



Mothering Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder during Covid-19 Pandemic: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

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Abstract

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The shelter-in-place mandate imposed by the Indonesian government during the Covid-19 pandemic led to disruptions of school routines and therapy services for children living with autism spectrum disorder. Thus, this study aimed to describe the experiences of mothering autistic children during the pandemic. The methodology used by this research was qualitative. The intended population of this research was mothers of autistic children. This study chose four mothers as samples for this research who were then interviewed using interview questionnaires as main research instruments. The data were analysed using the interpretative phenomenological analysis and four main themes were identified. Those were changing roles of mothers during Covid-19 pandemic, factors that contributed to the parenting difficulties during the pandemic, how mothers coped with these difficulties, and the impacts of Covid-19 pandemic toward autistic children as well as their consequences for the process of mothering. The findings of this study highlighted the trials and tribulations of mothering autistic children during crisis situation and they will contribute to the improvements of educational and psychological services delivered to autistic children and their mothers during the pandemic.

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INTRODUCTION

The Covid-19 pandemic forced the Indonesian government to impose strict lockdown rules that limited movements and social interactions of its citizens. The children living with autism spectrum disorder in Indonesia and their families were also affected by these strict lockdown rules because special education schools and therapy centres were pushed to move their activities online during the pandemic. While the responsibilities of conducting teaching and learning activities in the special education schools in Indonesia before the pandemic had been solely in the hand of the special education teachers, during the pandemic, the family of the autistic children should be responsible for the education of their children. Similar to the special education for the autistic children, before the

pandemic, the behavioural therapy for the autistic children was delivered solely by the therapists in the therapy centres, however, during the pandemic, the family should deliver this therapy for their children at home with the guidance from the therapists. The family should participate in the online coaching sessions with the behavioural therapists to receive the guidance on how to conduct the behavioural therapy at home during the pandemic. Unfortunately, due to strong patriarchal culture, Indonesian mother was the sole caregiver of the autistic children in this country (Daulay, 2021). Therefore, only mothers who were carrying the load to educate and conduct the therapy for their autistic children at home during the pandemic.

Based on the preliminary interviews with Mother 1 and Mother 2, two mothers who were the primary caregivers of their autistic children, it was found that they faced enormous challenges while they were educating their children and conducting therapies at home during the pandemic. They found that educating their autistic and typically developing children simultaneously at home during the pandemic was challenging and consequently, they could not provide enough time and attention to educate their autistic children at home. Owing to these challenges, the autistic children tended to receive less cognitive stimulation during the pandemic. As a result of less cognitive stimulation at home, some behavioural therapists in a local autism centre interviewed during the course of the preliminary phase of this study, Therapist 1 and Therapist 2, noticed that the cognitive, social, and emotional skills of the autistic children decreased significantly during the pandemic.

The current literatures with regard to the impacts of Covid-19 pandemic toward mothers and their autistic children are still sparse. Based on the study conducted by Colizzi et al (2020), parents of autistic children were struggling to understand their children's behaviour during the pandemic because the autistic children tended to have more intense behavioural problems during this period. The sudden changes of daily routines, sleep and eating problems as well as limited physical space due to lockdown resulted in these intense behavioural problems during the pandemic (Tokaltly Latzer, Leitner, & Karnieli-Miller, 2021). Furthermore, decreasing social stimulation during the pandemic led to the increasing emotional problems among the autistic children during the pandemic (Lugo-Marin et al, 2021). Unfortunately, the online behavioural therapies offered by some autistic service centres were proved ineffective to overcome the increasing psychological problems among the autistic children during the pandemic (Samadi et al., 2020).

As a result of increasing emotional and behavioural problems among the autistic children, the parental stress among parents of autistic children intensified (White et al, 2021). In addition to this, the closure of special education services during the pandemic meant that parents of autistic children could not find the appropriate educational supports for their children and this also contributed to the parental stress during the pandemic (Meral, 2021; Wong, 2020). Therefore, mental health problems frequently occurred among family members of autistic children (Friesen et al, 2021).

