

Parenting Style among Parents of a Child with Autism Spectrum Disorder

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Abstract

The number of children with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) is increasing every year, as well as in Indonesia so that it requires proper treatment to optimize children's development optimally. Some research that has been done states that the development of behavior in children with autism spectrum disorders is still less than optimal. One of the influential factors is the parenting style applied by parents. The purpose of this study was to determine parenting styles of parents who have ASD's children in Indonesia. This study was a quantitative descriptive. The study was conducted in three Special Needs Schools in West Java Province Indonesia, with a total sampling technique, and found 32 parents of autistic children participated in this study. The instrument used in this study was The Parenting Style and Dimensions Questionnaire. The reliability test results on the questionnaire had an Alpha Cronbach's value of 0.79 so it was a reliable instrument to use. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. The results of this study showed 43.8% of parents applied authoritarian style, 31.2% had permissive style, and 25% had authoritative style. It can be concluded that the most dominant was the authoritarian parenting style. This type of parenting can have a devastating effect on the development of children with autism spectrum disorders. There is a need for education for parents about the impact of parenting with developmental progress on children with autism spectrum disorder.

Keywords: *Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD), children, parents, parenting style.*

Introduction

Autism spectrum disorders (ASD) are neurodevelopmental disorders with the main symptoms involving problems in communication, social interaction, and behavior. These symptoms vary from mild to severe. Symptoms of ASD generally appear before the age of the child reaches three years. Children with ASD generally ignore sound, vision, do not respond to social contact such as eye sight, a touch of affection, and play with friends^{1,2}. This problem occurs in the brain area, causing the child's brain does not function as a normal brain. This causes children with ASD to often close themselves from outside contact³.

At present, the case of ASD in the world is increasing. According to UNESCO, the prevalence of children with autism in the world reached 35 million children in 2011. Based on data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) the prevalence of children with ASD increased to 1:68 in 2010 from a previous 1:88 children in 2008⁴. In Indonesia, the incidence of ASD is also increasing. According to the Indonesian Central Statistics Agency⁵, states that children sufferers of autism are estimated to reach 2.4 million. There is an increase in the ratio of children with ASD from the previous 1:100 to 1:88. West Java is one of the provinces in Indonesia which has the most children with ASD⁶.

Children with ASD require prolonged treatment. There are various ways of treatment in children with autism, one of which is through the role of parents in appropriate parenting style. The inappropriate pattern of parenting can cause a child to become depressed. Therefore parenting is one of the important aspects because providing appropriate care is expected to

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optimize the growth and development of children with autism disorders⁷.

Providing appropriate parenting is expected to help the development of children with autism⁸. The involvement of parents in parenting is tended to give positive impact on treatment and development of children with autism⁹. Children's behavior is influenced by close interactions between children and parents, so parents are expected to be able to apply appropriate parenting to their children. Parents must provide intensive guidance and coach for autism' children. According to Tripathi¹⁰, authoritative parenting applied by parents has a positive impact on the social interaction ability of children with autism, while authoritarian parenting causes children to often avoid to meet a new people. In addition, Mohammadi & Zarafshan¹¹ also said that permissive parenting causes children to have difficulty controlling themselves. The purpose of this study was to determine the parenting styles of parents who have children with autism spectrum disorders in West Java Province Indonesia.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

A quantitative descriptive design was used in this study. A total of 32 parents who have children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) have participated in this study that was taken with total sampling. This study was conducted in the three largest Special Needs School in the Bandung District of West Java Province, Indonesia. The instrument used in this study is Parenting Styles and Dimensions Questionnaire-Short Version (PSDQ), with alpha Cronbach values of 0.79. The questionnaire consists of 31 items parenting questions that includes the domain of warmth and control. Each statement item was measured on a 1-5 scale. The highest score shows the dominant parenting styles for each parent. Parenting style is then categorized into authoritarian, authoritative, and permissive. Data were then analyzed by univariate analysis.

Results

Characteristics of Respondents

Demographic characteristics in this study include the child's characteristics (sex, age, child's order, age of onset, the degree of ASD, the number of children) and parents' characteristics (gender, age, level of education, occupation).

Table 1. Frequency Distribution of Children Characteristics (n = 32)

Characteristics	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Gender:		
Boy	22	68.8
Girl	10	31.2
Age:		
8 Years Old	3	9.4
9 Years Old	7	21.9
10 Years Old	7	21.9
11 Years Old	15	46.9
Child's order:		
First	21	65.6
Second	10	31.2
Third	1	3.1
Age of onset:		
1 Year Old	3	9.4
2 Years Old	20	62.5
3 Years Old	9	28.1
Severity:		
Mild	14	43.8
Moderate	14	43.8
Severe	4	12.5
Number of children:		
≤ 2	29	90.6
>2	3	9.4

Based on table 1, it can be seen that most autism children are male, almost half are 11 years old and is the first child in his/her family. Based on the age of onset, most children have been diagnosed with ASD at the age of 2 years and and nearly half of children with ASD are mild to moderate spectrum.

