

# The Description of Parental Stress Coping Strategy in Facing Autical Children Growth

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**Abstract:** *In real life not all parents are blessed with children who are spiritually and physically healthy, there are parents who are blessed with children who experience with developmental disorder, for example autism. The attendance of autistic child in the middle of family will affect family life, especially on the psychological aspect of parents. These conditions are able to direct the parents to stressful condition and it needs effort to overcome problem with various problems faced by parents. Therefore, the purpose of this research is to know the description of parents stress coping strategy in facing autical children growth. Emotional reaction of parents who has children with autism is heterogeneous; parents might be able to deny reality, angry, refuse the situation, depression or surrender. Parents also experiences stress which is coming from problematic child behavior, environmental reaction, worrying about childcare in the future, finance or deep sad feeling, so that coping strategy is needed which is suitable to overcome situation or stressful event in the form of problem focused coping or emotion focused coping. This research is using qualitative approach type of study case with the subject of three parents who has children with autism. Data collection method is using interview method and observation. The procedure for taking respondents is using purposive sampling technique and data analysis is using matchmaking pattern (pattern making). From the interview result and observation, the three subjects have stressor and source of stress which is related with the condition autistic children. The three of subjects also perform more than one coping strategy to overcome the problem that they face. According to research result, the first subject has psychological and social stressor sourced from children behavior, environmental reaction, worrying the future of children and using playful problem solving strategy, escape avoidance, seeking social support to overcome stress. On the second subject has social and psychological stressor that sourced from children behavior, environmental reaction, worrying the future of children, finance and using playful problem solving strategy, escape avoidance, seeking social support to overcome stress. The third subject has psychological stressor that based on children behavior, worrying the future of children and finance by using playful problem solving strategy seeking social support and escape avoidance to overcome stress. Overall conclusion the stressor which is owned by the three subjects is social and psychological stressor sourced from children behavior, environmental reaction, finance and worrying the future of children. The way of the three subjects to overcome stress through playful problem solving, seeking social support and escape avoidance.*

**Keywords:** coping strategies, autism

## 1. Introduction

The birth of a baby is happiness for a husband and wife, because not only as happiness alone but a child is also as a successor of generation that is expected by every couple. Not all parents' expectations of having a healthy and normal child can be realized. Some parents actually blessed with children who have special needs. One form of disability or disorder is autism, which is a disorder of growth and development, both physically and mentally. Soekandar (in Sarlito Wirawan Sarwono, 2007: 254) found that in autistic patients, there are three parts of the brain that are disrupted, namely the frontal lobe, limbic system and right hemisphere. Usually autism has been seen since the age of 2-3 years of children, which is characterized by repetitive movements (repetitive behavior) which is there is no eye contact with others (impairments in social interaction) and if called cannot answer (impairment in communication) that affects autistic children cannot care about surrounding environment so that children with autism is able to do something without regard to danger at all.

Autism can also be caused by viruses, such as rubella, toxo, herpes, fungi, poor nutrition, bleeding and food poisoning during pregnancy which can inhibit the growth of brain cells that cause impaired brain function, especially the function of understanding communication and interaction. Another possibility is caused by psychological factors, because of the busyness of his parents

So that they do not have time to communicate with the child, or the child is never invited to speak since childhood, it can also cause children to suffer from autism (Nino Prasetyo, 2010: 5)

Autism can attack anyone, whether socio-economically established or not, children or adults, and all ethnicities, even children in developed countries. Children who suffer from autism in America are estimated total 2 to 5 people out of 10.000 children, and boys four times more than girls. In 2002, Dr. Ika Widyawati from the staff of Psychiatry at the Faculty of Medicine, University of Indonesia estimates that there are approximately 6.900 children with autism in Indonesia. This amount continues to increase every year. In Indonesia, in 2013 it was estimated that there were more than 112.000 children suffering from autism in the age of 5-19 years. While the prevalence of people with autism in worldwide according to UNESCO data in 2011 was 6 out of 1000 people with autism (<http://id.wikipedia.org/wiki/Autisme>).

