

RAISING CHILDREN WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER: A STUDY ON PARENTING STYLES AND TECHNIQUES

JEFFREY ALCANTARA LUCERO

MPMG, MAN, MAEd(C), BScN, AHScEd, CSE, RN, SHNC
Clinic Teacher, Congressional National High School, City of Dasmariñas, Cavite
Professor, Lyceum of the Philippines University, City of General Trias, Cavite

Abstract: The researcher knows someone who has a child with autism and saw the struggles in rearing the child and it caught his attention. In addressing the concern, this study was conducted to better understand and discover the techniques parents usually use and employ on their child with autism by using qualitative approach. The researcher used methodological triangulation in obtaining data. Cool and warm analyses revealed three (3) themes that pertain to parenting techniques Filipino mothers employ in raising their children diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD): **reform parenting**, **progressive parenting**, and **warmth parenting**. On the other hand, four (4) themes were discovered that pertain to the effect of the most aforementioned parenting technique to the child: **autonomy**, **conscientiousness**, **improved sociability**, and **aggression**. Hence, parents of children with autism employ various kinds of techniques in rearing their children. Reform parenting appeared to be the most significant to the mothers. Thus, the researchers concluded that this technique strongly helped mothers in raising and shaping the behavior of their children. It is recommended for the various sectors in the community to conduct further studies about the techniques employed not only in mild level but also in moderate and severe levels of autism.

Keywords: Parenting techniques, children with autism, and mothers of children with ASD.

I. INTRODUCTION

As of the year 2014, the number of people diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in the Philippines and in other countries worldwide has doubled for the past six years and still growing. According to The Philippine Star author, Mayen Jaymalin (2014), Erlinda Borromeo, the president of Autism Speaks Foundation in the Philippines said that one in 68 children worldwide had autism that summed up an estimated rise of 500,000 in 2008 to one million at the present, autism cases in the Philippines. The news raised concern to health experts and parents for the increasing number of cases because there were some areas in the Philippine which were not covered yet.

Parents of autistic children had been the center of studies and theories with regards to how they raise their children. Unfortunately, the Philippines had limited studies about the parenthood of parents with ASD diagnosed children. The researchers chose to study this topic because they were curious and eager to know the techniques of Filipino mothers in parenting children with autism. The researchers wanted to conduct this particular study for one of their members who had a friend who had a brother that was diagnosed with autism and witnessed the struggles of the parents in raising the child. The researchers wanted to help the parents who were having a hard time raising their children with autism. Autistic disorder was acknowledged in 1943 by Leo Kanner a psychiatrist at John Hopkins. Kanner noted 11 disturbed children who behaved differently from children with mental retardation or schizophrenia. He then labeled the syndrome as *early infantile autism* because he observed that the children showed

extreme autistic aloneness through ignoring, disregarding and shutting everything that surrounded them and only focus on one specific thing. Kanner considered extreme aloneness as the most fundamental symptom of the disorder; he also learned that these children have difficulties in relating with people in typical way. They were experiencing tremendous limitation in language and had strong obsessive desire for everything to remain unchanged (Davidson, Hopkins, Kring & Neale, 2010).

ASD begins in early childhood and evident in the first month of life. It appears that it rooted at early development of the brain. However, as early as two (2) years old the obvious signs and symptoms of ASD tend to emerge (Autism Speaks, 2015). ASD can be mild or severe. Mild autism was regarded as Asperger's disorder; it was named after Hans Asperger who described the syndrome as being less severe and with fewer communication deficits than autism. Social relationships are poor and stereotyped behavior is intense and vulnerable but children with Asperger's syndrome have normal intelligence and near normal language development but may develop difficulties in communicating as they get older (Davidson, Hopkins, Kring & Neale, 2010).

Each individual with autism disorder is unique. Some ASD diagnosed children have exceptional abilities in math, arts, visual skills, and music. Children with autism can have a profound problem dealing with the social world. They rarely interact with other people for they are suffering from aloneness (Davidson, Hopkins, Kring & Neale, 2010). They tend to ignore people around them and focus on one thing that attracts their attention. ASD patients experienced difficulty in sleeping and repeated awakening at night (Lamm, 2015). They experienced the highest rate and

almost two-third of the population with autism had sleep difficulties. Based on the study of Wiggs and Store, ASD patients ages 8 years old and below suffer severe sleep problems (Knight, & Johnson, 2014). This phenomenon causes the children to sleep during daytime that affect their relationship within the family. However, there has been no study on parenting techniques of Filipino parents in parenting children with autism.

The purpose of this study is to know the most effective technique that Filipino parents use in taking care of children with ASD.

