

# Father Involvement in Parenting Talented Autistic Adolescents

Astri Anggraini Hapsara<sup>1</sup>, Fransisca I. Roesmala Dewi<sup>2,\*</sup>, Riana Sahrani<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1,2,3</sup> *Professional Psychology Magister Program, Tarumanagara University, West Jakarta, 11440, Indonesia*

\* *Corresponding Author. Email: [fransiscar@fpsi.untar.ac.id](mailto:fransiscar@fpsi.untar.ac.id)*

## ABSTRACT

The role of fathers and mothers is very important in parenting talented autistic adolescents. The limited time of the father and his role as breadwinner in the family, has the potential to reduce this role. This study aims to see how the involvement of fathers in caring for talented autistic adolescents. Six mothers and two fathers were recruited as participants and interviewed online. Data were obtained and examined using thematic analysis. There were 5 themes, namely (1) Closeness father-adolescent relationships in carrying out daily activities, (2) Adolescent trust and obedience to father in dealing with new situations, (3) Assertiveness and consistency of father in controlling adolescent autism behaviour and (4) Self-disclosure of father in society for the future of adolescent, and (5) Exploration of adolescent's talent. The result shows that fathers were involved in parenting talented autistic adolescents and were very important figures. This involvement presents all theoretical dimensions of father involvement which are control, process responsibility, warmth and responsiveness, positive engagement activities, and indirect care. Father involvement in all five dimensions is important.

**Keywords:** *Father Involvement, Parenting, Autism, Adolescent.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Healthy and balanced parenting from father and mother allows children to grow optimally. A safe environment provides opportunities for children to explore their talents and interests. Many studies have focused on father involvement and its impact on child development. Analysis of data from UK National Child Development revealed that early involvement of fathers predicts educational attainment at age 20 [1]. Fathers engage in more vigorous types of play than mothers [2]. The involvement of fathers and mothers during play at the age of 24 months was able to predict the executive function of children at the age of 3 years in 620 children [3]. Fathers of children with intellectual disabilities (ID) are so involved in daily child career so that fathers must rearrange their work agendas [4]. Most fathers of autism children support children's education, however, the biggest barriers meeting the demands of work [5]. It is not easy for fathers to balance time between the demands of work and children.

The uniqueness of these two parenting styles contributes significantly to the healthy growth and development of a child. Mothers provide more warmth and academic pressure than fathers [6], show higher behavioural support and control than fathers [7]. Mothers are the main figures in the care of autistic children and revealed that the number of mothers who participated in the study exceeded the number of fathers with a ratio of 8:1 [8]. Most fathers play a supportive wife role, not as parents in their own way. The information mentioned above provides information that fathers are not the main key in children's education [9].

Talent is one of the unique characteristics of some autistic adolescents, or it can be said that it is a gift given by God. The talents exceed the abilities of adolescents in general, especially in the fields of art, music, mathematics, calendar calculations and memory of events or numbers [10]. There is one talented individual out of 10 autistic individuals in

the world [11], or there are 37 percent of talented from all autistic individuals [10], compared to cases of ID, which is only 0.6-1% show talents [12]. These talents are caused by the presence of mind blindness, executive dysfunction and detailed focused cognitive style of an autistic adolescents [11].

Talented autistic adolescents are not only able to produce works, but also get rewards from the work they produce. Rewards can be material or non-material such as awards, scholarships and so on. Their financial independence is undoubtful. However, talented autistic adolescents also have many barriers, like problems in communication that make social interactions hampered because they are less able to express thoughts and feelings and they use rigid language like textbooks. Autistic adolescents are also less skilled in making friends and lack of social instincts. This is the reason why autistic adolescents don't get many friends. Autistic adolescents are also often obsessed with one object because they have limited interests. In adolescent phase, they experience intense and rapid hormonal changes that make them prone to tantrum and aggression. The world becomes uncomfortable for them and this reduces their self-esteem and increases their anxiety.