## 2. Literature Review

In 1943, Dr. Leo Kanner from John Hopkins University describes autistic in early childhood (infantile autism) (Joko Yuwono, 2009: 8). Autism comes from the word "auto" which means self, people with autism seems to live in their own world (Desi Sulisty Wardani, 2009: 28). Whereas

according to the World Health Organization's International Classification of Diseases (ICD-10), autism is defined as an abnormality or developmental disorder that arises before the age of three years with a type of characteristic that is not normally three fields, namely social interaction, communication and repeated behavior. WHO also classifies autism as a developmental disorder as a result of disorders of the human central nerve system (Nur Kholis Reefani, 2013: 28).

Based on study of various scientific literature, it can be seen several factors that cause autism, namely, genetic factors, disorders of the nerve system, chemical imbalances, autism is also thought to be caused by viruses, such as rubella, toxo, herpes, fungi, poor nutrition, bleeding and poisoning food during pregnancy, other possibilities are psychological factors, (Nino Prasetyo, 2010: 5).

The presence of autistic children in the middle of the family will affect family life, especially in the psychological aspects of parents, which subsequently affects the relationship of husband and wife and other family members. By knowing that their child is diagnosed as autistic, parents experience shock (disbelief), this attitude is usually followed by various attitudes such as anxiety, feeling guilty, being a problem, confused, hopeless, angry, helpless or refused, do not know what to do, self-blaming, get angry with their self, partner or even to the child with autism and ask God why it happened like this. They are sad and appear desperate that develops into prolonged depression and stress (Joko Yuwono, 2009: 114).

The inability or failure of parents in addressing the child's condition will put parents in stressful situations, or generally known as stress. Stress in general is a feeling of depression, anxiety and tension. In daily language stress is known as a stimulus or response that requires individuals to make adjustments. Stress is a physical and psychological reaction to every demand that causes tension and destabilizes daily life (Priyoto, 2014: 2). Parents who have children with autism experience more stress than parents of mentally disabled children. This is because people with autism do not show a normal emotional response or have a low social response to others.

Because the physical and emotional tension that accompanies stress causes discomfort, a person becomes motivated to do something to reduce stress. This is a thing which is done namely part of stress coping (Nevid, et al., 2003: 135). Coping strategies refer to various efforts, both mental and behavioral, to dominate, reduce, or reduce a situation or a stressful event. Coping strategies can be interpreted as a process where individual try to handle and dominate stressful situations that suppress due to the problems they are facing (Zainun Mutadin, 2002: 1). If individual is able to manage coping strategies well then individual is able to do social adjustments well.

According to Lazarus and Folkman (Hanida Hidayanti, 2010: 38) coping strategies consist of:

The strategy of countermeasure that focus on problem

(problem focused coping Problem focused coping is a strategy by solving problems that they are facing, so that individuals are immediately free from the problem. The forms of this coping strategy are:

Confrontative coping is describing attempts to change circumstances or problems aggressively, also describing levels of anger.

Planful problem solving is describing the effort to change the situation carefully while using an analytical approach for problem solving.

Stress coping that focus on emotion (emotion focused coping) is intended to reduce emotional pressure which is caused by stress, by avoiding, minimizing, making distance, selective and positive assessments. In other words, certain cognitive forms of stress-centered coping strategies lead to changes the way to interpret an event without changing the objective situation, this form of coping strategy are:

Distancing is to describe a reaction to break away or attempt to get involved in a problem

Self control is to describe efforts to regulate feelings and actions which are taken

Seeking social support is to describe efforts to seek support from outside parties in the form of information, real support, and emotional support

Accepting responsibility is to describe the awareness of his role in the problems faced and try to position everything properly as it should

Escape avoidance is to describe a fantasy reaction and to avoid or escape from problems

Positive reappraisal is to describe efforts to create positive meanings that are more intended for personal development and also involve religious matters.

Stress handling strategy can also be classified as approaching and avoidance. Approach strategies include cognitive efforts to understand the causes of stress and efforts to deal with these causes of stress by dealing with the causes of stress or the consequences directly. Avoidance strategies include cognitive efforts to deny or reduce the causes of stress and effort that arise in behavior, to withdraw from or avoid the causes of stress (Santrock, 2003: 567)

According to Morgan (in Sekar Melati Pradipta, 2010: 34) there are several coping strategies in the care of children with special needs, namely:

- Avoid child behavior
- Recognize child behavior patterns
- Communicate with children
- The power to fight
- Be good with children
- Working with children

The benefits of coping strategies are in essence so that individuals can continue their next life despite having problems that is to maintain emotional balance, maintain a positive self-image, reduce environmental pressure or adjust to negative studies and continue a satisfying relationship with others.