When enormous problems appeared during the pandemic, parents of autistic children employed several strategies to help them overcome the challenges that they faced during this trying time. Asking for external supports from close family members as well as other parents of autistic children who were experiencing similar parenting difficulties during the pandemic was one of the strategies that could be used by these parents to ease their burdens during the pandemic (Cahapay, 2020; Majoko & Dudu, 2020). Besides those strategies, the availability of respite care was highly needed to help decreasing the parental stress during the pandemic (Young et al, 2021).

Because most of the available studies regarding autistic children's families in the time of pandemic focused exclusively on investigating the experience of autistic children's

parents, this study aimed to fill the gap by exploring the unique experience of mothering children with autism spectrum disorder during the Covid-19 pandemic. The exploration of mothering experience during the pandemic is crucial because it will contribute to the provision of adequate psychological and pedagogical supports for mothers of autistic children during the crisis situation like this in the future. Therefore, in order to achieve its objective, the qualitative approach was employed so that this study could capture the complex experience of mothering autistic children during the Covid-19 pandemic.

METHOD

The author conducted online interviews using video teleconference platforms during the period of lockdown in Indonesia. The author interviewed four mothers whose children living with autism spectrum disorder, being educated at special education schools, and joining regular therapy sessions at a local autism service centre. Two of the participating mothers lived in urban areas while two other mothers lived in rural areas. Three mothers were university graduates and one mother was a high school graduate. All of their children participated in the online behavioural therapy sessions led by the therapists from a local autism service centre and all of them were also educated online during the pandemic. Table 1 below summarizes the demographic data of the research participants.

Table 1. Demographic characteristic of the study participants

Characteristic	Specific Characteristic	N=4
Mother's sex	Female	4
Mother's age	>40	4
Family status	Married	3
	Single mother	1
Level of education	University graduate	3
	High school graduate	1
Employment status	Employed	1
	Unemployed	3
Living environment	Urban	2
	Rural	2
Age of children with autism	<10 years old	2
	>10 years old	2
Type of therapy given to the children with autism	Behavioural therapy	4
	Cognitive therapy	1
Type of schooling for children with autism	Special education school	4

The author used the database of patients from a local autism service centre to recruit potential participants. After the participants agreed to participate in this study, they filled in online informed consent forms. Then, the author interviewed each participant using an online video teleconference platform and each interview lasted for approximately two hours. All interviews were conducted in Indonesian and Javanese. The author interviewed the participants using a semi-structured interview guideline which was devised specifically for this study. In total, the interview guideline comprised 16 questions that dealt with the theme of mothering autistic children during the pandemic. The list of questions asked during the interview was presented in table 2 below.

Table 2. List of questions asked during the interview

Number	Questions
1	How was your child doing prior to Covid-19 pandemic (physical condition, emotion, and cognition)?
2	How is your child doing during Covid-19 pandemic (physical condition, emotion, and cognition)?
3	How were you doing at home or at work prior to Covid-19 pandemic?
4	How are you doing at home or at work during Covid-19 pandemic?
5	How are you educating your child at home during Covid-19 pandemic?
6	What are the challenges of educating your child at home during Covid-19 pandemic?
7	How do you overcome the challenges that you face when you are educating your child at home during Covid-19 pandemic?
8	How is your experience of conducting home therapy during Covid-19 pandemic?
9	What are the challenges of doing home therapy during Covid-19 pandemic?
10	How do you overcome the challenges that you face when you are doing home therapy during Covid-19 pandemic?
11	How do you parent your child at home during Covid-19 pandemic?
12	What are the challenges of parenting your child at home during Covid-19 pandemic?
13	How do you overcome the challenges that you face when you parent your child at home during Covid-19 pandemic?
14	Which activity is the most challenging: educating, doing home therapy or parenting your child at home during Covid-19 pandemic? Why do you think this is the most challenging activity?
15	What kind of support do you get from your family, friends or colleagues that will help you to parent your child during the pandemic?
16	What are the internal factors (personality trait, knowledge, and skill) that will help you to navigate the mothering life during the pandemic?

