

Parental Communication Patterns in Providing Sexual Education to Adolescents with Autism in Surakarta

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ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini dilatarbelakangi oleh kurangnya remaja autisme terhadap perubahan dan perilaku seksual saat memasuki masa pubertas dan remaja autisme memiliki keterbatasan dalam berkomunikasi. Hal ini yang menyebabkan remaja autisme beresiko melakukan penyimpangan perilaku seksual atau menjadi korban kekerasan seksual. Di dalam sekolah edukasi seksual masih belum maksimal perdebatan edukasi tentang seksual masih menjadi tabu di dalam masyarakat sehingga peran orang tua menjadi sangat penting dalam edukasi seksual. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mendeskripsikan pola komunikasi orang tua dalam memberikan edukasi seksual kepada remaja autisme di Surakarta. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode fenomenologi. Subjek dalam penelitian ini adalah empat orang tua yang memiliki anak autisme memasuki remaja, dipilih melalui teknik purposive sampling. Teknik pengumpulan data dalam penelitian ini meliputi wawancara semi-struktur, observasi, dan dokumentasi. Uji keabsahan yang digunakan menggunakan triangulasi sumber dan teknik. Hasil dari penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa pola komunikasi yang digunakan oleh orang tua adalah pola komunikasi primer dengan model komunikasi linier. Orang tua dalam menyampaikan edukasi seksual menggunakan intruksi sederhana serta media visual kontekstual disesuaikan dengan kemampuan pemahaman anak. Materi edukasi yang diberikan disesuaikan dengan gender atau jenis kelamin, seperti penggunaan pembalut untuk anak perempuan dan kebersihan alat kelamin untuk anak laki-laki. Kesimpulan dari penelitian ini adalah pola komunikasi orang tua dalam memberikan edukasi seksual kepada remaja autisme adalah pola komunikasi primer, dari pola yang dihasilkan menunjukkan sebuah model komunikasi yaitu model linier.

Kata kunci: pola komunikasi, edukasi seksual, remaja autisme.

ABSTRACT

This study is motivated by the lack of awareness among autistic adolescents regarding sexual changes and behavior when entering puberty and the communication limitations of autistic adolescents. This puts adolescents with autism at risk of deviant sexual behavior or becoming victims of sexual violence. In schools, sex education is still not maximized because it is still a taboo in society, so the role of parents is very important in sex education. This study aims to describe the communication patterns of parents in providing sexual education to adolescents with autism in Surakarta. This study used a qualitative approach with a phenomenological method. The subjects in this study were four parents who have children with autism entering adolescence, selected through purposive sampling technique. Data collection techniques in this study include semi-structured interviews, observation, and documentation. The validity test used source and technique triangulation. The results of this study show that the communication pattern used by parents is a primary communication pattern with a linear communication model. Parents in delivering sexual education use simple instructions and contextual visual media adapted to the child's understanding ability. The educational materials provided are adjusted to



gender or sex, such as the use of sanitary napkins for girls and genital hygiene for boys. The conclusion of this study is that the communication pattern of parents in providing sexual education to adolescents with autism is a primary communication pattern, from the resulting pattern shows a communication model, namely a linear model.

Keywords: *communication pattern, sexual education, adolescent autism.*

INTRODUCTION

This study was motivated by the lack of awareness among adolescents with autism regarding changes and sexual behavior during puberty, as well as their limited communication skills. During adolescence, individuals with autism experience difficulties in coping with puberty because adolescents with autism find it difficult to understand the meaning of information provided by others regarding puberty changes in themselves (Pradini, 2012). This causes adolescents with autism to be at risk of engaging in deviant sexual behavior or becoming victims of sexual violence. Several cases of abuse of autistic individuals have occurred in West Java, such as a 13-year-old autistic girl from Sukabumi, West Java, who was allegedly a victim of sexual violence and abuse at a hospital in Sukabumi. The autistic teenager was found naked in one of the hospital's psychiatric wards (Alamsyah, 2016). Another case involved a man who committed sodomy against an autistic child. The perpetrator admitted that he would give the autistic teenager money if she agreed to go to his house, where he then abused her and acted on his sexual desires (Andre & Arbi, 2022).

