

Counseling Intervention for Native Mothers with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) Children

CHAN WEI SIAN & JAMAYAH SAILI

Faculty of Cognitive Sciences and Human Development, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak,
94300 Kota Samarahan, Sarawak, Malaysia
Corresponding author: sjamayah@unimas.my

ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to explore the experiences of native mothers with autistic children in Kuching, Sarawak. The research focused on the challenges faced by native mothers with autistic children, their coping strategies, and participation in counseling intervention. This is a qualitative-based research with three native mothers with autistic children, employing approximately 30 until 45 minutes semi-structured interview sessions. Outcome of the interview sessions were categorized into four major themes and nine sub-themes. Recommendation of counseling intervention include psychoeducational, which aim to provide information to native mothers with regards to autism-related knowledge, skills, and techniques to handling autistic children.

Keywords: Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), coping, intervention, counselling, carer

INTRODUCTION

Statistic showed that estimated one out of every 600 children in Malaysia is born with autism (Lee, 2016). Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) faced difficulties in social interaction and sensory processing. They are unable to use verbal and non-verbal communication effectively (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Mental, psychological, and biological development of autistic children are different with typically developing children. According to Piaget's Theory, cognitive development in early childhood consists of four stages, which are sensorimotor, pre-operational, concrete operational, and formal operational stage. On the other hand, autistic children are unable to perform cognitive tasks such as reasoning, decision making, numbering and so on. Vikram, Nameera, and Jacob (2016) found that typically developing children performed better in reasoning compared with autistic children. However, cognitive ability of autistic children could not be examined by intelligence test because impairment of brain in autistic children did not affect their cognitive ability, but it impacts their social interaction ability. For typically developing children, quality of social interaction depends on active dialogue between their parents and children (Tordjman, Davlantis, Goergieff, Goeffray, Speranza, & Anderson, 2015). Limitation in social interaction cause autistic children unable to develop relationship with others such as family members, friends, teachers, and so on (Autism Spectrum Australia, 2008). Opposite with autistic children, typically developing children tend to share their interest and enjoyment with others. Biological development among autistic children is different with typically developing children. Autistic children are weak in activities that required used of small-muscle coordination and used of eye-hand. In addition, they are over-sensitive to light and sound so they usually faced sleeping problem. Tordjman et al. (2013) found that abnormalities of circadian rhythm cause autistic children poor in adapting to internal and external environment changes. Thus, there are more challenges and difficulties faced by mothers with autistic children.

Autistic children required excessive care and support from caregivers due to poor social interaction, self-care, and behavior problem. Majority mothers with autistic children experienced rigid family schedules, social isolation, heavy child care duties, discrimination, and lack of social support and awareness of society (Divan, Vajaratkar, Desai, Strik-Lievers, & Patel, 2012; Hoefman, Payakachat, Exel, Kuhlthau, Kovacs, & Pyne, 2014; & Myers, Mackintosh, & Goin-Kochel, 2009). In Malaysia context, there is more than half (53.8%) of parents with autistic children experienced disturbance in psychological well-being (Nikmat, Ahmad, Oon, & Razali, 2008). Lee, Ong, Lee, & Fairuz (2017) found that parenting stress among parents with autistic children is higher than parents with typically developing children. Negative psychology development affects behavior and interaction patterns between caregivers and their children. Beurkens (2010) found that severity of autism symptoms and parent-child relationship are highly associated. Result showed that scores of parent-child interaction decrease when the scores of autism symptoms increase (Beurkens,