### 3. Methodology

In this study, the discussion that will be examined is about the description of parental stress coping strategies in dealing with the growth of autistic children in the Zinnia Special School which would require in-depth data, presented in full and detailed in order to provide a clear and complete description of taken phenomena. With the background previously described in the introductory chapter, the research approach chosen in this study is qualitative, because the problem that will be examined leads to the reality of life and characteristics of parents of autistic children.

According to Bogdan and Taylor (in Moleong, 2002: 3) qualitative methodology is defined as a research procedure that produces descriptive data in the form of written or oral words from people and observable behavior. In qualitative research, the data obtained is not in the form of numbers, but in the form of personal notes, interviews, observations, or historical relics related to the case (Liche Seniati et al., 2011: 22).

In connection with the title of the research, the authors decided to use the type of case study research that is a type of qualitative approach that focuses on certain cases that have the uniqueness and distinctiveness of the case so that it has an appeal to the reader (Haris Herdiansyah, 2010: 64). The selection of case studies as a type of research is intended in order to the writer gets a clear and complete picture of the real situation about the description of parental stress coping strategies in facing the growth of autistic children in the special school of Zinnia. The author uses a qualitative type of intrinsic case study approach, where the author conducts research because of interest or concern for a special case. Intrinsic case study is research conducted because of interest or concern in a special case (Kristi Poerwandari, 2013: 125). With descriptive research, it is expected to reveal current and occurring symptoms in order to provide a detailed description of the background, factors and characteristics typical of a case. Of course without intending to produce theories, or effort to generalize.

In the method of data collection the author observes the cast as well as an observer, where the observer in this case is not entirely an actor and, but still performs the observation function. Observations made also use an observation approach with a scientific setting, where observations are carried out in natural situations in the sense that the author allows the conditions in the actual situation and waits and pays attention to what will appear. In examining the description of parental stress coping strategies in dealing with the growth of autistic children, researchers not only looked at verbal answers to subjects but also observed non-verbal things. Complementary observations in this study are

observations of autistic children of the subject concerned to provide a general description and symptoms of autistic children. These observations include physical characteristics, appearance, motor skills and behavior of children.

In accordance with the problem and purpose of the study, which is about the description of parental stress coping strategies in dealing with the growth of autistic children, the main data collection is done by using the interview method to the research subject, which is one of the parents that is considered most visible in parenting and treatment of autistic children. According to Lexy J. Moleong (2002: 135) interviews are conversations with a specific purpose. The conversation is carried out by two parties, namely the interviewer (interviewer) who asks questions and interviewee who provide answers. Lexy J. Moleong (2002: 178) says that one of the credible techniques of qualitative research is triangulation techniques. Triangulation is a data validity checking technique that utilizes something other than that data for checking purposes or as a comparison to that data. The most widely used triangulation technique is examination through other sources.

Based on the problem and purpose of the study, the researcher used a purposive sampling technique that is one parent who has an autistic child who is considered seems in the problem of parenting and treatment of children, parents of autistic children whose a child are attending therapy at an autistic institution in South Jakarta, this is ensures that the child has received a diagnosis of autism from a doctor or therapy, a minimum level of junior high school education or equivalent to facilitate researchers to communicate with the subject in research data collection. In research regarding the description of parental stress coping strategies in dealing with the growth of autistic children, researchers took three parents from autistic children. Parents referred to in this study are only one of the couples most involved in parenting and treatment of children, which is the father or mother of the autistic child.

Data analysis according to Patton (in Moleong, 2002: 103) is the process of arranging data sequences, organizing them into a pattern, category, and basic unit description. According to Lexy J. Moeleong (2002: 103) that data analysis intends to first organize data. The data collected is numerous and consists of field notes and researcher comments, pictures, photos, documents in the form of reports, biographies, articles, and so on. Data analysis work in this case is to organize, sort, classify, provide code, and categorize it. Organizing and managing the data is aimed at finding work themes and hypotheses that were finally adopted as substantive theories.

