

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN STRESS LEVEL AND COPING MECHANISM WITH PARENT'S ABILITY TO CARE FOR AUTIS CHILDREN

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: The incidence of autism in Indonesia has increased by 0.15% per year, this affects the level of stress and coping mechanisms of parents of autistic children because they have to take care of children who are very active, angry and difficult to understand the needs of this affects the ability of parents to care for autistic children. **Objective:** Analyzing the relationship between stress levels and coping mechanisms with parent's ability to care for autistic children. **Methods:** This type of descriptive correlation with a cross-sectional approach. The population includes all parents of autistic children in SLB Bina Anggita Special Autism Magelang City. The sample taken in this study were all guardians of autistic with a total of 60 people. The instruments used are the Perceived Stress Scale, Brief Cope, and a questionnaire sheet of parents' ability to care for autistic children. The analysis used in this research is correlation test using Spearman Rank test. **Result:** There was no correlation between the level of stress and the ability of parents to care for autistic children (p -value = 0.445) and there was a relationship between coping mechanisms and the ability of parents to care for autistic children with a value (p -value = 0.008). **Conclusion:** All the parents of autistic children in SLB Bina Anggita Magelang City are able to care for autistic children well.

Keywords: Autism; Coping mechanism; Parents' ability to care; Stress

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INTRODUCTION

High stress is often felt by parents of autistic children than normal parents (Nahdah, 2022). These parents have experience in caring for autistic children should be able to consider their care when the stress felt will be handled (Giannotti, 2023). Stressed parents experience a state where the interaction of individuals with the environment shows gaps from individuals both biological, psychological, and even social (Putri, 2019). The prevalence of parents who felt moderate stress was 58.1% (Nahdah, 2022) while those who felt mild stress was 59% (Ghaisani, 2022). When stress is high in parents, their involvement in caring for autistic children will tend to decrease but vice versa, the prevalence of parents who experience high stress is 56.3% (Pertiwi & Mar'at, 2022).

Autism is a complex developmental problem involving aspects of communication, cognitive, motor and social development (Asep, 2020). The World Health Organization (WHO) states that children globally have an estimated child prevalence of 62/10,000. The incidence of

autism around the world continues to increase, even in Indonesia (Silitonga et al., 2023). The incidence of autism in Indonesia has increased by 1:100 if the number of births in Indonesia is 6 million in a year, it can be concluded that in Indonesia autism has increased by 0.15% per year (Livia Sari et al., 2022).

The prevalence of autism in Sekolah Luar Biasa Bina Anggita Kota Magelang is 60 children. Parental stress in the mild stress category will have an impact on their daily lives, for example, excessive work enthusiasm, fatigue, difficulty feeling relaxed and parents will be more overprotective to limit autistic children's social interaction with the environment (Ghaisani, 2022). Parents who experience moderate levels of stress when caring for autistic children will often feel dizzy, insomnia, and irritable if family members do not help them (Hastutiningtyas, 2021). Parents who have severe stress levels will cause stress toxicity which results in children (Pravesty, 2019).

Parents of autistic children must have good coping mechanisms to avoid the impact of stress

that causes internal disorders and the treatment process which may have negative consequences for the growth and development of autistic children (Ghaisani & Hendriani, 2022). This coping mechanism is an effort by parents to overcome the stress they are facing and parents who have poor coping mechanisms will have an impact on the care of autistic children (Hidayat, 2021). The application of parental attitudes in caring for autistic children must be adjusted to the type of obstacle and the level of awareness of the parents (Thaibah, 2020). The purpose of this study was to analyze the relationship between stress levels and coping mechanisms with parents' ability to care for autistic children.

METHOD

The method used was descriptive correlation with a cross-sectional approach. This research was conducted at Bina Anggita Special School for Autistic Children in Magelang City. The population includes all parents of autistic children in SLB Bina Anggita Special Autistic Magelang City which amounted to 60. The sample used is all parents of autistic children in SLB Bina Anggita Special Autistic Magelang City with a total of 60 people.

