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Training in Early Detection of Autism Spectrum Disorder for Early Childhood Educators and Achieving Mothers' Well-being

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ABSTRACT

The lack of ability of early childhood educators in the early detection of ASD can hinder learning objectives. On the other hand, lack of parental well-being also affects children's growth and development. This community service activity aims to help early childhood educators recognize and develop early detection skills for Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in children, thereby promoting the well-being of mothers, so that they can provide appropriate treatment. The training method used is the in-on-in approach, which involves learning, application, and evaluation/reflection. At the learning stage, teachers participate in a workshop that includes lecture techniques, question-and-answer sessions, simulations, and mentoring. At the application stage, teachers and mothers conduct early detection of ASD in children. Teachers work on training and collect assignments. Then, at the evaluation/reflection stage, we use quantitative and qualitative descriptive analysis. The results of this activity show an increase in early childhood educators' knowledge and skills regarding the early detection of ASD in children and achieving mothers' well-being. Based on the pre-test and post-test results, there was a 28.85% increase in knowledge and skills related to the early detection of ASD. Meanwhile, mothers show better well-being in caring for children with ASD. This training has a long-term impact on achieving learning objectives and the well-being of mothers.

ARTICLE INFORMATION

Keywords:
autism spectrum disorder (asd), early detection, educator, well-being

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INTRODUCTION

Education is a fundamental activity that develops the potential of each individual to acquire knowledge and insight and advance the nation's civilization. At this time, the scope of education has expanded and developed according to the individual's needs, potential, and circumstances. Everyone has the right to live and develop themselves, including in education. School is not only a place for children who develop normally; children with special needs can also experience proper education with their peers through inclusive education. Children with special needs exhibit characteristics that differ from those of the general population, and their growth experiences may be affected by mental, emotional, or physical disorders (Husna et al., 2019; Nordahl-Hansen et al., 2018; Meleady et al., 2020). There are many types of disorders experienced by children with special needs, one of which is autism or Autism Spectrum Disorder.

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a developmental disorder that usually appears in children under the age of 4 years. ASD is a neurodevelopmental disorder characterized by deficits in language and communication, social interaction, play, and imagination, as well as limited interests and repetitive behaviors exhibited by children (APA, 2013; Wang et al., 2020). ASD does not occur due to

social misfortune but is a disorder in the brain. Children with autism spectrum disorders often act aggressively and endanger themselves, such as clapping their hands loudly, making repeated sounds, biting, hitting, scratching, and the like (Nugraheni, 2012; Hersinta, 2023). All these unnatural actions come from their efforts to convey desires or hopes they cannot express (Dewi et al., 2018; Zeidan et al., 2022). Khanza and Kurniawan (2022) stated that these efforts impact the people in their lives, especially parents at home and teachers and friends at school (Khanza & Kurniawan, 2022; Iskayanti & Hartini, 2019; Hodgetts et al., 2017). Nurjadin and Mediastika (2021) calculated the ASD nationally based on data from the Women's Empowerment and Child Protection (PPPA), reporting two new cases per 1,000 population per year and 10 cases per 1,000 population. Autism spectrum disorders are more common in boys than girls (Kandouw et al., 2018; Kodak & Bergmann, 2020).

So far, many educators, especially early childhood educators in Central Java, have not carried out early detection on their students. They assume that all children develop normally overall, even though this is not always visible physically. On the other hand, there are many causes behind this problem, such as the fact that many educators experience difficulties due to the constantly changing and developing demands of the education system. Teachers must always have professional knowledge and skills to fulfill their roles during the educational revolution. The primary challenge for educators of children with special needs is selecting methods and materials that cater to children's abilities and needs (Fazry & Supriyadi, 2022; Khachadourian et al., 2023; Li et al., 2023). Parents also find it challenging to care for children with ASD. Parents expect schools to accompany their children's development. Parents, especially mothers, are confused about what to do. Children are in a period of rapid adaptation and development in all aspects of their lives. It is not uncommon for things to happen beyond a parent's knowledge or control.

Suryaningrum et al. (2016) stated that some educators cannot meet these expectations due to several factors, such as less relevant educational background, age limitations in understanding technology, length of service, and minimal willingness to learn constantly update knowledge, which can reduce the professionalism of teachers or educators in carrying out their roles. These factors result in deficiencies in child identification due to a lack of awareness about early detection. In their study of 45 early childhood education educators, 90% did not have instruments to detect children with special needs, 70% did not have experts to carry out early detection on children with special needs, 70% did not know how to intervene on children with special needs, 60% did not know how to conduct assessments or early detection on children with special needs, and 60% did not know the characteristics of children with special needs in detail.

It impacts the service of children with special needs if it is not applied to early childhood educators. Educators must equate the potential and treatment of children with ASD with those of normal children. Children can be left behind and unable to achieve learning objectives. ASD children can develop like normal children if given special treatment and education. Therefore, early detection is crucial for determining the child's condition and providing appropriate treatment to achieve learning objectives. The Department of Health introduced an early detection program as part of its health examination initiatives to identify developmental abnormalities in toddlers and young children at an early stage (Ulfa, 2018; Radley et al., 2020). According to Woods and Wetherby (2003) and Zeidan et al. (2022), ASD diagnosis in the United States is usually carried out when children are less than 3-4 years old. This early detection is carried out because it involves abilities that usually develop in the first few years of a child's life. Kurniawan (2021) added that in Indonesia, there are still many delays in ASD diagnosis, with more than 3 years. Early detection is necessary so that interventions for children can be implemented immediately and the severe negative impacts can be mitigated.

