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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PARENTING STYLE IN PARENTS OF CHILDREN WITH AUTISM AND ANXIETY LEVELS IN KLATEN REGENCY

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ABSTRACT
Background:. Parenting encompasses the approaches parents use to educate, protect, and provide emotional comfort to their children. Parenting a child with autism presents distinct challenges due to the variability in autism characteristics. The parenting style adopted may influence the level of anxiety experienced by parents. **Methods:** A cross-sectional study was conducted using a total sampling method involving 36 parents of children with autism from nine special needs schools (SLB) in Klaten Regency, Indonesia. Parenting style was assessed using the Parenting Style and Dimension Questionnaire, and parental anxiety levels were measured using the Hamilton Anxiety Rating Scale. Data normality was examined using the Shapiro–Wilk test, and as the data were non-normally distributed, the Spearman rank correlation test was applied. **Results:** Most respondents were female (83.3%) with a senior high school education (50%), adopted a democratic parenting style (66.7%), and reported no anxiety (47.2%). A statistically significant negative correlation was found between democratic parenting style and parental anxiety levels ($p = 0.036$, $r = –0.350$), indicating that a democratic parenting style is associated with lower parental anxiety. **Conclusion:** Parenting style is significantly associated with parental anxiety among parents of children with autism, with a democratic approach linked to reduced anxiety levels

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1. INTRODUCTION

Parenting a child with autism can present significant challenges and serve as a trigger for anxiety in caregiving (Hyman et al., 2020). This is evident in the way parental involvement greatly supports the development of children with autism, such as spending time engaging in activities with the child, maintaining frequent contact, providing financial support, nurturing, and playing together. Parental involvement also encompasses thoughts, planning, emotions, caregiving or nurturing, supervision, evaluation, prayers, energy, and concerns for the child. In childhood, it is natural for children to compare themselves with others in terms of academic or athletic achievements as a means to assess their own abilities (Wibowo & Nurlaila, 2017).

Autism is a condition that manifests in childhood, characterized by social withdrawal, delayed language development, limited and spontaneous activities, repetitive behaviors, and rote memorization without comprehension (Rieskiana, 2021). The global prevalence of autism continues to rise. According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2018), it is estimated that one in 160 children worldwide has Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). In Indonesia, based on data from the Central Bureau of Statistics (BPS, 2020), the population is approximately 270.2 million, with an estimated 3.2 million children diagnosed with autism.

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According to Zhou et al. (2020), this is due to the numerous limitations experienced by children with autism, which require greater attention compared to other children. Such high caregiving demands may lead to stress, anxiety, and depression in parents. Anxiety is one of the most common mental health issues faced by parents raising children with autism.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study employed a quantitative research design with a cross-sectional approach and utilized a total sampling technique, encompassing the entire population from 10 special needs schools (SLB) in Klaten Regency, with a total of 36 respondents. Univariate data analysis was conducted using frequency distribution, while bivariate analysis was performed using the Spearman correlation test.

3. RESULTS

This descriptive study was conducted from 26 February to 8 March 2024, involving 36 respondents in Klaten Regency. Primary data were obtained directly from respondents through questionnaires distributed by the researchers. Data analysis comprised both univariate and bivariate methods. Univariate analysis was employed to determine the frequency distribution of each variable studied, while bivariate analysis was used to examine the relationship between parenting style in parents of children with autism and anxiety levels.

Table 1. Frequency Distribution of Respondents by Gender

Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Female	30	83.3
Male	6	16.7
Total	36	100.0

Source: Primary Data, IBM SPSS 25

Table 1 shows that the majority of respondents by gender were female, totaling 30 respondents (83.3%).

Table 2. Cross-Tabulation of Parenting Style by Gender

Gender	Parenting Style	Frequency	%
Female	Permissive	8	26.7
	Democratic	22	73.3
Male	Permissive	4	66.7
	Democratic	2	33.3
Total	Permissive	12	33.3
	Democratic	24	66.7

Source: Primary Data, IBM SPSS 25

Table 2 shows that, based on gender, the most frequently applied parenting style was the democratic style among females, with 22 respondents (73.3%).

Table 3. Cross-Tabulation of Gender by Anxiety Level

Anxiety Level	Gender	Frequency	%
Severe Anxiety	Female	2	6.7
	Male	0	0.0
Moderate Anxiety	Female	10	33.3
	Male	0	0.0
Mild Anxiety	Female	4	13.3
	Male	3	50.0
No Anxiety	Female	14	46.7
	Male	3	50.0
Total	Female	30	83.3
	Male	6	16.7

Source: Primary Data, IBM SPSS 25

Table 3 shows that, based on gender, the highest proportion of respondents with no anxiety was found among females, totaling 14 respondents (46.7%).

