



Stress, Health and Emotional Instability Among Students with Special Educational Needs: An Early Intervention Approach

Rosnee Ahad¹, Mohamad Zaid Mustafa¹, Ahmad Rizal Madar¹, Mohd Norazmi Nordin², Lo Wen Huey², Nor Fauziyana Mosbiran¹

¹Faculty of Technical and Vocational Education, Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia, Batu Pahat, Johor, Malaysia

²Faculty of Education, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Bangi, Selangor, Malaysia

(Received: 14 April 2024

Revised: 1 May 2024

Accepted: 18 June 2024)

KEYWORDS

special education,
visual impairment,
early intervention,
soft skills,
education

ABSTRACT:

The involvement of parents in early intervention programs for children with special educational needs can help parents know the skills and development their children are going through. Parents are the main guardians of children, namely the provision of food, clothing, protection, love, education and shelter for children. With this, it is very important for parents to get involved in the activities of the child's early intervention program. Parents' understanding of intervention skills is improved and the types of activities appropriate for their child. For example, parents can use strings and beads for children with special educational needs to help their children concentrate and focus. In addition, parents can know the level of development of their child where it is necessary to improve their child. However, there are some parents who are less involved in early intervention programs because they lack the knowledge and readiness for early intervention programs. This can be seen clearly in parents who live in rural areas and there is no information for early intervention programs. According to studies, service access barriers for children living in rural areas are decreasing. Therefore, parents do not know about early intervention programs for children with special educational needs and they do not know that early intervention needs to be implemented as early as 2 years of age.

Introduction

The relationship between parents and experts becomes closer. This is because parents will always communicate with experts to get information on their children's development in the early intervention program. Apart from that, the involvement of parents in the early intervention program allows parents to share about their child's development with experts or teachers. Therefore, experts can also create a suitable platform such as Google Form or Review Feedback for parents so that parents can share their own opinions to experts related to the mastery of children's skills throughout the early intervention program.

Parental partnership with professionals has also been shown to be a link between parental education and access to early intervention program services (Casagrande, K.A. et. al., 2017). The involvement of parents in early

intervention programs can give parents the opportunity to get involved in the slots of early intervention programs for children. Parents can share information and personal opinions to professional experts for the betterment of their children. Parents can also be exposed to knowledge in teaching children at home.

This can also lead to positive communication between parents and experts. Meanwhile, issues that occur during the development of children in the early intervention program such as slow child development, difficult speaking skills to master, poor gross motor or fine motor skills and so on, issues can be easily resolved. This is because parents often involve themselves in the early intervention program and know their child's development while undergoing the intervention program. Parents can understand the details carried out by the specialist and trust in the specialist can also be increased.



The Concept of Stress, Health and Emotional Instability in Intervention

Nowadays, there are many studies that study the lack of parental involvement in children with special educational needs (Schiltz et al., 2018; Levinson et al., 2021), most parents refuse to get involved in early intervention programs because of input about the importance of the program limited early intervention (Kurth et al., 2020). Among the issues for parents to be less involved in early intervention programs is because of family socioeconomic status factors, namely the level of parental education, parental income (Norbury & Sparks, 2013), the gender of children with special educational needs (Meadan et al., 2015), and the severity of children's behavior problems (Schiltz et al., 2018) is an unavoidable factor.

Lack of cooperation and lack of parental involvement has disappointed the school (Bari et al., 2016). There are many parents who only rely on early intervention centers to improve their children's development, they do not implement the skills that their children have learned. In order to achieve an effective intervention, parents need to apply activities continuously at home. In addition, parents lack collaboration with the hospital, the private sector and the community. This is because most early intervention programs are implemented in private centers. There are low-income parents who cannot afford to take their children to private centers for early intervention programs. Furthermore, the lack of social support among parents is a barrier to parental involvement in early intervention programs. Based on the study of Hamme et al. (2010), parents who are actively involved in early intervention programs due to high social support. However, there are studies showing that social support for parents who have children with special educational needs is lacking.