All of the interviews were transcribed verbatim by the author. Each transcript was around 50 pages. All of the participants appeared in the transcript and manuscript using pseudonyms that were assigned to them. Then, after transcribing the results of all interviews, the data were analysed using interpretative phenomenological analysis or IPA. Interpretative phenomenological analysis allows a phenomenon to be interpreted from the point of views of the individuals who live in a certain social context (Smith & Shinebourne, 2012). This technic of data analysis unites the real experience of research participant and the researcher's interpretation of the personal and social context of the research participant.

The data were analysed in several stages. Firstly, each interview transcript was analysed individually by rereading the transcript several times, identifying and labelling the emerging themes from the interview, creating a structural analysis of the emerging themes, and creating a summary table of the structured themes (Willig, 2013). Secondly, all of the structured themes identified in the previous stage of analysis were integrated and main as well as subordinate themes were identified. Next, the identified themes were analysed using the established theories that were relating closely to the phenomenon which was investigated in this study. In order to ensure the credibility of the data, the author used the theoretical triangulation where the data were re-examined using the previous theories and scientific literatures that were relating to the observed phenomenon (Howitt, 2019).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Four principal themes and six subthemes on mothering autistic children during the Covid-19 pandemic were identified. The first theme was changing roles of mothers during Covid-19 pandemic which discussed new roles of mothers of autistic children during the Covid-19 pandemic as the main teachers and therapists for their children at home. The second theme was factors that affected parenting difficulties during the pandemic. These

factors could be classified into internal and external factors that contributed to the overall experience of mothering autistic children during the pandemic. The third theme was coping mechanism employed by mothers of the autistic children during Covid-19 pandemic which described the problem-focused coping as the coping strategy preferred by mothers of autistic children in this study. The fourth theme was the impacts of Covid-19 pandemic toward the autistic children and their consequences for the process of mothering. These impacts could be divided into two categories including negative and positive impacts of pandemic toward the autistic children. All the main themes and subthemes are presented in table 3 below.

Table 3. Themes and subthemes of mothering children with autism spectrum disorder during Covid-19 pandemic

Theme	Subtheme
Changing roles of mothers during Covid-19 pandemic	Mothers as the main teachers and therapists for the autistic children during Covid-19 pandemic
Factors affecting parenting difficulties during the pandemic	Internal factors: lack of maternal self-efficacy and ineffective time management skill External factors: lack of support from the partner to parent the autistic children and regression of child's language and communication skills
Coping mechanism employed by mothers of autistic children during Covid-19 pandemic	Problem-focused coping employed by mothers to parent their autistic children during Covid-19 pandemic
Impacts of Covid-19 pandemic toward autistic children and their consequences for the process of mothering	Negative impacts of pandemic: sleep disorder and regression of child's social and emotional skills Positive impact of pandemic: the autistic child became more independent during the pandemic

Changing roles of mothers during Covid-19 pandemic

Mothers as the main teachers and therapists for the autistic children during Covid-19 pandemic

During the lockdown period, all special education schools and autism centres were closed and they moved their activities online. However, the online activities conducted by the teachers and therapists were starkly different to the usual activities conducted directly with the students and patients before the pandemic. For example, the teachers at special education schools just gave their autistic students a lot of assignments but these teachers had never conducted online face to face teaching sessions with their students. The therapists at the autism centre also rarely conducted online direct and face to face therapy sessions with their autistic patients and they preferred holding several coaching and evaluation sessions with the parents of the autistic children. In this case, the parents would be in charge to implement the home therapy programs with their autistic children during the pandemic. As a result of these school and therapy arrangements during the pandemic, the parents especially the mothers would be likely to take up new roles during the lockdown period. They became the main teachers and therapists for their autistic children during the lockdown as described by one of the mothers in this study:

"Yes, of course, right now, I'm his teacher, his therapist, and the teacher of his brother."
(Mother B).

All mothers in this study found that the changing arrangements of school and therapy during the pandemic were hard. They were not ready to embrace their new roles as the main teachers and therapists for their autistic children during the pandemic. For them, these new responsibilities were complex and challenging.