Table 4. Frequency Distribution of Respondents' Educational Level

Educational Level	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Elementary School (SD)	4	11.1
Junior High School (SMP)	3	8.3
Senior High School (SMA)	18	50.0

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College (PT)	11	30.6
Total	36	100.0

Source: Primary Data, IBM SPSS 25

Table 4 shows that, based on educational level, the majority of respondents had completed senior high school, totaling 18 respondents (50.0%).

Table 5. Cross-Tabulation of Educational Level by Parenting Style

Parenting Style	Educational Level	Frekuensi	%
Permissive	SD	0	0.0
	SMP	1	2.8
	SMA	7	19.4
	PT	4	11.1
Democratic	SD	4	11.1
	SMP	2	5.6
	SMA	11	30.6
	PT	7	19.4
Total	SD	4	11.1
	SMP	3	8.3
	SMA	18	50.0
	PT	11	30.6

Source: Primary Data, IBM SPSS 25

Table 5 shows that, based on educational level, the most frequently applied parenting style was the democratic style among those with a senior high school education, totaling 11 respondents (30.6%).

Table 6. Cross-Tabulation of Anxiety Level by Educational Level

Anxiety Level	Educational Level	Frequency	%
Severe Anxiety	SD	1	2.8
	SMP	0	0.0
	SMA	0	0.0
	PT	1	2.8
Moderate Anxiety	SD	2	5.6
	SMP	0	0.0
	SMA	5	13.9
	PT	3	8.3
Mild Anxiety	SD	0	0.0
	SMP	3	8.3
	SMA	4	11.1
	PT	0	0.0
No Anxiety	SD	1	2.8
	SMP	0	0.0
	SMA	9	25.0
	PT	7	19.4
Total	SD	4	11.1
	SMP	3	8.3
	SMA	18	50.0
	PT	11	30.6

Source: Primary Data, IBM SPSS 25

Table 6 shows that, based on educational level, the highest proportion of respondents with no anxiety was found among those with a senior high school education, totaling 9 respondents (25.0%).

Table 7. Frequency Distribution of Parenting Styles in Children with Autism

Parenting Style	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Permissive	12	33.3
Democratic	24	66.7
Total	36	100.0

Source: Primary Data, IBM SPSS 25

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Table 7 shows that the most frequently applied parenting style overall was the democratic style, with 24 respondents (66.7%).

Table 8. Frequency Distribution of Respondents' Anxiety Levels

Anxiety Level	Frequency	Presentase (%)
Severe Anxiety	2	5.6
Moderate Anxiety	10	27.8
Mild Anxiety	7	19.4
No Anxiety	17	47.2
Total	36	100.0

Source: Primary Data, IBM SPSS 25

Table 8 shows that the most common anxiety level experienced by respondents was no anxiety reported by 17 respondents (47.2%).

Table 9. Cross-Tabulation of Parenting Styles in Children with Autism and Anxiety Levels

Parenting Style	Anxiety Level: Severe Anxiety	Moderate Anxiety	Mild Anxiety	No Anxiety	Total
Permissive	0	1	3	8	12
%	0.0%	8.3%	25%	66.7%	100%
Democratic	2	9	4	9	24
%	8.3%	37.5%	16.7%	37.5%	100%
Total	2	10	7	17	36
%	5.6%	27.8%	19.4	47.2%	100%

Source: Primary Data, IBM SPSS 25

Table 9 shows that parenting style was predominantly democratic (18 respondents, 75%) among those experiencing moderate anxiety, totaling 9 respondents (37.5%).

Table 10. Parenting Styles and Anxiety Levels

			Parenting Style	Anxiety Level	P Value
Spearman Rho	Parenting Style	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	-350	0.036
		Sig. (2-tailed)		.036	
		N	36	36	
	Anxiety Level	Correlation Coefficient	-350	1.000	
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.036		
		N	36	36	

Source: Primary Data, IBM SPSS 25

Table 10 shows that the null hypothesis H_0 was rejected, as indicated by a p-value of $0.036 < \alpha = 0.05$, thereby accepting the alternative hypothesis (H_a). This indicates a correlation between parenting style and anxiety level. The correlation coefficient of –0.350 reflects a low correlation, with a degree of association ranging from 0.200 to 0.399, and a negative direction, indicating that the better the parenting style applied to children with autism, the lower the level of anxiety experienced by their parents.

4. DISCUSSION

A. Gender

The results of this study show that the majority of respondents were female, totaling 30 individuals (83.3%). This finding is consistent with a study conducted by Hutasoit et al. (2023), which reported 38 female respondents. In Indonesian culture, women are generally perceived to be more capable than men in managing and caring for the household, particularly in caring for sick children, whereas men are primarily expected to fulfill their role as financial providers for the family (Sari, 2016).

This study, likewise, was dominated by female respondents (83.3%). This is in line with the findings of Hallers-Haalboom et al. (2014), which highlighted that mothers play a crucial role in childrearing. Mothers were found to spend more time with their children compared to fathers.