This study was concerned in identifying the parenting techniques in children with Autism Spectrum Disorder. The participants of the study were selected five (5) Filipino mothers from Autism Society Philippines. These mothers had a child diagnosed with ASD at severity level 2 that ages 12 and above. The researchers interviewed mothers with child diagnosed with level 2 ASD for it is the lowest level of autism where the child experiences struggle that gives their mothers a more challenging role. The interview, which is the main source of information in this study, took place in the residence of the participants. The study has a time span of approximately two (2) months to finish gathering information from the participants.

As early as nine months old, a child can be diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder. People who have autism have different ways in doing or learning things, that is why it is a big problem for parents who encounter this for the first time. As the child grows, the parents encounter different struggles and they also learn to establish different coping strategies. Since this study will solely focus on identifying the parenting techniques, there are some topics related to Autism Spectrum Disorder that will not be covered. This study, in particular, will also covered topics such as the adjustment period and coping strategies of parents. The study didn't tackle about the skills and development of a child diagnosed with ASD.

II. DISCUSSION

With onset in the first years of life, Autism presents as a disorder of profound social disconnect rooted in early brain development. A child with autism may appear unaware of his surroundings. He may also fail to respond to the sights and sounds of a social world. Often, with limited speech and language skills, the child follows a different development pattern compared to other children in the same age group. He has difficulty playing with other children and making friends. Alone, the child engages in restricted repetitive behavior that is hard to understand (Mandy, Murin, Baykaner, Stauton, Hellriegel, Anderso, & Skuse, 2016). ASD are impaired in terms of social interaction and communication, as well as restricted, repetitive and stereotyped patterns of behavior. It is a complex developmental disorder that affects the

brain's normal development of social and communication skills. Scientists believe that both genetics and environment likely play a role in ASD. There is a great concern that rates of autism have been increasing in recent decades without full explanation as to why. Researchers have identified a number of genes associated with the disorder. Imaging studies of people with ASD have found differences in the development of several regions of the brain. Studies suggest that ASD could be a result of disruptions in normal brain growth very early in development. These disruptions may be the result of defects in genes that control brain development and regulate how brain cells communicate with each other. Autism is more common in children born prematurely. Environmental factors may also play a role in gene function and development, but no specific environmental causes have yet been identified.

Caring for children with autism spectrum disorders (ASDs) is challenging and affects family life. ASDs are neurological complex conditions impairing social interaction and communication, such as difficulties to respond to social interactions or deficits in understanding nonverbal communication. Moreover, persons diagnosed with an ASD have restricted behavioral functions, such as stereotype behavior or inability to adjust to new situations (Strock 2007). Children with ASDs often exhibit more than one of these core ASD symptoms and many also suffer from associated symptoms, such as severe tantrums or sleep problems.

III. PARENTING STYLE

Through the world of influence, children were basically molded and shaped by their parents into adulthood. (Baumrind, 1971 as cited in Aiwan, Bibi, Chaudhry, & Tariq, 2013). "A way of reflection between parent and child relationship is parenting and it is a complex activity that includes many specific attitudes and behaviors that work separately and collectively to influence child outcomes and generate an emotional bond in which the parents' behaviors are expressed." Parenting styles refers to the normative patterns of behavior and tactics that parents used to socialize and control their children. (Wentzel & Russell, 2009). Parenting style is explained through its dimensions or components: parental responsiveness or warmth and parental demandingness or control. Parental responsiveness are those parents that support their children's need while parenting demandingness are those parents that set rules and guidelines. When combined, the three parenting styles emerge: Authoritarian, Authoritative and Permissive (Baumrind, 1971 as cited in Aiwan, Bibi, Chaudhry, & Tariq, 2013). Later on, Maccoby and Martin added the neglectful parenting style. The first style of parenting is Authoritarian or the "too strict". This is more on demandingness than warmth.

It is more on setting rigid rules and guidelines. The second parenting style is Permissive or the “too soft”. This is more on warmth or responsive than demandingness. They set few limitations and loving towards the child (Greenwood, 2010). It uses minimal punishment that allows their children to do what they please. “Research reveals that children of permissive parents may have difficulty with self-control due the lack of boundaries and rules, and demonstrate egocentric tendencies that can interfere with proper development of peer relationship” (Kapko, 2007). The third parenting style is Authoritative or the “Perfect”. This is high both responsiveness and demandingness. They show supportiveness and care while monitoring and disciplining their children fairly. They are more likely to stand up for responsibility, get along with other people, and show autonomy, and are successful (Maccoby, 1992 as cited in Cherry, 2011). The last parenting style is the neglectful style. It displays no demandingness and responsiveness. It does not show any love to their child and usually give harsh punishment to them.