“Doing therapy at home is not simple, I have to take pictures and make videos as the proof that I’m doing the therapy at home.” (Mother C).

However, some mothers in this study also expressed their gratitude for the online education and therapy programs for their children during the pandemic. For instance, Mother D was grateful for the help from the psychologist and physiotherapist who helped her to do the therapy at home for his autistic son who suffered from psychological trauma during the pandemic while it was difficult to access direct and face to face therapy at the local hospital during the lockdown. She described her experience below:

“There were no available therapists who would come to our house during the lockdown and it was difficult to persuade my son to go to the hospital. He was so traumatised. We were lucky that the psychologist and the physiotherapist from the autism service centre gave us the guidance on how to help my son heal from his traumatic experience.” (Mother D).

Factors affecting parenting difficulties during the pandemic

Internal factors: lack of maternal self-efficacy and ineffective time management skill

The mothers of autistic children in this study acknowledged that they were not ready to take up the new roles as the main teachers and therapists at home during the pandemic. Their roles were changing abruptly and they were not prepared to assume these new roles because they did not have appropriate knowledge, skills, and experience relating to special education and therapy for children with autism spectrum disorder. This meant that there was a lack of maternal self-efficacy among the mothers of autistic children in this study as described by one of the mothers below:

“Of course, it’s very difficult. I don’t have any knowledge and skills to teach autistic children like the special education teachers at my son’s school. It’s very difficult to teach him during the pandemic.” (Mother A).

In addition to the lack of maternal self-efficacy, time constraint also became the main hurdle for the mothers in this study to exercise their new roles as the main teachers and therapists for their children. Both working and non-working mothers in this study recognised the fact that they could not manage their time effectively during the pandemic. Some mothers found that it was very difficult to help their children achieving their therapeutic goals or finishing their assignments from school while at the same time they had to work or manage various household chores. One of the mothers in this study described her experience of juggling the responsibility at work and at home while becoming the main therapist and teacher for his autistic son:

“I don’t have enough time to teach him at home. I’m very busy right now. If I have a time to do a therapy at home, I’ll do it. I’ll send the videos and photos to his therapists as the proofs that I have done the therapy at home. However, I often come home very late from the office and I can’t even meet my son. So, teaching him or doing the therapy is almost impossible.” (Mother A).

External factors: lack of support from partner to parent the autistic children and regression of child’s language and communication skills

Besides internal factors, there were also external factors that affected mothering experience of the mothers of autistic children in this study during the pandemic. One of these external factors were a lack of support from their partner to take care of their autistic children. The

education and therapy for autistic children at home during the pandemic were the responsibilities of the mothers. The unequal share of responsibilities between the parents frustrated the mothers in this study. Their husbands always found the reasons to avoid the responsibility of taking care of their autistic children as described by one the mothers in this study:

"I am the only one in this family who is responsible for the education and therapy for my autistic son. My husband always comes home from work very late and if he has spare time, he prefers teaching my youngest son (note: who is not autistic) to my autistic son local language. He always says to me that he is not patient enough to teach my autistic son. He keeps saying to me that my autistic son will be better taught by me than him." (Mother C).

Another challenging factor that affected the experience of mothering autistic children during the pandemic was the regression of child's language and communication skills. During the pandemic, the children with autism spectrum disorders whose mothers participated in this study could not develop their language and communication skills because they had very limited social interactions with their peers and teachers. In addition to this, speech and language therapy sessions allocated to them were deemed insufficient. The regressions of language and communication skills among the autistic children during the pandemic baffled their mothers who struggled to help them finishing school's assignments and achieving therapeutic goals as depicted by one of the mothers in this study:

"It's very difficult to ask him to speak. If he can't speak, how can I teach him?" (Mother A).