The first instrument uses the Perceived Stress Scale to measure the respondent's stress level which has been modified by the researcher. The second instrument uses Brief Cope to measure respondents' coping mechanisms. Then, the last is a questionnaire sheet of parents' ability to care for autistic children, this statement is taken from the theory of efforts in caring for autistic children (Dewi et al., 2018).

The research took place from January to May 2024. The first time data collection was to test the validity and reliability of the instrument with 20 respondents after the instrument was declared valid and reliable the researcher held a socialization event with the presence of 51 respondents of which 2 of them entered the exclusion criteria so that 11 respondents from the valid and reliability test of this data were reused so that the total number of respondents was 60 by getting data from distributing questionnaire sheets to respondents who had attended. If, the data has been collected, the

researcher codes the data then the data analysis technique used by Pearson Product.

Moment in determining the instrument test and the second analysis technique uses Rank Spearman to determine the relationship between variables. Research ethics are divided into 3, the first is honesty, informed consent and confidentiality in the answers that respondents give on the questionnaires that have been distributed. This research has been authorized with the issuance of ethical clearance no.012/KE/01/2024 and permission letter no.229/Unimus.62/PT/2024.

RESULTS

Table 1. Distribution of Characteristics of 60 Respondents of Parents of Autistic Children (n=60)

Characteristics of responden	n	%
Gander		
Male	22	36,7
Female	38	63,3
Age		
26-35 years	9	15
36-45 years	30	50
46-55 years	15	25
56-65 years	4	6,7
>65 years	2	3,3
Education		
Elementary school	4	6,7
Junior high	6	10
High school	23	38,3
First Graduate	16	26,7
D3	4	6,7
D1	4	6,7
Magister	3	5
Work		
Private employee	8	13,3
Farmer/Farm Laborer	3	5
Civil servant	10	16,7
Self-employed	15	25
Housewife	21	35
ART	2	3,3
PPNPM	1	1,7
Income		
Less than minimum wage	35	58,3
More than the minimum wage	23	38,3
Religion		
Islam	52	85,7
Christianity	4	6,7
Catholic	4	6,7

Number of children with special needs		
One child	55	91,7
Two children	2	3,3
Three children	3	5

Table 1 shows that the gender of respondents is female as many as 38 respondents (63.3%) with the highest age range of 36-45 years as many as 30 respondents (50%), most of whom work as housewives as many as 21 (35%) and have the last high school education as many as 23 respondents (38.3%). Earning less than the minimum wage as many as 35 respondents (58.3%) and almost all respondents have children with special needs one as many as 55 respondents (91.7%).

Table 2. Frequency Distribution of 60 Respondents Based on Stress Level, Coping Mechanism, and Parents' Ability to Care for Autistic Children

Variabel	n	%
Stress levels		
Low	3	5
Medium	45	75
High	12	20
Coping mechanisms		
Adaptive	1	1,7
Maladaptive	59	98,3
Parents' ability to care for autistic children		
Enough	8	13,3
Good	52	86,7

Table 2 states that the majority of respondents experienced moderate stress as many as 45 respondents (75%), however, almost all respondents applied adaptive coping mechanisms as many as 59 respondents (98.3%) and parents of autistic children at SLB Bina Anggita Khusus Autis Kota Magelang were able to care for autistic children well as many as 52 respondents (86.7%).

Table 3

Table 3. Relationship between Stress Level and Coping Mechanisms with Parent's Ability to Care for Autistic Children

Relationship	r-calculated	p-value
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Stress levels		
Parents' ability to care for autistic children	0,101	0,445
Coping mechanisms		
Parents' ability to care for autistic children	0,339	0,008

Table 3 shows the results of the analysis of the relationship between stress levels and coping mechanisms with parents' ability to care for autistic children. The results showing that the correlation or r value = 0.101 and p-value 0.445 > 0.05, meaning that there is no relationship between stress levels and the ability of parents to care for autistic children. The other results of the analysis have r value = 0.339 and p-value 0.008 < 0.05, which means that there is a relationship between coping mechanisms and parents' ability to care for autistic children.