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The researchers assume that women tend to be more adept at nurturing children and managing household responsibilities compared to men. By nature, mothers possess an instinct to care for and nurture, which is why they are often referred to as the first school (madrasah) for their children. The greater amount of time mothers spend with their children further strengthens their central role in parenting. However, on the other hand, as women are generally more emotionally involved, mothers caring for children with autism are more likely to experience psychological fatigue.

B. Educational Level

According to Wong, as cited in Chairini (2013), several factors influence parenting styles, including parental age, parental involvement, prior childcare experience, marital relationships, and parental education.

The findings regarding educational level in this study are consistent with those of Purnamasari et al. (2020), who reported that the majority of respondents had completed senior high school (SMA), totaling 16 respondents (53.3%). Similarly, Nahdah et al. (2022) found 17 respondents (39.5%), and Jeniu et al. (2017) reported 17 respondents (47%). These results suggest that educational attainment may influence parenting styles and the type of care parents provide to their children.

Furthermore, educational level can also affect anxiety. A study conducted by Nisak and Hardina (2020) revealed that among 37 mothers with good knowledge, 17 experienced mild anxiety, and 16 experienced moderate anxiety. According to Notoatmodjo (2014), educational attainment can influence anxiety levels. Individuals with higher education are better able to cope with and resolve problems effectively and constructively compared to those with lower educational levels. This has implications for parents of children with special needs, such as autism, who may experience higher levels of anxiety.

The findings of this study, in which 18 respondents (50%) had completed senior high school, suggest that parental education is relatively adequate and therefore influences their ability to process and accept information. This indicates that parents with higher education are better able to understand, accept, and apply information effectively. Consequently, educational attainment is closely related to anxiety levels, as it shapes how parents respond to and apply information, ultimately impacting both themselves and the children they care for.

C. Parenting Style in Parents of Children with Autism

The findings of this study revealed that the majority of respondents (24; 66.7%) adopted a democratic parenting style. This result is consistent with the study by Silfia & Ardianingsih (2018), which reported six respondents using a democratic style, as well as the study by Purnamaningsih et al. (2020), which also found the democratic style to be the most prevalent, with 25 respondents (53.2%).

Parents who adopt a democratic parenting style typically practice responsive and demanding approaches to childrearing (Septiani, 2021). Democratic parenting is often described as a positive style and is associated with optimal child outcomes, particularly in Western countries (W., 2022). Supporting this, Sari et al. (2021) reported that when democratic parenting is applied to children with autism, the children tend to be more open to discussion and demonstrate greater emotional stability.

This study also found that 12 respondents (33.3%) adopted a permissive parenting style. Similarly, Setyaningsih et al. (2015) reported that 84% of their respondents used a permissive style. Permissive parenting is characterized by parental behaviors that grant children freedom to act without questioning or imposing strict rules. This style involves limited guidance, leading to reduced control or supervision over the child (Olinda et al., 2021).

D. Anxiety Levels

The findings of this study indicate that 17 parents (47.2%) of children with autism did not experience anxiety. This is consistent with the study by Al-Farsi et al. (2016) in Australia, which reported that half of the 107 parents of children with autism experienced anxiety. In Indonesia, Atmadiyanti et al. (2018) found that 54.2% of parents experienced anxiety, while Jeniu et al. (2017) reported 72%.

According to Tussofa (2015), the emergence of anxiety in parents, particularly those with children with autism, can be attributed to various factors, including difficulties in autism programs and education, which are often costly and limited in availability. The characteristics of children with autism that frequently cause family stress include severe anxiety symptoms, mood disorders, echolalia, difficulty adapting, and the absence of speech (Hidayah et al., 2017).

Most parents experience a range of emotional reactions upon learning that their child has autism. These reactions negatively affect parents both physically and psychologically, leading to feelings of worry and fear. Some mothers have expressed that caring for and raising a child with autism is a heavy burden. For instance, when their child has an outburst, parents often isolate the child in a room until they calm down, in order to help the mother manage her own anxiety (Nurussakinah et al., 2019).

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5. CONCLUSION

1. The characteristics of respondents based on gender were predominantly female, totaling 30 respondents (83.3%), with the highest educational level being senior high school (SMA), totaling 18 respondents (50%).
2. The parenting style most frequently applied by parents of children with autism in daily life was the democratic style, adopted by 24 respondents (66.7%), followed by the authoritarian style, adopted by 12 respondents (33.3%).
3. With regard to anxiety levels, 17 parents (47.2%) of children with autism reported no anxiety, while 10 parents (27.8%) experienced moderate anxiety.
4. There was a significant relationship between parenting style and anxiety levels among parents of children with autism in Klaten Regency, although the correlation was low. This was demonstrated by p-value of $0.036 < \alpha = 0.05$, indicating the presence of a correlation.

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