The Concept of Parental Emotional and Stress in Managing the Special Needs

Family stress, parents who raise children with special educational needs experience more serious parenting stress in the family than parents with typical children (Iadarola et al., 2018). Typically, parents with high levels of parenting stress may be more likely to exhibit behaviors such as negative facial expressions, apathy, and neglect, which may have irreversible negative effects on parental involvement (Howard et al., 2018). . This

indicates the need to study how social support can ameliorate such parenting stress, specifically whether social support reduces the adverse effects of parenting stress on parental involvement.

However, children with special educational needs tend to learn things through hands-on activities where knowledge is the result of the activities they do. This causes children to not respond positively to telehealth. Jean Piaget thought that children can adapt their learning experiences into knowledge through hands on activities. In fact, Ginn et al. (2017) stated that a direct learning approach (hands on) can increase children's ability to think critically. Furthermore, lack of access to therapeutic materials is an obstacle for children to use telehealth (Gulsrud et al., 2016). Furthermore, low-income families are likely to have problems accessing the internet and are unable to own this technology (Galpin et al., 2017) and further hinder the use of telehealth.

It cannot be denied that telehealth has an encouraging effect on the development of children with special needs, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, telehealth is a new approach in early intervention. After all, parental acceptance of telehealth is still at a low level. In line with that, various parties, especially therapists, need to emphasize the benefits of telehealth for children with special needs in order to change bad perceptions and myths about telehealth. Other than that, therapists also need to collaborate with parents by giving exposure and sharing experiences in order to help children with special needs through telehealth.

In addition, the study of Curtiss et al. (2019) stated that the involvement of fathers in early intervention programs for the development of children with special needs. Father involvement is defined as typological characteristics such as interaction, availability and responsibility (Landa, 2018). This argument is in line with the opinion of Tamis-LeMonda, Baumwell & Cabrera (2013) that fathers have unique ways of interacting with their children. A study by Cowan et al. (2009); Flippin & Crais, 2011; Tamis-LeMonda, & Cabrera, 2011) found that fathers' involvement in early intervention programs displayed a positive impact on children's development. Although fathers play an important role in early intervention. However, past studies show that fathers' involvement is influenced by cultural factors where fathers have the impression that mothers are seen as having a great duty to take care of



their children. This is in line with the opinion of Jarrett, Hamilton & Coba-Rodriguez (2015) that fathers have biases and negative perceptions like mothers who should bear responsibility in child care. This is clearly proven through the study of Engel (2005) that most fathers give less support to take care of children. From another point of view, the factor of less flexible working hours becomes one of the factors preventing the involvement of fathers in the early intervention of their children (McBride et al., 2017).

Future Recommendation for Emotion Management and Parental Disclosure to EIP

Based on that, involvement in early intervention should not be subject to the responsibility of one party only. Instead, both parents should bear joint responsibility. This is related to the opinion of Turnbull et al., (2010) that family involvement has positive implications for the development of children with special needs. In fact, according to the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), families become an integral part of making all decisions for their children and participating in services and supports. In addition, the Division for Early Childhood of the Council for Exceptional Children (DEC; 2014) recommends that the practice of focusing early childhood intervention programs is family-centered. Therefore, future studies can target potentially acceptable factors that can facilitate increased parental involvement in early intervention programs for children with special educational needs.

Acknowledgement

This research was supported by Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) through Fundamental Research Grant Scheme (FRGS/1/2021/SS0/UTHM/03/10). We also want to thank to the Government of Malaysia which provide MyBrain15 programme for sponsoring this work under the self-funded research grant.