DISCUSSION

Overview of respondent's stress level

The result shows that the majority of respondents felt moderate stress. The amount of stress experienced by respondents in this study was influenced by several individual characteristics (Kurniasih, 2023). Some characteristics seen from gender in this study are almost mostly women (mothers) parents who often experience stress are women because the care and care of mothers to take care of autistic children is more likely to be tiring so, mothers often feel unstable emotions besides that, work is a characteristic of the onset of stress. In addition, work characterizes the onset of stress.

The majority of research respondents work as housewives where the work of housewives (IRT) is easier to experience stress because it is difficult to divide time between housework, guiding autistic children and even a mother easily feels tired (Kurniasih, 2023). These things trigger stress in research respondents. Stress that arises in respondents if it is too frequent or turns into high stress will affect the care of autistic children. This moderate stress starts from a few hours or even days which can cause symptoms such as fatigue, irritability, difficulty resting, anxiety (Dewi, 2018) and more often experience feeling dizzy, insomnia, and irritability (Hastutiningtyas, 2021) so, it is

necessary to handle stress accordingly in order to reduce stress levels in research respondents.

Overview of respondent's coping mechanisms

Respondent's coping mechanisms based on the results of the study most of the respondents applied adaptive coping mechanisms respondents have been able to accept the fact that respondents are blessed with special children so, respondents always try to improve the care of autistic children and a small proportion of respondents who apply maladaptive coping mechanisms on the results of one respondent's questionnaire who often smokes to foster a much better feeling when facing a problem.

Adaptive coping mechanisms where respondents focus on problem focused coping which means respondents focus on problems with positive results in stress management (Twining, 2020). Parents who have adaptive coping mechanisms tend to be able to overcome their problems, one of these strategies is that respondents in the study send their autistic children to inclusive schools in accordance with the target sample in this study.

Respondents who have adaptive coping mechanisms tend to be able to overcome their problems, one of these strategies is that respondents in the study send their autistic children to inclusive schools according to the target sample. Respondents are able to apply including chatting with others, solving problems effectively and efficiently, finding solutions to problems, taking action, learning from the past, being able to do relaxation techniques, doing balanced exercises and constructive activities (Dewi, 2018).

Overview of the ability of parents to care for autistic children

Respondents' ability to care for autistic children based on the results of the study respondents were able to apply autistic children's care by teaching them about toileting methods, applying sleep hygiene before children sleep, and always applying two-way communication with autistic children. This

shows that respondents are able to take good care of autistic children.

Fathers have an important role for the growth of children's emotional intelligence while mothers have an important role to help children to be able to find their own potential path because the development of children is very dependent on the seriousness of the mother in developing and caring for them (Asari, 2023) when autistic children are able to play roles with others, they will develop their ability to speak, listen, and be able to express their feelings (Mariyam, 2022) this is the role of parents. In addition to play therapy Javanese classical music therapy is also able to foster the creativity of autistic children, parents can play Javanese classical music at home to support the creativity of autistic children.

The large percentage obtained in this study shows that the respondents' ability to care for autistic children is mostly able to take good care of autistic children. This has a good impact on autistic children because, respondents will be able to create success in caring for children with autism due to the realization of safety factors, tighter supervision of autistic children, giving attention, affection, acceptance, providing educational facilities, being able to control the food of autistic children (Dewi, 2018).

Overview of the relationship between stress levels and parents' ability to care for autistic children

The results of the researcher's analysis of the picture of this relationship show that there is no significant relationship between stress levels and the ability of parents to care for autistic children. The stress felt by the research respondents most of the respondents experienced feeling excessive anxiety, nervousness, sometimes feeling pessimistic, irritated and angry in caring for autistic children, this caused respondents to be unable to control things that made them depressed or feel stressed.