**1.1 Current Research**

Parents have a big role in maintaining the talents and work of autistic adolescents and controlling their behaviour. Transition from adolescent to young adulthood is one of the responsibility of parents [13]. Unfortunately, fathers have limited time for adolescent as the breadwinner. In addition, there is still not much researches conducted about the involvement of fathers in autistic adolescent. These two things prompted researchers to conduct research on how fathers are

involved in educating talented autistic adolescents. From these questions emerged research questions, namely:

- a. How is the involvement of fathers in parenting talented autistic adolescents?
- b. How do fathers interpret the talents of autistic adolescents?

**2. METHOD**

**2.1 Research Design**

This research uses qualitative research with an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) research design which is made to identify the nature of human experience about certain phenomena. The main purpose of this research is to find out how the father involves in parenting talented autistic adolescents and interpret these talents. In the data collection process, researchers used semi-structured interviews to encourage individuals to freely express or recall experiences that occurred to themselves.

**2.2 Ethics and Participants**

This study involved parents of talented autistic adolescents. The parents consist of six mothers and the fathers who were recruited from one of the autism foundations in Indonesia with the following criteria: (a) parents who have talented autistic adolescents (b) physically and mentally healthy, (c) willing to be involved in research. In addition, the researchers also recruited 13 supporting participants as the significant other of the 8 participants. Each participant filled out an informed consent and had the right to withdraw. Data collection has been approved by the Human-Related Research Ethics Commission Unit of the Faculty of Psychology, Tarumanagara University with reference number 083-TIM/KEPTM/1243/FPsi-UNTAR/IV/2021.

**Table 1.** List of Participants and Adolescents\* name in asterix participated in the interview

Participant's anonymity (age)	Participant's job	Participant partner's name	Participant partner's job	Adolescent Diagnosis	Adolescent Age	Sibling Age	Child order	Gender Adolescent
Angrek* (49)	Housewife	Langit*	Banker	Autisme nonverbal	20	14	1/2	Male
Asoka* (56)	Housewife	Bintang	Manager IT	Autisme verbal	20	22	2/2	Male
Lili* (53)	Lecturer	Samudera	Translater	Sindrom Asperger	21	19	1/2	Female
Mawar* (53)	Housewife	Laut	Company owner	Autisme verbal	21	28,23	3/3	Female
Melati* (44)	Diplomat	Bumi*	Property Consultant	Autisme nonverbal	12	14, 10	2/3	Male
Bulan (47)	Translater	Amarilis	Consultant	Autisme verbal	18	5	1/2	Male

### 2.3 Procedure

This research was conducted for four months from January to April 2021, during the COVID-19 pandemic. After obtaining permission from the Human-Related Research Ethics Commission Unit, Faculty of Psychology, Tarumanagara University, the eight participants were contacted via WhatsApp. The researcher built the rapport first, namely greeting, asking how things were, and having light conversations. Then the researcher explained the purpose of the study and asked for consent from the participants by signing the informed consent sent via WhatsApp. After completing the approval, the interview process is carried out for 60-90 minutes online using zoom media. Interviews were recorded using audio facilities with participant permission. The interview data was then manually typed and analyzed.

### 2.4 Data Collection

Data were obtained through in-depth interviews with 8 participants and 13 supporting participants at different times. Researchers used interview guidelines that were prepared by the researcher according to the topic of discussion in the study and were based on theory.

### 2.5 Processing and Data Analysis

After collecting all the required data, the researcher processed and analyzed the results of the subject interviews. First, the researcher prepared a complete interview transcript from the sound recording into a set of sentences as well as the original audio from the interview. Second, the researcher made initial notes to select the required data. Third, the researcher condenses the facts by reconstructing the participant's sentences into sentences that are well organized and can make it easier for researchers to understand the meaning of the subject's narrative. Fourth, the researcher drew emergent themes from each participant or coded them. Fifth, the researcher draws superordinate themes across participants or creates categories. Sixth, the researcher draws superordinate themes from across participants or collects the same category from each participant. Seventh, the researcher analyzed the data by doing pattern matching, data that has been categorized is linked based on the theory in chapter II. Eight, the researcher identifies whether there is a particular striking theme that exists in one participant that has psychological value that must be conveyed.

