited three types of SEN. The ideal allocation of types of interviewees would be 3 to 4 caregivers with each three types of SEN. However, due to pandemic situation, it is difficult for research to contact parents. Researcher had already contacted with organization which provide SEN training service. However, organization is difficult to contact targets under the pandemic. To review the circumstance, the finding interviewee action is more difficult than the original planning. In addition, the format of interview is also limited under the pandemic. The face-to-face interviews are changed to Zoom interview. Under the pandemic, researcher found 7 interviewees with 6 ASD and 1 ADHD respectively. In

fact, the ideal situation would be having similar amount different types of SEN caregivers. Although there is limitation on selection of interviewees, the direction of situation is similar. Different types of SEN children have different features. The difference of features may affect the method of dealing with. However, the cause of stress is similar. Above big theme is the general direction of stress which caregivers are facing to. Therefore, this research can still show the validity in Hong Kong society.

The second limitation is the SEN family issues are large diversity. There are a lot of factors which affect the stress on caregivers. In fact, the combination of factors can be complicated. For example, social classes, numbers of SEN children and non-SEN children in family. Different situation may lead to have different level of stress. For example, a family which have two SEN children is different with a family with two children but have one SEN child only. The caring stress can be different. In fact, the factors combinations are too large and too complicated. It is difficult for the research to cover most of situation of family combination. The research focus on the big directions of different kinds of causes and coping behaviors. Although there are details of difference, the cause of stress is similar between most of scenario.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion:

To conclude, above seven causes are the most stressful causes which caregivers are facing to. The first cause is the features of SEN children. Every SEN child has their own characteristic and features. Sometimes, the features cause other behaviors which caregivers need to handle. The second cause is the physical demand on caring.

Especially in the golden period, caregivers provided a lot of training to their children in order to enhance their development. SEN children need to have many kinds of training lesson. Caregivers need to bring them for the lesson in different places, the physical demand is huge. The third cause is Heavy psycho-social-emotional demand.

Caregivers need to handle many caring difficulties which influence their emotions such as worry about the future of their children. The long term of negative emotion bring stress to caregivers. The fourth cause is Financial Burden. Every social class of family mentioned the personal training fee is expensive. Some family need to pay around \$10000 for the training fee which is a large burden. The fifth cause is

Marriage. In fact, mother always is the main caregiver. Father tends to focus on working. Therefore, the whole responsibilities on caring burden on mother. The

expectations from husband and the non-compromise parenting style bring stress on caregivers, The sixth cause is Children's academic's issue. SEN children have huge needs on learning. caregivers worry about their academics. School supports are one of an academic concern on caregiver. The final cause is public scandal. Not only at home, but also SEN children may have emotional break down in the street.

Sometimes, caregivers may receive public eyes. The misunderstanding from public give stress to caregivers.

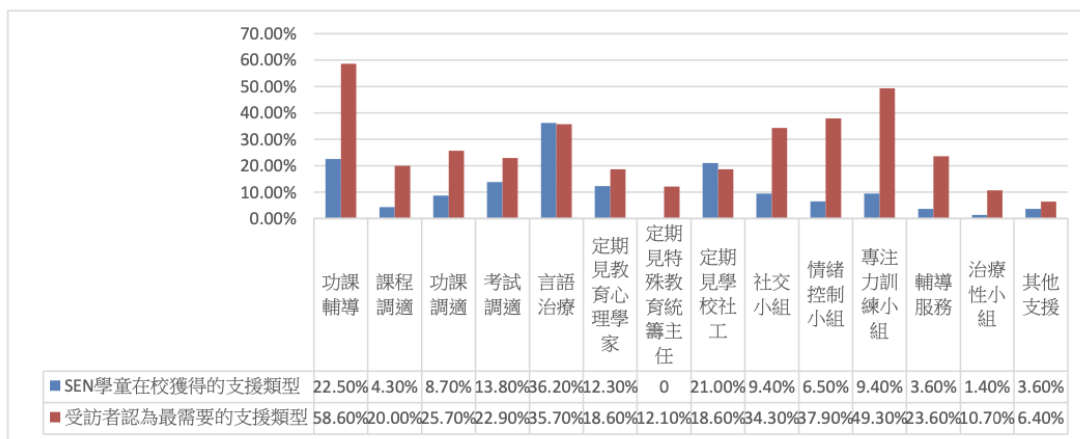
Caregivers has their coping behavior to deal with difficulties in order to eliminate stress. Both of problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping are important for caregivers to solve the sources of stress. The interesting finding is that the religious is a good means to help caregivers to alleviate their negative emotion and gather useful information for caring SEN children.

Recommendation:

The difference between pre-6 years SEN services and post-6 years old services is obvious. The emphasize of SEN golden period from government lead to the unequal allocation of resources. Most of SEN training services are concentrated in pre-6 years old services though NGO. This is because the system is changed in the transition of 6

years old. Before 6 years old, SEN services are managed by Social Welfare Department. The subsidies and resources are group in pre-6 years old services. When SEN children move to primary school, the resources of services are managed by EDB. Most of SEN children receive training service at school. However, training services which are provided by school are not well-designed. For example, some interviewees mentioned the frequency of receiving training is low. It means it is insufficient to provide training to SEN children for development and improvement. As table 2 showed the proportions of different support which provided by school. The table showed the insufficient of training support such as 9.4% of social skills course, 6.5% of emotional-control training and 1.4% of treatment group. The developmental supports are not enough, caregivers mentioned above aspects should be enhance in order to developmental improvement on their SEN children. Therefore, fraction in services is occurred when 6 years old is the clear point (Society for Community Organization, 2018). Most of caregivers need to find personal training for their children. However, the struggle is that personal training is super expensive, it increases their financial burden. If SEN children receive insufficient training, their development may be affected. The dilemma makes caregivers struggled. Therefore, it is suggested that the government should review the structure of SEN services. It is inappropriate that to shift the control from SWD to EDB after 6 years old. Although

the school support is important, the incomplete of SEN services after 6 years affect the learning and development on SEN children. The insufficient support to caregivers increases the burden on them and make them have a lot of stress. The equal allocation of resources is important for SEN children to have stable and continuous support during their grow path. For example, the government can open organization in order to provide post-6 years old training specifically. From respondents' opinions, they claimed that there are not enough services for post-6 years old SEN children due to the insufficient of center. It is necessary that to open specific center for providing post-6 SEN services. After the interviews, most of stress on caregivers are come from their SEN children. Therefore, it is believed that the completed and sufficient support on SEN services can reduce the burden on caregiver in order to stress elimination.



(Table 2)

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