In addition to the above cases of abuse, several types of deviant sexual behavior are also often found in adolescents with autism. Amanda and Caterino (in Suhanto & Dwihiadah, 2023) found that nearly 75% of adolescents with autism engage in sexual activities such as masturbation in public. This is reinforced by the research of Kusrin et al. (2019), which describes deviant sexual behavior in adolescents with autism in public, including stalking, touching others inappropriately, masturbating, and exposing their genitals. Research by Gunarhadi et al. (2021) explains that there are several behaviors that appear in adolescents with autism that are not in accordance with social norms, including masturbating in public, inappropriate friendships, obsession with certain objects, failure to distinguish between appropriate and inappropriate behavior in certain locations, touching their own and other people's private parts, hugging without the other person's consent, and inappropriate sexual comments. In addition, based on observations conducted by researchers at a special needs school in Surakarta, a teenage boy was found exposing his genitals in public and another teenage boy was found playing with his genitals in class. Furthermore, sexual education in schools is still not optimal, and discussions about sexuality are still taboo in society.

Many parents of autistic teenagers experience difficulties in providing sex education. The main obstacles faced by parents include communication barriers with autistic children (Ratna & Rahmasari, 2022), lack of knowledge about sexuality in autistic children (Sholihatina et al., 2012), and still viewing sexuality as taboo or parents who still instill negative perceptions about sexuality (Retnaningrum, 2024). In a study by Syoufiana et al. (2022), data on the provision of sex education for adolescents with autism showed that 25 people (56.8%) had negative perceptions, while 19 people (43.2%) had positive perceptions. Overall, parents' perceptions of sex education for adolescents with autism can be categorized as "negative" or unsupportive of sex education for adolescents with autism. In addition, another challenge faced by parents is the difficulty in providing guidance, emotional support, and sexual needs support to adolescents with autism, because adolescents with autism cannot communicate and express the sexual needs that adolescents with autism experience (Sugini et al., 2024).

As parents of individuals with autism, you will certainly experience difficulties in communicating when providing sex education. However, the involvement and role of parents in accompanying individuals with autism during adolescence is very important, because parents have a big responsibility in providing sex education to

prevent promiscuous behavior and other deviations (Marbun & Stevanus, 2019). In a study by Anggraini et al. (2018), it is explained that for the role of parents of adolescents with autism to be optimal, parents must have three main areas of knowledge: knowledge at the time of identification autism, knowledge about child development, and knowledge about providing sexual education during adolescence. Teaching sex education to adolescents is certainly not an easy task. Parents of adolescents with autism certainly have their own communication patterns for educating their children in the right way. However, educating adolescents with autism has its own challenges, as parents of adolescents with autism have different ways of communicating. The quality of communication between parents and adolescents with autism depends on the extent to which parents accept their children's condition. Parents who have teenagers with autism will have higher stress levels than parents in general, because this will later affect communication between parents and teenagers with autism (Noach et al., 2021). Based on the above background, this study aims to determine the communication patterns of parents in providing sex education to autistic adolescents in Surakarta with the aim of describing the communication patterns of parents in providing sex education to autistic adolescents in Surakarta.

METHOD

This study is a qualitative study using a phenomenological approach. Hadi and Rusman (2021) explain that phenomenology is a philosophical approach that investigates human experience. Phenomenology means a method of thinking to obtain new knowledge or develop existing knowledge with logical, systematic, critical steps, not based on apriori/prejudice and not dogmatic. The data sources used in this study were primary data, which is data obtained directly from the first source, either through observation or interviews with respondents and informants, and secondary data. In this study, the secondary data used was documentation of activities during the research.

In this study, several techniques were used to collect data in order to answer the research questions. This study used semi-structured interviews, non-participant observation, and documentation. To verify the accuracy of the data obtained, the researcher conducted a validity test. The purpose of the validity test was to determine whether the data obtained was valid. In this study, the data validity technique used to test the accuracy of the data was triangulation. According to Sugiyono (2021), triangulation in credibility testing is defined as checking data from various sources using various methods, sources, and times. Thus, there are three types of triangulation, namely source triangulation, technique triangulation, and time triangulation. In this study, the techniques used for validity testing were source and technique triangulation. Meanwhile, the data analysis technique used was the interactive analysis model of Miles and Huberman (in Sugiyono, 2021), which states that the interactive analysis model has three related components, namely data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing or verification.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Based on the results of the study Patterns of Parent Communication in Providing Sexual Education to Adolescents with Autism in Surakarta, it was found that not all subjects understood sexual education. This is due to the lack of information obtained. If the subjects participated in sexual education seminars or training programs, then sexual communication or learning at school would vary and the information would be different. However, two of the four subjects did not participate in seminar programs or obtain information from outside sources, relying only on their

personal experiences. Subject F, for example, participated in many sexual education seminars and even had a community of parents of autistic adolescents, so subject F created the sexual education programs that their child needed.