## 3. RESULT

### 3.1 Closeness father-adolescent relationships in carrying out daily activities

Closeness is formed from the emotional bonding between adolescent and father. When adolescent at the early age, father was always involved in childcare such as changing diapers. Likewise, when the child needs sensory therapy father makes a footpath made of stones so that the child is stimulated by his sensory senses. Even when the child underwent needling therapy in Klaten, Central Java, the child was traumatized because he had to be separated from father in Jakarta. At elementary school age, father and children often play kick ball together or go hiking. When the child become adolescent, father considers child as peer. Father pays attention to the child's criticism that is conveyed in his own way

There is, at that time he asked for my Ipad, but apparently he gaped at his body shape. Look at his face, he looks like he has acne on his face. I've started this stage, you know, I already have acne, I already have a beard, so I'll just leave it alone. He saw me putting a cigarette in the ashtray and he turned it off, I turned it on again and was doused with water with him. He once hid my cellphone, I asked where it was, uh, it was put in a drawer. Oohh hidden by him. He means dad, don't play on the cellphone, don't just call

One father found out the talent of adolescents in daily activities. from outside the room, and then offer the adolescent to take private drum lessons. Adolescents was very enthusiastic when learning to play the drums.

Yes, and now my son really likes it, his activities mostly in front of his computer, just listen to Spotify, when I peek open his room he will quickly stop, But by listening with a glass from the door of the room, I could tell that he was inside, tapping his thighs according to another drum beat that he was listening to

### 3.2 Adolescent trust and obedience to father in dealing with new situations

At the age of puberty, adolescent often show tantrums due to uncontrollable emotional changes. Father could calm adolescent's emotions by holding his hand and making sure all is well. For example, when the adolescent has to adapt to a new environment, namely staying in a place that has never been visited, father is willing to wait half a day outside with the adolescent, father is able to assure that all will be alright and the adolescent goes inside. Father could give confidence to adolescent and adolescent shows obedience.

Dasvy is angry again, father holds his hand. Calm down, his father said, finally his emotions went down, he was okay. Always like that. When he has tantrum

he is calm when his father is talking. From a young age, his father was very involved with him.

He didn't want to come in, so he just sat on the sofa, the doctor took a portable drill, he just looked at it, I just let it go. Wow, I thought it wasn't drilled. The doctor said it had to be drilled if it wasn't drilled the cement wouldn't stick. So I did the drilling, he just wanted to see it. It was the doctor who told Mr. after this, he just gape

### **3.3 Assertiveness and consistency in controlling adolescent autism behavior**

Father applying authoritative parenting like firmness, consistency and bravery. When adolescent behave in unusual ways such as repeating word or behaviour, adolescent is immediately reprimanded. According to parents, the most effective way is to immediately reprimand knowing adolescent's limited understanding so that things must be explained in concrete and clear way. Father also do not hesitate to coordinate with the school to implement discipline. For example, when a child has a tantrum hitting the teacher, they coordinate to give punishment by confiscation of one side of the shoe so that the child comes home wearing only one shoe. Sometimes father also feel a dilemma with this assertiveness, but there is no other way than to give firm directions so that the child does not repeat this behaviour. This firm and consistent behaviour must be repeated again and over again until the child finally understands.

Yes, we will follow Dasvy, but Dasvy will follow us. Let's not follow autistic children, right? I have to drag him to a normal person, I force him to let it go. Don't always be in your comfort zone.

We have to be brave too. Who is he, I am the father, I am the mother, who are you? Papa doesn't want to obey you, you obey Papa, do you want to be angry? The next day he didn't try again. Child like this will definitely try again. But if we are consistent, strict, surely he will understand. There must be a chance to try him. Like a baby, the breastfeeding schedule is not regulated, we are the ones who are bothered

Father demands adolescent firmly to read a lot of books to broaden their horizons to optimize adolescent's talent.

And now her father demands that she read a lot, so I asked Mrs. Irna to give her a book for her to read, how do you want to be a writer, how come she reads books rarely, I've never seen her read books.