After this is done then the data obtained in descriptive form will be continued with an analysis using pattern matching that is comparing the patterns obtained empirically with the existing theory (Yin, 2009: 140). If the two patterns have similarity, it will strengthen the validity of the existing data. The last step is to interpret the data that has been analyzed and related to the literature review so that produce a conclusion related to the research.



#### 4. Data Analysis and Discussion

Based on the results of the interview then it is able to do data analysis, in this study can be known about the coping strategies of parents facing autistic children. In this case there are three subjects, first subject M with child W, second subject B with child R, and third subject P with child R.

The characteristics of autism found in children, first subject children often play alone and do not like being disturbed by other people if invited to play with siblings and friends other than that unstable emotions sometimes can not control his emotions and also active children who can not be silent. The second subject child is late in talking compared to the child his age, often does not turn around when called and has not been able to communicate and also seized all attention to the part of an object. The third subject child experiences slow behavior, is often dazed, and is difficult when called, besides experiencing speech delay and unable to play with children his age. Of the characteristics of autism in DSM-IV (in Bonny Danuatmaja, 2003: 2) the most prominent characteristic of the three subjects is the obstacle in communication that is delayed or late in using spoken language. In addition, obstacles in social interaction are also seen in the three subject children, which is in subject one and the subject of three children lacking interaction can not play with friends of the same age, whereas in the subject both children lack in giving and receiving related to social or emotional, and also seized all abnormal attention to part of an object.

Parents have a variety of certain feelings and reactions when waiting for diagnosis and after the diagnosis states that their child has autism. This is a natural thing as expressed by Mangunsong (in Sekar Pradipta, 2010: 18) who says there is an emotional reaction that is often experienced by parents of children who suffer from autism, which is feeling of shock, feelings of sadness, acceptance. Feelings experienced by the first, second and third subjects when they find out their child is diagnosed are sad feelings. Initially the second and third subjects were at the stage of refusing to accept the reality at that time. While the first subject at that time was in the stage of surrender and accepting the reality. when they found out that their children were diagnosed with autism, the three subjects still had hope for the state of children's behavior that could still change when they grew up. At present the first and second subjects are in a tired phase because they overcome the emotions of children who are unstable and are worried about children's skills for the future.

Stress description and parent coping strategies before a child is diagnosed with autism, during pregnancy, first and second subjects experience stressful conditions due to family problems and get inner stress, while in the third subject have many thoughts. The first and third subjects felt confused, worried about seeing children's behavior, while the second subject was worried when they saw the same symptoms of autism on television like their children. At that time the first and second subjects feel physically tired because the child needs more attention. The second subject also felt inferior to the environment because of the child's behavior.

Stress conditions can be caused by various causes or sources, in more general terms called stressors. Stressor is a condition or situation, object or individual that can cause stress. According to Priyoto (2014: 2) in general a stressor can be divided into three, namely, physical stressors, social stressors, psychological stressors. Of the three categories stated, the stressors possessed in the first and second subjects are social stressors, namely reflecting the interaction of individuals with other individuals such as family problems experienced by both subjects, while the stressors possessed by the third subject are psychological stressors which create mental stress and can lead to frustration, conflict or anxiety because of the thoughts of a third subject.

To overcome the physical and emotional pain that accompanies stress, the individual will be motivated to do things to reduce stress. The things that the individual will do are what is included in coping (Sarafino, 2002: 134). Coping strategies are divided into two types, namely problem focused coping and emotion focused coping (Folkman and Lazarus, in Hanida Hidayati, 2010:). The first subject tried to directly solve the existing problem by gathering family members, and tried to convince the environment to overcome the child's behavior, the way of the first subject to deal with stress including the type of problem-focused coping with the planful problem solving category that describes the effort to change the situation carefully in besides using an analytical approach to solving. Whereas the way of the second subject and third subject overcome stress by traveling alone so as not to think about the problems that exist, including the emotional focused coping type with the escape avoidance category, which is describing imaginary reactions and attempts to avoid or escape the problem.