Table 2. Frequency Distribution of Parent's Characteristics

Characteristics	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Gender: Male Female	21 11	65.6 34.4
Age: Early Adulthood (18-39 Years Old) Middle Adulthood (40-59 Years Old)	22 10	68.8 31.2
Level of Education: High School Graduate Post Graduate	11 18 3	34.4 56.2 9.4
Occupation: Government Employee Worker Housewife	10 19 3	31.2 59.4 9.4
Parental Status: Biological parents Adoptive parents	32 0	100 0

Based on table 2, the demographic characteristics of the parents are as follows: most are fathers, aged 18-39 years old (early adulthood), most are undergraduate degree, most are self-employed, all are biological parents.

Table 3. Frequency distribution of Parenting Styles of Parents with Autisme Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

Type	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Authoritarian	14	43.8
Permissive	10	31.2
Authoritative	8	25.0

Based on table 3, it can be concluded that the most dominant parenting style applied by parents in children with autism is authoritarian (43.8%).

Discussion

In this study, authoritarian was the most dominant parenting applied by parents (43.8%), followed by permissive (31.2%) and authoritative style became the least applied (25%). In an authoritarian parenting style, the communication that occurs is a one-way communication from parents to children, while children are not allowed to express opinions. The impact of authoritarian parenting is that children become shy, full of fear, and withdraw, besides that children also find it difficult to make decisions for themselves. This can happen because children are used to being told what to do or not to do. This situation will cause children to be timid and have an impact on children's social and motor development¹².

Children with ASD who are raised in authoritarian parenting are unable to control themselves. Bahrami, Dolatshahi, Pourshahbaz, & Mohammadkhani¹³ describes the relationship between parenting patterns and temper tantrums of children with ASD, and it is found that the more parents do authoritarian parenting, the more the temper tantrum intensity in children, conversely, the lower the authoritarian parenting applied, the lower the temper tantrum intensity in the autistic child. Thus authoritarian parenting will have a negative impact on children's development because children have difficulty developing their potential. Children are required to follow what the parents want, even if it goes against the wishes of the child.

This study found that the highest proportion (86.7%) of parents who were applied authoritarian was early adulthood (18-39 years), was graduate from high school (64.3%), and as a worker in private company (64.3%). Hurlock¹⁴ said in early adulthood, parents' thinking and reasoning may still be unstable and more concerned with their own personal needs, besides that Johansen¹⁵ also said that parents who were graduate from high school level may have limited knowledge and understanding of children's development needs. Parents tend to dominate children, thus applying authoritarian parenting. Parent's occupation can also contribute to the implementation of parenting styles in children with autism. Masuda¹⁶ states that private workers tend to use physical punishment as a form of power over their children and are less concerned with child's limitation.

The second most parenting practice applied by parents in this study is permissive style (31.2%). Permissive has a negative influence on children. This is reinforced by the opinion of Sahithya¹⁷ who said that parents who apply permissive styles are actually involved in the lives of children but lack in controlling children. Bjorklund¹⁸ explained that parents with permissive styles tend to give freedom to their children but lack of control. Lack of control makes children behave inappropriately without guidance. Children with ASD who are raised by permissive parents usually have low self-esteem, lack of self-control, and poor social interaction¹⁹. Tripathi²⁰ states that parents of children with ASD face various challenges in their life and parents are less likely to apply discipline and rules to children with autism.

In this study, the authoritative style is the least adopted by parents (25%), whereas authoritative provide adequate control that can encourage children to be more independent. Parents who have authoritative parenting tend to be warmer, loving to children and more understanding of their child. Children who are accustomed to authoritative parenting will have a positive impact. Children will have self-control, self-confidence and can communicate well with their friends²¹. According to Jackman²² authoritative is appropriate parenting to apply to children with autism spectrum disorders. They explained that authoritative style has a positive impact on the development of children with autism and other disabilities.

In addition, Bi et.al²³ states that authoritative provides freedom, but still balanced with sufficient control and guidance. Parents at the same time give direction, attention, and control to children. In this authoritative style, parents may often discuss decisions and answer children's questions wisely and openly. Discussion is a pillar of problem solving. Parents support with full awareness and communicate well.

Children with ASD who raised with authoritative style, are always trained to make appropriate decisions and are ready to accept all the consequences of decisions that have been taken. Children do all activities in accordance with their interests and desires, thus enabling children to reach their potential. While parents provide control and guidance to prevent children from negative things that can damage themselves²⁴.

Conclusion

Parents have a very important role in caring for children with an autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Children with autism need balanced warmth and control at the same time. Appropriate parenting styles is very important to optimize and will have a positive impact on the development achievement of children with ASD. Therefore supports are needed to increase understanding about appropriate parenting and its impact on autistic children through counseling or parental education.

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