Coping mechanism employed by mothers of autistic children during Covid-19 pandemic

Problem-focused coping employed by mothers to parent their autistic children during Covid-19 pandemic

The mothers of autistic children in this study faced a lot of challenges during the pandemic. However, when they were confronted with many parenting problems, they employed problem-focused coping to solve these problems. For instance, when the autistic son of Mother D was very sick during the lockdown and they could not access the appropriate treatments at the local hospital, Mother D tried to find a lot of resources to help her son recover from his illness. She reflected on her coping strategies below:

"My son was very traumatised during the pandemic. He couldn't sleep and he couldn't walk. I could neither find any therapists who were willing to come to our house nor come to the hospital and get the treatment for him during the lockdown. So, I decided to read many books and watch a lot of videos relating to therapies for autistic children. I was lucky that therapists from the autism service centre guided me to do the therapy at home. Thanks God, now he can walk again." (Mother D).

Impacts of Covid-19 pandemic toward autistic children and their consequences for the process of mothering

Negative impacts of pandemic: sleep disorder as well as regression of social and emotional skills of the autistic children

The Covid-19 pandemic impacted children with autism spectrum disorder negatively. For example, some children with autism whose mothers participated in this study suffered from sleep disorder. The mothers in this study told that the sleep disorder experienced by their autistic children happened because of the accumulated stress during the pandemic and the

Covid-19 infection. One of the mothers in this study described the sleep disorder experienced by his autistic son:

“Right now, I’m still awake at 2AM because my son can’t sleep. He’s feeling sick all the time and perhaps, this makes him difficult to sleep.” (Mother D).

Besides sleep disorder, the regression of social and emotional skills among children with autism spectrum disorder were also apparent during the pandemic. They could not regulate their emotion and they could not make eye contacts with the members of the family. One of the autistic children whose mother was interviewed in this study also experienced the regression of social and emotional skills as recounted by his mother below:

“It’s been so long that he hasn’t attended his class at school. I think that’s the cause why he can’t improve his mood.” (Mother A).

Positive impact of pandemic: the autistic children became more independent during the pandemic

Although it was rare, pandemic eventually gave some positive impacts for children with autism spectrum disorder. Certainly, this would lead to positive mothering experience for some mothers of the autistic children. Some autistic children increased their independence as illustrated by one of the mothers in this study:

“He helps me doing some household chores. It seems to me that he’s becoming more independent since he is staying at home all the time.” (Mother C).

Discussion

Through in-depth interviews with the mothers whose children living with autism spectrum disorder, this study revealed that these mothers had multiple roles at the same time during the pandemic. They were not only parenting their children but also, they were teaching and doing therapy at home. Because most of the teachers at special education schools where their children studied only gave many assignments and exams during the pandemic, mothers who participated in this study were forced to teach and mentor their autistic children at home so that they could finish their assignments and complete their exams. Without prior background in special education and comprehensive teaching guideline, these mothers found that teaching their autistic children at home was very challenging. They were frustrated because the academic and vocational ability of their autistic children were stagnant or decreasing during the pandemic. With regard to the home education, the experience of these Indonesian mothers was starkly different to the experience of other parents of autistic children living in other countries during the pandemic. Based on the studies on the experience of conducting home education at home during the pandemic in the Philippines and Zimbabwe, it was found that most of the parents could navigate the challenges of home education better due to the availability of clear guidelines on how to teach and mentor their children at home during the pandemic in those two countries (Cahapay, 2020; Majoko & Dudu, 2020). These guidelines did not exist in Indonesia so that the mothers in this study were left alone to figure out the best way to educate their autistic children at home during the pandemic.

Besides becoming the main teachers for their autistic children at home during the pandemic, these mothers also played significant roles as the main therapists for their children at home. During the period of lockdown, all autism service centres were closed and as a result of these closures, all therapy services for children with autism spectrum disorder were moved online. There were two main methods of online therapies for autistic children during the lockdown period. First, the behavioural therapist conducted direct therapy with an autistic child. Second, the behavioural therapist conducted several coaching and evaluation sessions with the mothers of autistic children so that these mothers