After the three subjects found out their children had autistic disorders, the first and second subjects felt upset and tired of the child's behavior when the child was angry for no reason, the child's emotions were unstable, whereas in the third subject felt dizzy and stressed when the child cried, shouted and his emotions are high. In the first and second subjects feel sad when the family environment and the surrounding environment can not accept the condition of children who are autistic and at that time the second subject and the third subject feel worried about the cost problems that will be faced during the child care period.

According to Horowitz (in Firdha Lystia Utami, 2011: 24) parents who have autistic children have their own sources of stress, namely problematic children's behavior, reactions from the social environment and feelings of isolation, worrying about parenting and treatment of children in the future, financial and also deep sad. According to the source of stress, the three subjects have a source of stress from the behavior of the problematic child. The first and second subjects have additional stress sources which are coming from the social environment and deep feelings of sadness, and in the third subject and the second subject also has a source of stress from finance.

Efforts made by the second and the third subjects to overcome children's behavior by involving children in therapy while the first subject solve with the direct way of

talking well with the child. when the third subject was in a state of stress the effort that is made is asking for help and support from the surrounding environment and listening to the song when resting. To overcome the sources of stress from the social environment and family environment the first subject overcomes it by avoiding while the second subject by asking for support from people around and the second and the third subject efforts to overcome financial problems by selling. From the two types of coping strategies, namely problem focused coping and emotion focused coping, the three subject has the type of problem focused coping with the planful problem solving category in overcoming children's behavior and financial problems in the second and third subject. The three subjects also have emotion focused coping type, where the first subject included the category of escape avoidance and the second subject and included the seeking social support category in overcoming the social and family environment problems, the third subject also included in the seeking social support category when it is in the stress condition.

Currently the three subjects feel worried about the future of the child, if until adulthood the child cannot be independent, at this time the first subject still feels dizzy with puberty problems experienced by children and the first and the third subject also still feeling annoyed because the child's emotions are still not as stable as children who still like to be angry and difficult to be advised. On the second subject the problem that is still dominant is financial problems. From the sources of stress described by Horowitz (in Firdha Lystia Utami, 2011: 24), the three subjects have a source of stress worrying about child care and treatment in the future. On the first and third subject have a source of stress from the behavior of children who are problematic, while on the second subject has a source of stress that is still dominant is finance.

Efforts made by the three subjects are currently in need of support from the family and the surrounding environment, and the first subject's efforts to overcome the behavior of children who have problems by talking well with children while the third subject to overcome it by finding a way out and other ways is not to think about the problem. On the second subject, the effort that is done to overcome the financial problem is by selling, but the first subject from the whole problem faced by the effort that is done is to live a relaxed life and not think too much about the problem. From the two types of coping strategies, namely problem focused coping and emotion focused coping, all three subjects have problem focused coping types with planful problem solving categories in overcoming the problems that are still dominant today. The three subjects also have emotion focused coping types which included the seeking social support category, and on the first and the third subject also included in the avoidance escape category when they do not think about the problem.

## 5. Conclusion

Based on data analysis and discussion of research, it can be concluded that: 1. Based on the results of the study it is found that most of the informants have problem solving orientation

that focuses on ways or strategies to resolve problem or Problem Focused Coping. The forms of effort or the method carried out by informants include: involving children in therapy and school, trying to find information about how to deal with children with autism, how to deal with children's emotions that are unstable, guiding and training children to be more independent, and also give an understanding of the state of their child to the community well.

2. The form of coping behavior carried out by informants who are oriented towards problem solving (Problem Focused Coping) is planful problem solving while coping behavior that is carried out by Emotion Focused Coping is escape avoidance and seeking social support.

## 6. Suggestion

- 1) The three subjects are advised to remain optimistic and try to improve the condition of the child and be more open to the surrounding environment in order to remain able to socialize with the environment and get from the surrounding environment and deal with the emotions of children who are not stable patiently and talk well with children.
- 2) Autistic children have difficulty to adapt with changing environments. Therefore parents are advised to provide an explanation of the actual condition of the child so that the community can provide conducive environmental conditions for autistic children and parents
- 3) Teachers and therapists are advised to pay more attention to parental concerns, especially the issue of children's education by providing information to parents on how to optimize the child's ability in order to follow the level of formal education immediately and provision for the future.

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