

# Preliminary Study: Taiwanese Mothers' Experiences of Children With Sensory Processing Disorder

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## ABSTRACT

**Background:** Different cultural backgrounds and parental experiences influence parenting styles and approaches to raising children with disabilities. Family-centered care should consider parental, especially main caregivers, experiences with their disabled children. In Taiwan, in most of homes, mothers are the main caregivers.

**Purpose:** The purpose of this study was to explore Taiwanese mothers' experiences with their children who have sensory processing disorder.

**Methods:** This study used a qualitative ethnographic design and semistructured interview format. Transcripts were analyzed and synthesized into themes.

**Results:** Three mothers were interviewed. The following three themes emerged: (a) relationships within the shared worlds of disability and culture, (b) daily life challenges and expectations, and (c) opportunity to receive professional services. These Taiwanese mothers expressed that they experienced stress from being blamed for insufficient skills and from the shame of their children's disabilities that reflected lack of teacher, friend, and other family members' understanding of the cause of their children's inappropriate behaviors. Their children experienced difficulties performing daily activities, which resulted in stresses on both the mother and her child. The interviewed mothers needed to receive timely, long-term services from healthcare professionals. However, hospitals are inadequately staffed with occupational therapists, which delays care for children with special needs.

**Conclusion:** Taiwanese mothers experience stresses from themselves, their child, and others. Healthcare professionals should apply a family-centered service approach to fulfill the needs of mothers and their disabled children. Moreover, healthcare professionals should promote greater awareness of sensory processing disorder symptoms and interventions to increase public awareness and acceptance of these children.

## KEY WORDS

sensory processing disorder, family-centered service approach, Taiwanese mothers, ethnographic research.

## Introduction

Knowledge of disabilities, personal contact, types of disability, and ethnic background may affect a person's perception of people with disabilities (Hampton & Xiao, 2007). Previous studies indicate that, when compared with other ethnic groups, Chinese people living in Australia, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and the United States are more apt to stigmatize people with disabilities and have more desire to disengage themselves from those with disabilities (Chan, Lee, Yuen, & Chan, 2002; Chen, Jo, & Donnell, 2004; Wang, Thomas, Chan, & Cheing, 2003; Westbrook, Legge, & Pennay, 1993). In general, the stigma of disabilities and the unfavorable thoughts that they evoke are common within the Chinese culture because of a cultural belief system that views disability as a form of punishment or the result of an evil spirit. From this perspective, people with disabilities can be wrongfully condemned and considered shameful, dangerous, and unpredictable (Lam, Tsang, Chan, & Corrigan, 2006; Lee, 1996).

Sensory processing involves receiving sensory information, transmitting this information to the nervous system, and organizing and comparing it with past experiences to confirm its meaning (Dunn, 2009). These processes are the foundation for learning, perception, and action in daily activities (Ahn, Miller, Milberger, & McIntosh, 2004; Koziol, Budding, & Chidekel, 2011). Children with sensory processing disorder (SPD) may exhibit disabilities such as decreased social skills, immature playing skills, impaired self-image, and decreased fine and gross motor skills. Although SPD may not be as visibly perceptible as disabilities that impair mental functions or cerebral palsy, which impairs physical body functions, this disease can affect the sufferer's ability to accomplish daily activities and his or her physical coordination skills. Children with attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and

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