could act as the therapists for their children at home. Most of the mothers in this study acted as the main therapists for their respective children at home and they were required to implement home therapy programs and attended several evaluation sessions with the behavioural therapists using teleconference platforms such as Zoom or Google Meet. Not all of the mothers in this study were satisfied with these online therapy programs. Only Mother B, C, and D who found these online therapy programs useful for them and their children. For example, Mother D said that the home therapy programs had helped her to improve the condition of her son who had been very sick during the pandemic and could not access the physiotherapy service at the public hospital during the lockdown period. Although the online therapy programs could not satisfy the needs of every parent and their autistic children, in a crisis situation like the Covid-19 pandemic, these online therapy programs were appropriate emergency interventions to help the autistic children continue their therapy programs and prevent the regression of their cognitive, social, and emotional skills (White, Stoppelbein, Scott & Spain, 2021).

All mothers in this study acknowledged that it was difficult to teach their autistic children at home and act as their therapists during the pandemic. Most of the mothers in this study including Mother A and C did not have appropriate knowledge and skills to teach and act as the therapists for their autistic children at home. This meant that they lacked maternal self-efficacy or the self-efficacy regarding mothering their children including those who were autistic (Kuhn & Carter, 2006). In this study, only Mother D who felt comfortable teaching her autistic son and doing therapy at home because indeed, she had the working experience as a special education teacher in the past. Unfortunately, even though Mother D had prior knowledge and skills in the domain of special education that could help her to navigate the challenges of home education and therapy for autistic children during the pandemic, she recognised that educating her autistic son at home was difficult because his teacher at school only gave him enormous amounts of assignments without considering his academic skills which were decreasing during the pandemic.

In addition to the lack of maternal self-efficacy, time management was also a challenge for both working and non-working mothers in this study. They acknowledged that they could not manage their time and they could not devote their full attention to every activity that their children should do during the lockdown including online schooling and therapy. In fact, managing time was always a challenge for the mothers of autistic children even in the normal period outside pandemic (Behnia et al., 2017). Therefore, time management became a perpetual challenge for mothers of autistic children and it could lead to distress and decrease their quality of life (McCauley, Mundy & Solomon, 2019).

The mothers who participated in this study also expressed their disappointments because they were not supported by their partners to parent their autistic children during the pandemic. They were left alone and they were struggling to teach their autistic children and conduct the behavioural therapy at home. The experience of Indonesia mothers in this study was in direct contrast to the experience of other parents in some countries such as Zimbabwe and the Philippines where both parents worked together to ensure their autistic children educated well at home during the pandemic (Cahapay, 2020; Majoko & Dudu, 2020). It was proved that the parenting tasks in the family who has autistic children in Indonesia were not equally shared during the pandemic.

The mothers in this study also admitted that their children's language and communication skills were getting worse during the pandemic. The regressions of language and communication skills among children with autism spectrum disorder were due to lack of social and verbal stimulations during the lockdown period (Lugo-Marin et al, 2021). Mother A claimed that the lack of social interaction between the teacher and the students

as well as among the students during the online schooling period exacerbated his son's language and communication skills.

Mothering autistic children during the pandemic was not easy and the challenges that appeared along the way provoked the stress and other emotional problems among the mothers in this study including Mother C and Mother D. Fatigue and frustration were the main features of mothering autistic children during the pandemic (Levante et al., 2021). Hence, some mothers in this study including Mother B and Mother D employed a problem-focused coping to alleviate the challenging situation at home. Problem-focused coping is a strategy employed by a person as a response to a challenging situation that they face (Kirsh, Duffy, & Atwater, 2013; Vernhet et al., 2019). This strategy can be in the form of changing the physical and social environment around them or finding a solution to resolve their problem.