The results of the study explained that many experienced moderate stress which could trigger the emergence of higher stress levels and from the results of the study respondents were able to care for children seen from the

various efforts that parents had made such as toileting methods, elimination, sleep patterns and good communication (Dewi, 2018). The results of the researcher's analysis also showed that the respondents had reached the acceptance stage where they could accept their child's condition. Thus, parents are required to be able to take care of all their children's needs such as vitamins, therapy, and children's dietary problems (Purnamaningsih et al., 2020). Parents must be able to improve their role properly in supervising children using electronic media, and providing the best nutrition for children (Mariyam et al., 2023) if, parents are already in the acceptance stage then, parents will be able to take good care of autistic children. This level of stress has been influenced by other factors such as finances or often called economic stress (Iswanti et al., 2024). Low economic status affects high consumption needs such as the need to send children to school, high shopping needs and the need for a more comfortable home so that, as a result, parents become more emotional, depressed, and irritable, this triggers an increase in stress levels (Fitriani & Gina, 2021).

The impact of parents who have autistic children between fathers and mothers is very different, where mothers will often feel anxious and stressed while fathers prioritize a father's self-assessment which is a shield to avoid stress and anxiety (Harita & Chusairi, 2022). Thus, the emergence of stressors that increase parental stress does not affect the respondents' ability to care for autistic children because parents are already at the acceptance stage, so they are required to be able to take care of all their children's needs (Purnamaningsih et al., 2020). The results of this analysis explain that there is no relationship between these two variables in accordance with previous research which indicates that there is no significant correlation between stress and parenting patterns for parents of autistic children in Denpasar City.

Overview of the relationship between coping mechanisms and the ability of parents to care for autistic children

The results of the researcher's analysis of the relationship between the two variables show that

there is a significant relationship between coping mechanisms and the ability of parents to care for autistic children with a positive relationship direction where the better the coping mechanism applied by respondents, the better their ability to care for autistic children. The results showed that almost all respondents in this study applied adaptive coping mechanisms. This adaptive coping mechanism encourages unity, progress and learning in achieving a hope (Dewi, 2018). Some examples of adaptive coping mechanisms are respondents being able to talk to others to find solutions to a problem, being able to act in the face of circumstances and being able to take lessons or past events (Pravesty, 2019).

Respondents in this study have a crucial obligation to support the care of autistic children (Giannotti, 2023). Adaptive coping mechanisms applied by respondents based on the results of the study, most respondents have been able to accept the fact that respondents are blessed with special children so that, respondents always try to improve the care of autistic children. The situation of respondents who are able to apply good coping mechanisms and are already at the acceptance stage, respondents will have more calm thoughts and the application of good coping, respondents will focus on providing the best care for their children (Purnamaningsih et al., 2020). One of the therapies that can be an effort for parents in supporting the development of autistic children is hypnotherapy and touch therapy which can reduce the hyperactive attitude of autistic children (Alfiyanti et al., 2022). This will greatly affect the growth and development of autistic children.

The results of the study showed that respondents were also able to apply various treatments for autistic children well, such as teaching children to dress up and dress, teaching children to defecate and urinate in the right place, implementing diets for autistic children and being able to communicate two-way with children well. So, the better parents apply coping mechanisms, the better their ability to care for autistic children (Iswanti et al., 2010). The results of the analysis that parents are able to properly care for autistic children mean that

the adaptive coping that respondents have applied focuses on problem focused coping as evidenced by respondents who strive for their children to continue to develop (Lazarus, 1984).

Placing their children in inclusive schools is one example that parents apply problem focused coping. In addition, the role of parents is very important in supporting the development of fine motoric autistic children because, fine motoric will develop if honed every day and need support from the closest people of autistic children (Kurnianingsih & Alfiyanti, 2017). The significance of this study with the previous one explains that there is a relationship between coping strategies and parenting patterns in caring for autistic children (Ma'rifah, 2018).

The implication of the results of this research is that parents who are able to overcome stress levels with appropriate coping mechanisms can increase their ability to care for children with autism. Limitation of this study is the insufficient number of respondents, which may affect the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, the study did not fully represent all categories of children with autism, as the sample size was limited. These constraints may limit the applicability of the results to broader populations of children with autism.

CONCLUSION

The result shows that there was no correlation between stress levels and the ability of parents to care for autistic children. There is a correlation between coping mechanisms and the ability of parents to care for autistic children. Future studies are recommended to involve a larger number of respondents to enhance the generalizability of the findings. Efforts should also be made to include a more diverse representation of children with autism, considering various categories such as severity levels, age groups, or socio-demographic backgrounds.

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