### **3.4 Self disclosure father in society for the future of the adolescent**

Father has opened himself to the environment either to seek information or support or to provide educational opportunities. Father wanted to meet the school principal, was willing to change his domicile, and even went to every school in Singapore to get subsidies from the local

government, which was never done by his previous colleague.

Then when Abhi was accepted, the second DCM said how did I know that children in Singapore can be subsidized to go to special needs children's schools, so not many...Yes, I look with Aldi, we will look for it on the Ministry of Education website. Diplomat habits are just carrying out the habits of the Indonesian people or the Indonesian Embassy before that.

Not only accompanying children, father also prepare children's future by looking for communities according to the type of children's paintings. Father admitted that he had absolutely no interest in the art world before. Now the father is actively involved in the Surrealist Community while introducing children's paintings. For father, painting is not just painting, but it must be known by supportive community.

I did a search on the internet. Typical Dasvy's painting is on which segment, which people like it. There is an association called the Surrealist Society, at the Sunday Market. I'm also new to this world, only now

### **3.5 Exploration of adolescent's talent**

Parents emphasize the importance of exploring talents and interests at the early age because adolescents better work with a lot of happiness. Some of the adolescents showed interest in several fields but finally they narrowed down to one field. Some adolescents begin to find out their talents before the age of 5 years, but there are also those who are more than 5 years old. This is because adolescents were occupied with some therapies so they don't have time for other activities. One father developed his son's ability to play the drums with the aim of balancing adolescent's gross motor skills, not for the pursuit of achievement

Yes there is, when he learns drumming, his emotions are controlled, gross motor skills are also well controlled, not when his right hand shakes the left hand shakes too. So first, he has to balance that

## **4. DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION, LIMITATION**

This study was conducted to understanding how the involvement of fathers in parenting talented autistic adolescents and interpret these talents. Father involvement is more than just having positive interactions with children, but also paying attention to child development, showing closeness, understanding and accepting the child's condition. Father involvement implies active participation and initiative [14]. Figure of father is significant for the child. Father's involvement is very important in the form of intimacy, trust and obedience, assertiveness and consistency and self disclosure to society

The results show that fathers seem to be very involved in childcare, mentoring when children are in the adolescent phase, and preparing for their children's future by opening themselves up in the community. Father involvement has dimensions of positive engagement activities, warmth and responsiveness, control, process responsibility and indirect care [15].

Closeness father and adolescent relationships in carrying out daily activities is related to positive engagement activities. Closeness is formed from the emotional relation between the child and father. Father was always involved in childcare such as changing diapers. Fathers are more likely to promote children's intellectual and social development through physical play. Several studies have shown that father involvement during infancy affects the way children communicate and children's socio-emotional development [17]. Fathers also often play outdoors with their children. Playing with fathers improves communication and socialization skills in children [16]. Parenting that involves direct interaction between father and children enhances bonding from an early age. Fathers' playing behaviours enhance social and emotional development and regulation of young children through active and physical play [17]. Closeness with adolescents makes parents able to encourage children to stay enthusiastic in focusing on their talented work.

Adolescent's trust and obedience to father in dealing with new situations related to warmth and responsiveness of father. At the age of puberty, fathers could calm the child's emotions by holding the child's hand and making sure all is well especially when child has a tantrum. When child in adolescent's phase, father and adolescent's relationship is formed like peers. Father pays attention to child's criticism of him. Mother also shows warmth, but mothers are more likely to intervene more quickly in face of their adolescent's frustration. Emotional warmth, overprotection, and rejection were significantly more often perceived from mothers [18] However, the results of this study are contrary from research that compares to fathers, mothers used more psychological aggression and verbal explanations [19]. Adolescent's trust in parents makes them easy to follow directions regarding educational opportunities that support their talents.