The Covid-19 pandemic brought about negative and positive consequences for the children living with autism spectrum disorder and these would affect the mothering experience among the mothers in this study. One of the negative consequences of pandemic which was experienced by the autistic children in this study was the sleep disorder. The children of Mother C and D had the sleep disorder during the pandemic. Sleep disorder among autistic children during the pandemic was caused by the anxiety and excessive use of electronic devices such as smartphone and tablet during the lockdown (Bruni et al, 2020). Another negative impact of the pandemic for autistic children was the decline in the language and social skills. Mother A admitted that his son experienced such declines. Decreasing language and social skills among autistic children during the pandemic were prompted by the lack of social stimulations at home (Lugo-Marin et al, 2021). All of these negative impacts of Covid-19 pandemic might worsen the experience of mothering autistic children and consequently, they would deteriorate the emotional distress of the mothers whose children living with autism spectrum disorder (Young et al, 2021). Nonetheless, the Covid-19 pandemic might also bring a positive impact to the life of an autistic child. Based on the research conducted by Meral (2021), autistic children might be more independent during the pandemic. The experience of the son of Mother C mirrored the result of the research conducted by Meral (2021) where he became more independent during the pandemic and his increasing independence might ease the parenting tasks of his mother.

CONCLUSION

This study can be a catalyst for further development of theoretical concepts regarding mothering of autistic children in crisis situations. This study was able to show that the Covid-19 pandemic brought about a lot of changes in the life of mothers whose children living with autism spectrum disorder. These mothers had multiple roles at the same time as parents, teachers, and therapists for their children at home because the learning activities and therapies for autistic children were mainly delivered online during the pandemic. Online learning activities and therapies at home required the active participations of the mothers of autistic children in order to ensure the learning and therapeutic goals of their autistic children were achieved during the pandemic. Certainly, the mothers who participated in this study found that the changing roles of mothering their autistic children during the pandemic were not easy. Based on the results from the interviews with the mothers in this study, it was clear that there were internal and external factors that contributed to the difficult adaptation toward these multiple new roles of mothering. The internal factors that affected this difficult adaptation were the lack of maternal self-efficacy and ineffective time management whereas the external factors were the lack of support

from their partners and the regression of language and communication skills experienced by the autistic children during the pandemic.

In addition, the changing roles of mothering autistic children during the pandemic led to increasing frustration, exhaustion, stress, and emotional problems among the mothers who were interviewed in this study. Consequently, in order to cope with these frustration, exhaustion, stress, and emotional problems, mothers who participated in this study employed the problem-focused coping. These mothers always tried to find the solutions for the problems encountered by their autistic children at home during the pandemic.

The Covid-19 pandemic brought about negative and positive impacts for children living with autism spectrum disorder. The negative impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic for the children with autism were sleep disorder and the regression of social and emotional skills. Beside these negative impacts, the Covid-19 pandemic also brought about the positive impact for autistic children. For instance, at home, autistic children became more independent during the pandemic.

Suggestion

In order to develop more comprehensive theoretical concepts regarding mothering of autistic children in crisis situations including the pandemic, it is important to devise further quantitative and mixed-method studies to measure the maternal self-efficacy of mothers who have children with autism spectrum disorder during the pandemic. It is also necessary to conduct quantitative and mixed-method studies to measure the time use quantity of mothers whose children living with autism during the pandemic. Further exploration of sleep disorder among children with autism spectrum disorder using qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-method methodology during the pandemic should be a priority for the research in the future.

Reflecting on the results of this study, it is suggested that mothers of autistic children should create online support groups to help them navigate the challenges of online education and therapy for autistic children during the pandemic. The psychologists and behavioural therapists should also develop home therapy programs that take into account of the needs of mothers such as the employment status of the mothers and whether the mothers had pre-existing knowledge and skills relating to therapy of autism spectrum disorder or not. It is also imperative to involve a special education teacher in the therapy session so that the academic concern of the autistic children could be addressed more appropriately. Providing access to counselling and psychotherapy for mothers of autistic children is also essential to ensure their psychological well-being during the pandemic.

Special education for children living with autism spectrum disorder during the pandemic needs further attention. It is essential to encourage teachers to develop more intensive teaching and learning activities using teleconference facilities such as Zoom or Google Meet during the pandemic. Teachers should be barred from giving only assignments and just conducting exams for autistic students during the pandemic. By creating more intensive teaching and learning activities, teachers could develop better social and emotional relationships with their autistic students during crisis situations like pandemic. Lastly, the schools should hold several coaching sessions with mothers of autistic children to help them navigate the online special education curriculum during the pandemic.

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