References

1. Bari, S., Abdullah, N. A., Abdullah, N., & Yasin, M. H. M. 2016. Early intervention implementation preschool special education students in Malaysia. *International Journal for Innovation Education and Research*. 4(6): 139-155.
2. Casagrande KA, Ingersoll BR. 2017. Service delivery outcomes in ASD: Role of parent education, empowerment, and professional partnerships. *J Child Fam Stud*. 26:2386–2395.
3. Curtiss, S. L., McBride, B. A., Uchima, K., Laxman, D.J., Santos, R. M. & Weglarz-Ward, J.,
4. engagement with children: Preventive interventions for low-income families. *Journal of Marriage and Family*. 71: 663-679.
5. Flippin, M., & Crais, E. R. 2011. The need for more effective father involvement in early autism intervention: A systematic review and recommendations. *Journal of Early Intervention*. 33: 24-50.
6. Galpin, J., Barratt, P., Ashcroft, E., Greathead, S., Kenny, L., Pellicano, E. 2017. ‘The dots just don’t join up’: Understanding the support needs of families of children on the autism spectrum. *Autism*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362361316687989>
7. Ginn, N. C., Clionsky, L. N., Eyberg, S. M., Warner-Metzger, C., Abner, J.-P. 2017. Child-directed interaction training for young children with autism spectrum disorders: Parent and child outcomes. *Journal of Clinical Child and Adolescent Psychology*. 46(1):101–109. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15374416.2015.1015135>.
8. Gulsrud, A. C., Hellemann, G., Shire, S., Kasari, C. 2016. Isolating active ingredients in a parent-mediated social communication intervention for toddlers with autism spectrum disorder. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*. 57(5):606–613. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcpp.1248>.
9. Hamme, P. C., Buser, T. J. & Westburg, N. G. 2010. Effects of familial attachment, social support, involvement, and self-esteem on youth substance use and sexual risk taking. *The Family Journal*. 18(4): 369–376.
10. Howard, A. R. H., Copeland, R., Lindaman, S., Cross, D. R. 2018. Theraplay impact on parents and children with autism spectrum disorder: Improvements in Affect, Joint Attention, and Social cooperation. *International Journal of Play Therapy*. 27(1):56–68. <https://doi.org/10.1037/pla0000056>.
11. Iadarola, S., Levato, L., Harrison, B., Smith, T., Lecavalier, L., Johnson, C., Swiezy, N., Bearss, K., & Scahill, L. 2018. Teaching parents behavioral strategies for autism spectrum disorder (ASD): Effects on stress, strain, and competence. *Journal of Autism*



- and *Developmental Disorders*. 48(4):1031–1040.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-017-3339-2>.
12. Jarrett, R. L., Hamilton, M., & Coba-Rodriguez, S. 2015. “So we would all help pitch in”:
 13. Kern, J. 2017. Father involvement in early intervention: Exploring the gap between service providers’ perceptions and practices. *Journal of Early Intervention*, 39: 71–87.
 14. Kurth, J. A., Love, H., & Pirtle, J. (2020). Parent perspectives of their involvement in IEP development for children with autism. *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities*. 35(1): 36–46.
 15. Landa, Rebecca J. 2018. Efficacy of early interventions for infants and young children with, and at risk for, autism spectrum disorders. *International Review of Psychiatry*. (1): 1–15.
 16. Levinson, S., Neuspiel, J., Eisenhower, A. & Blacher, J. 2021. Parent-Teacher disagreement on ratings of behavior problems in children with ASD: Associations with parental school involvement over time. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*. 51(6): 1966–1982.
 17. Meadan, H., Stoner, J. B., & Angell, M. E. 2015. Fathers of children with autism: Perceived roles, responsibilities, and support needs. *Early Child Development and Care*. 185(10): 1678–1694.
 18. Norbury, C. F., & Sparks, A. 2013. Difference or disorder? Cultural issues in understanding neurodevelopmental disorders. *Developmental Psychology*. 49(1): 45–58.
 19. Schiltz, H. K., McVey, A. J., Magnus, B., Dolan, B. K., Willar, K. S., Pleiss, S., Karst, J., Carson, A. M., Caiozzo, C., Vogt, E., & Van Hecke, A. V. 2018. Examining the links between challenging behaviors in youth with ASD and parental stress, mental health, and involvement: Applying an adaptation of the family stress model to families of youth with ASD. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*. 48(4): 1169–1180.
 20. Tamis-LeMonda, C. S., Baumwell, L., & Cabrera, N. J. 2013. *Father involvement: Multidisciplinary perspectives*. 2nd ed. New York, NY: Routledge.