Assertiveness and consistency in controlling adolescent autistic behaviour related to control. Parenting has two dimensions, namely control and warmth. The control dimension relates to the extent to which parents expect and demand maturity and responsible behaviour from their children. Father have a lot of parenting control, especially when

dealing with autistic behaviour. Father are firm, consistent and brave. When adolescents show repetitive behaviour, father firmly ask the child to stop. Mothers reported higher scores on involvement (warmth) and positive parenting, and lower scores on poor monitoring than did fathers [20], mothers reported themselves as more authoritative than fathers, and exerting less punitive or coercive discipline [21]. Possible retarded cognitive development makes parents exhibit higher commanding behaviour and gives children fewer opportunities to solve problems on their own. This is because parents try to compensate for unexpected behaviour from children caused by cognitive developmental barriers, by controlling the child's behaviour [22]. The assertiveness of parents makes adolescents eager to improve their abilities of talents

Exploration of adolescent's talent is related to process responsibility. Preparing for the future is very important. One example is the consolidation of interests and talents that have been traced since early childhood. Transition from adolescence to young adulthood is the responsibility of parents [13].

Self disclosure father in society for the future of the adolescent related to indirect care. To be able to provide optimal opportunities for children, parents need to open themselves first to the environment about their child's condition. Father wanted to meet the school principal, was willing to change his domicile, and even went to every school to get subsidies from the local government, which was never done by another colleague. Acceptance is the main key in the adjustment of parents who have autistic children. When acceptance and sincerity have been formed, parents will automatically open up to others to seek information, ask for support, or share stories. Acceptance is a protective factor of parental adjustment. The more severe the condition of the child, the greater the acceptance of the parents [23]. This is likely because in milder cases, parents' expectations increases and they always look for solutions to improve the child's condition. When a child has severe autism, parents are unlikely to refuse the condition and there is little chance of improvement so that parents accept it. Parents' self-disclosure of the child's condition makes children have more opportunities to develop their talents.

The conclusion of this research is despite of father's role as a breadwinner, father still involves with autistic adolescent. This involvement presents all theoretical dimensions of father involvement in the dimensions of control, process responsibility, positive engagement activities, and indirect care.

Father involvement in all five dimensions is important. The limitation from this research is it has not been revealed to what extent the father's involvement in the academic achievement of adolescents with verbal autism. Another limitation is lack of availability of resources related to talented autism. Researchers suggest further research on experiential learning to see more clearly the process of educating father through stages of a more systematic dimension.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors would like to appreciate the LPPM (Lembaga Penelitian dan Pengabdian kepada Masyarakat Universitas Tarumanagara) for financial support and facilitated us in this research. We also thankful to the participants who are willing to participate in this research.