Parents provide different sexual education materials depending on the needs of each teenager, including the use of sanitary napkins for teenage girls, male genital hygiene, and reprimands for sexual deviance. This indicates that educational materials are tailored to gender, with 2 out of 4 parents using different media for teenage boys, while the 2 parents of teenage girls with autism used the same media to educate their children on sanitary pad use during menstruation.

Based on the sexual education material provided by the four subjects, it can be aligned with Chomaria's (2012) statement, which explains that there are seven stages in providing sexual education, namely: recognizing body parts and their functions, having a sense of modesty, *toilet training*, maintaining body hygiene, teaching manners, permissible and impermissible touch, and maintaining relationships between the opposite sexes.

Based on the results of the study, all subjects used primary communication patterns in providing sex education, namely visual communication (media) and verbal communication (simple instructions and reprimands). This is in line with Effendy's (2011) statement, which explains that primary communication patterns are a process of conveying information to others using symbols as a medium. The following are details of the communication strategies and techniques used by each subject:

1. Subject 1 (B): Direct visual (showing how to use sanitary pads) and simple instructions (instructions on how to wear, clean, and dispose of sanitary pads) with material on the use of sanitary pads.
2. Subject 2 (A): Direct visual (showing how to use sanitary pads) and simple instructions (instructions on wearing, cleaning, disposing of sanitary pads, and reprimanding deviant sexual behavior) with material on the use of sanitary pads and reprimanding deviant behavior, namely raising skirts when sitting.
3. Subject 3 (F): Direct visual (showing how to shave pubic hair) and direct instructions (admonishment of deviant behavior) with material on genital hygiene and admonishment of deviant behavior, namely: touching the penis in public.
4. Subject 4 (L): Direct visuals (showing images of men and women) and direct instructions (reprimanding deviant behavior) with material distinguishing between men and women and reprimanding deviant behavior, namely: touching one's genitals in public and not closing the door when showering in a public area.

Based on the similarities in the primary communication patterns of the four subjects, the researcher observed a pattern in the model used in sex education, namely the Shannon and Weaver communication model. The Shannon and Weaver model, better known as the linear model, highlights the problem of message delivery based on the level of accuracy (Mulyana, 2015). For example, the communication patterns of subjects B and A in providing sex education about the use of sanitary napkins during menstruation, B provided simulations and simple instructions on how to use, clean, and dispose of sanitary napkins to their children who were diagnosed with autism. The children of subjects B and A were unable to communicate bidirectionally and had a low level of understanding, so sex education had to be provided in a simple manner and with the aid of media to make it easier to understand. In addition, subjects F and L also required simple instructions and additional media. For example, when the children of subjects F and L touched their genitals in public, subjects F and L instructed them not to touch their genitals, and when the child of subject L did not close the door while bathing in a public area, subject L instructed

them to close the door because it was embarrassing.

The results of interviews with all *significant others* (SOs) indicate that all subjects use verbal and visual methods to provide sex education. Overall, the communication pattern used is the primary communication pattern according to communication science theory (in Effendy, 2011). Parents' understanding of sex education varies in providing sex education to adolescents with autism. Parents have strategies for providing educational material when adolescents with autism experience it themselves or exhibit sexual behavior, making it easier to understand.

CONCLUSION

Based on the above research results, it can be concluded that the communication pattern in providing sex education uses the primary communication pattern, namely visual communication (media) and verbal communication (simple instructions and reprimands). This is in line with Effendy's (2011) statement, which explains that the primary communication pattern is a process of conveying information to others using symbols as a medium with models used in sex education, namely the Shannon and Weaver communication model. The Shannon and Weaver model, better known as the linear model, highlights the problem of message delivery based on the level of accuracy (Mulyana, 2015). Parents' understanding of sex education varies in providing sex education to adolescents with autism. Parents have strategies for providing educational material when adolescents with autism experience it themselves or exhibit sexual behavior, making it easier to understand.

The implications of this study can be described as follows.

1. Theoretical Implications
 - a. The results of this study on parental communication patterns in providing sex education to adolescents with autism can be used as literature and development material in the field of education.
 - b. This research can be used as a reference for future researchers related to communication patterns and sex education for adolescents with autism.
2. Practical Implications
3. This research can be used as a reference or source of knowledge for parents, teachers, researchers, therapists, and the general public regarding communication patterns that have developed from previous communication processes. The communication patterns studied in parents of autistic adolescents can also be applied or studied in other types of communication.

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