IV. METHOD

Design

This is a qualitative research that intended to know about the parenting techniques in children with Autism Spectrum Disorder. Phenomenological research was applied and this was appropriate for determining the experience of parents in taking care of their children with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

Participants

The selected participants of the study were recommended by one of the authorized personnel of the Autism Society Philippines. Participants were taken purposively from the society i.e. five (5) Filipino mothers with children diagnosed with autism at severity level of 2. The selected criteria for the participants are the following: 1.) Filipino mothers with a child who has autism under severity of level 2; 2.) Children must be 12 years old and above. The Filipino mothers were evaluated through interview about parenting techniques on children with autism using a semi-structured questionnaire

Sampling Technique

The study used purposive sampling technique in choosing the parents with ASD diagnosed children. Purposive sampling technique or *judgment sampling* is a non-randomized technique and non-probability technique that selects sample based on particular characteristics. For this technique, the researchers were sent out to seek parents with autism children who can and are willing to provide the information by virtue of knowledge or experience on having one (Bernard 2002, Lewis & Sheppard 2006 as cited in Tongco, 2007).

Procedure

The data was collected by using this method from the mothers coming from Autism Society Philippines; they stand as the participants of this study. The flow of the interview questions was based on Patton’s interview guide approach. This study used cool and warm analyses; the type of interview that the researchers used a semi-structured interview. This type of interview was the best to use in establishing rapport that helped produce good data. The researchers followed Patton’s interview guide approach; the interview was set into different parts. The interview lasted for three (3) weeks before the data was completely gathered.

Research Instrument

The information and data needed in the study was gathered through a semi-structured interview conducted by the researchers. That tackles about the parenting techniques that Filipino parents used in raising an ASD diagnosed children.

The instrument was based on Patton’s typological questions that is composed of six (6) categories; A. Experience/Behavior Questions, B. Opinion/Value Questions, C. Feeling Questions, D. Knowledge Questions, E. Sensory Questions and F. Background Demographic Questions. In every category there are five (5) open-ended questions that total an overall thirty (30) questions.

Data Analysis

The recorded interviews were individually transcribed by the researchers. After finishing transcription, a construction of a phenomenological aide, repertory grid, was made for the reduction of statements from the transcribed data. This was used in observing both cool and warm analyses. Cool analysis includes reading the transcribed data and looking for significant statements. These statements were used in warm analysis. In warm analysis, the statements were categorized and this is also where the themes were formed. These analyses also include reading and re-reading the data for validations. The researchers also sought help from a friend critic who checked and validated the themes that were raised and did a cross validation for further validation of the themes made by the researchers.

Summary

This study was conducted to determine the lived experience of mothers with children diagnosed with autism. The researchers intended to seek answers for the following: the parenting techniques employed by Filipino mothers, the effective techniques used by the Filipino mothers and the effect of the said techniques to the child. Five (5) Filipino mothers of children with mild autism ages 12 and above were asked to be the participants in the study. The participants have been gathered purposively from Autism Society

Philippines (ASP) in the area of Cavite as they were referred by the organization since mothers of children with autism were difficult to find.

A qualitative approach was used in this study to identify the techniques used by Filipino mothers with children diagnosed with autism. Specifically, phenomenological research design was used. The researchers used a methodological triangulation in gathering data: a process involving in-depth interview, focus group discussion and participant observations. The gathered data was transcribed, analyzed and interpreted through the use of cool and warm analyses.

As the outcome of this study, three (3) themes were identified. These are (1) Progressive Parenting, (2) Reform Parenting, (3) Warmth Parenting, while the effective technique is Reform Parenting. On the other hand, four (4) themes were identified in the effect of the most effective parenting technique to the child with autism. These are: 1) Autonomy, 2) Conscientiousness 3) Improve Sociability, and 4) Aggression.

CONCLUSION

The mothers have dissimilar ways of parenting their children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Some prefer continuous help from the therapist while some prefer teaching their children personally. Things were different for all the mothers but, despite being different in some approaches, they also have similarities. The eagerness to look for ways and study about their children's condition helped the mothers in raising their children well. As they meet other people sharing the same story of having a child diagnosed with ASD and seeking for help with the therapists and developmental pediatricians, their knowledge about right parenting grows. In spite of the fact that they have different set of techniques in applying this shared knowledge to their children, they also have communalities in implementing rules.

Among the themes that have been made, reform parenting appears to be the most significant to all the mothers. This practice was based on being firm in correcting their children's behavior; thus the researchers concluded that it strongly helped the mothers in raising and parenting their child with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). This also was a big help to all the mothers in terms of shaping and disciplining their children with ASD as they grow older. In effect, their children were less manipulative, and more respectful to their mothers.

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