## REFERENCES

- [1] R. Fletcher, J. St George, E. Freeman, Rough and tumble play quality: Theoretical foundations for a new measure of father-child interaction, *Early Child Development and Care*, 183, 2013, pp 746–759. DOI: 10.1080/03004430.2012.723439.
- [2] M. E. Lamb, *The role of the father in child development* 5th ed, 2010 Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.
- [3] N. R. Towe-Goodman, M. Willoughby, C. Blair, H. C. Gustafsson, W. R. Mills-Koonce, M. J. Cox, the Family Life Project Key Investigators, Fathers' sensitive parenting and the development of early executive functioning, *Journal of Family Psychology*, 28, 2014, pp 867–876. DOI:10.1037/a0038128
- [4] C. Towers, *Recognizing Fathers: A national survey of fathers who have children with learning disabilities*, 2014, London, UK: Foundation for People with Learning Disabilities
- [5] C. A. Potter, Father involvement in the care, play, and education of children with autism, *Journal of Intellectual & Developmental Disabilities*, 2016. DOI: 10.3109/13668250.2016.1245851
- [6] A. S. Quach, N. B. Epstein, P. J. Riley, M. K. Falconier, X. Fang, Effects of Parental Warmth and Academic Pressure on Anxiety and Depression Symptoms in Chinese Adolescents, *J Child Fam Stud*, 24, 2015, pp 106–116. DOI 10.1007/s10826-013-9818-y
- [7] S. Mastrotheodoros, J. Van der Graaff, M. Deković, S. W. H. Meeus, S. J. Branje, Coming closer in adolescence: Convergence in mother, father, and adolescent reports of parenting, *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 29(4), 2019, pp 846–862. DOI: [10.1111/jora.12417](https://doi.org/10.1111/jora.12417)
- [8] Y. P. Huang, S. L. Chen, S. W. Tsai, Father's experiences of involvement in the daily care of their child with developmental disability in a Chinese context, *Journal of Clinical Nursing*, 21, 2012, pp 3287–3296. DOI :10.1111/j.1365-2702.2012.04142.x
- [9] S. West, *Just a shadow: A review of support for the fathers of children with disabilities*, 2002, Birmingham, UK: The Handsel Trust
- [10] J. E. A. Hughes, J. Ward, E. Gruffydd, Savant syndrome has a distinct psychological profile in autism, *Molecular Autism* 53(9), 2018. DOI: [10.1186/s13229-018-0237-1](https://doi.org/10.1186/s13229-018-0237-1)
- [11] F. Happe, P. Vital, What aspects of autism predispose to talents?, *Phil. Trans. R. Soc. B*, 364, 2009, pp 1369-1375. DOI:10.1098/rstb.2008.0332
- [12] T. Saloviita, L. Ruusila, Incidence of savant syndrome in Finland. *Percept. Mot. Skills* 91, 2000, pp 120–122. DOI:10.2466/PMS.91.5.120-122
- [13] J. Chen, E. S. Cohn, G. I. Orsmond, Parents' future visions for their autistic transition-age youth: Hopes and expectations, *Autisme*, 2018. DOI: [10.1177/1362361318812141](https://doi.org/10.1177/1362361318812141)
- [14] S. Allen, K. Dally, *The Effect of Father Involvement: an Updated Summary of Research Evidence*, 2007 Canada: University of Guephl
- [15] J. Pleck, *Paternal Involvement Revised Conceptualization and Theoretical Linkages with Child Outcomes*, 2010, University of Illinois, Urbain Champaign
- [16] J. R. Dykstra, B. A. Boyd, L. R. Watson, E. P. Crais, G. T. Baranek, The impact of the advancing social-communication and play (ASAP) intervention on preschoolers with autism spectrum disorder. *Autism*, 16, 2016, pp 27–44. DOI:10.1177/1362361311408933
- [17] N. Stockall, L. Dennis, Fathers' role in play: Enhancing early language and literacy of children with developmental delays. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 41(4), 2013, pp 299–306. DOI: [10.1007/s10643-012-0557-2](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-012-0557-2)

- [18] J. Xu, S. Mi, M. Ran, C. Zhang, The Relationship between Parenting Styles and Adolescents' Social Anxiety in Migrant Families: A Study in Guangdong, China, *Frontiers in Psychology*, 8, 2017. DOI:[10.3389/fpsyg.2017.00626](https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2017.00626)
- [19] M. Gámez-Guadix, C. Almendros, Parental discipline in Spain and in the United States: Differences by country, parent-child gender and education level. *Infancia y Aprendizaje*, 38(3), 2015, pp 569–599. DOI:[10.1080/02103702.2015.1054665](https://doi.org/10.1080/02103702.2015.1054665)
- [20] M. R. Gryczkowski, S. S. Jordan, S. H. Mercer, Differential relations between mothers' and fathers' parenting practices and child externalizing behavior, *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 19(5), 2010, pp 539–546. DOI:[10.1007/s10826-009-9326-2](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-009-9326-2)
- [21] Y. Yaffe, Comparing Bedouin and Jewish parents' parenting styles and practices, *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth*, 25(1), 2020, pp 25–34. DOI :[10.1080/02673843.2019.1577283](https://doi.org/10.1080/02673843.2019.1577283)
- [22] B. Ku, J. D. Stinson, M. MacDonald, Parental Behavior Comparisons Between Parents of Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder and Parents of Children Without Autism Spectrum Disorder: A Meta-analysis, *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 2019. DOI:[10.1007/s10826-019-01412-w](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-019-01412-w)
- [23] N. S. Dapaz, B. Siegel, M. A. Coccia, E. S. Eppel, Acceptance or Despair? Maternal Adjustment to Having a Child Diagnosed with Autism, *J Autism Dev Disord*, 48(6), 2018, pp 1971–1981. DOI:[10.1007/s10803-017-3450-4](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-017-3450-4)