Based on initial interviews with three mothers with ASD children, they have not achieved complete well-being. RD said, "I feel my child is different. I become sad and do not know how to live

my life. People around me also start to distance themselves from me as a form of protest against my child's behavior". SY also said, "Happy to have a child, but God tests me with a sad life. I face it alone without anyone caring. I remain optimistic that one day my child will be like other children. I generally treat him like a child. I am always involved in his daily activities". M expressed her feelings, "I am sad when people distance themselves from me. What is wrong with me and my child? He is just a child learning, so it is natural to make mistakes. My life is meaningless". The three mothers shared their experiences, which involved children who were different from those of their peers. It appears that they have not achieved the level of welfare they should. The mother is the first person close to the child, especially in terms of care and nurturing. The mother's condition will affect the child's growth and development (Alrahili, 2023; Bravo-Benítez et al., 2019).

Monitoring child development is important. Disorders must be treated immediately. If a child's development is disrupted, support from experts or professionals is necessary to receive treatment that can address future conditions (Astuti & Suminar, 2022; Silawati et al., 2020; Palmer et al., 2023). Each examination produces a diagnosis, which should only be made by experts such as clinical psychologists, pediatricians, or child psychiatrists (Nugraheni, 2012; Choi et al., 2022). Teachers or parents can conduct early detection by identifying abnormal symptoms in children, allowing experts to examine them further. Early detection utilizes the Checklist for Autism in Toddlers (CHAT), which, according to the American Academy of Pediatrics, is an instrument designed to identify children starting from 18 months who experience social communication disorders (Aprilia et al., 2014; Cui et al., 2023).

Together with IGTKI Central Java as a community service partner, this early detection training is crucial to hold. Most early childhood educators do not yet know how to apply the early detection of ASD to their students. This activity helps early childhood educators in Central Java conduct early detection in their respective institutions, with the mentoring and supervision of the community service team, to determine the actual condition of the child. Educators can identify a child's condition more quickly by monitoring their daily activities. In addition, the mother's well-being is also a concern to be achieved in caring for children with ASD. Unlike other community service activities, this initiative targets both teachers and parents simultaneously. This community service activity aims to improve early childhood educators' knowledge and skills in the early detection of ASD and mothers' well-being. Coordination is carried out between educators and parents to facilitate early detection and provide information on the management of children with ASD through speech therapy, biomedical therapy, feeding therapy, and behavioral therapy.

This activity contributes to science, namely, related to the detection and handling of children with ASD and their mothers' well-being. Additionally, it can serve as a valuable resource for teachers and parents in educating and caring for children with ASD. Cooperation between teachers and parents is necessary to assist ASD children (Iskayanti & Hartini, 2019; Gobrial, 2018). Early detection is beneficial for determining the child's condition early because children with ASD require special treatment in forming independence according to their conditions. Predictability has been identified as important for children with ASD to learn new skills and reduce deviant behavior (Papadopoulos, 2021; Ramadhan & Rahmandai, 2021). This independence is important for development, ensuring they do not always depend on others in the future.

METHOD

This activity is a community service initiative with the theme of early detection training for ASD in early childhood educators and mothers' well-being. The target of this community service is 140 early childhood educators in Central Java and three mothers with children with ASD. Some of them are guest participants from several provinces in Indonesia. The partner of this activity is IGTKI Central

Java. In the initial stage, information about the activity was conveyed by contacting the head of IGTKI Central Java. Furthermore, educators who participated in the activity were asked to register directly through the link or contact the person on the poster. After that, all participants joined the WhatsApp group to facilitate the activity.

The implementation methods used to support the success of this activity are as follows: 1) Learning. Lecture by a resource person to explain ASD (Autism Spectrum Disorder) in detail and how to detect it. Questions and answers regarding participant problems regarding the behavior of children with ASD and how to provide appropriate treatment. Simulation of early detection of ASD in children. Mentoring in the form of child growth and development consultations via a WhatsApp group; 2) Applicatian. Providing independent assignments allows early childhood educators to understand how to conduct early detection through practice, involving parents, over one week. A parent interview and visit by the implementation team to the school; 3) Evaluation/Reflection. Evaluation/reflection is carried out to determine the achievement of implementing community service, specifically in terms of teacher knowledge and skills in early detection of ASD and mothers' well-being.

The instruments used in this activity are CHAT (Checklist for Autism in Toddlers) and an interview guide. CHAT is a screening tool for ASD tendencies (Hersinta, 2023; Tiel, 2020). It consists of 9 questions for parents/caregivers and five observations on child behavior. Meanwhile, the interview guide consists of 7 questions to explore the mother's well-being. Interviews are one way of collecting qualitative data (Mulyana, 2018; Kakar et al., 2023).

The data analysis employed is a combination of quantitative and qualitative descriptive analysis. Quantitative descriptive analysis to determine the increase based on the average achievement. The average pre-test and post-test are compared (Azwar, 2025; Yakin, 2023). In this case, a comparison is made of teachers' knowledge and skills regarding the early detection of ASD before and after receiving training on the topic. Qualitative descriptive analysis is needed to explore the unit of analysis (Moleong, 2016; Mulyana, 2018), specifically the mother's well-being.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This early detection training for Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) was conducted over eight days. There was an increase in participants' knowledge and skills before and after the workshop and mentoring, with a 28.85% improvement, from an average of 53.39 to 82.24. The first day's activity was a workshop on Friday, December 16, 2022, from 11:00–13:30 WIB, held online via Zoom Meeting. The activity began with a presentation on the Early Detection of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) by the community service team, moderated by Dr. Diana, M.Pd., and attended by 140 early childhood educators throughout Central Java. Some of them were guest participants from other provinces.

The material began with an understanding of ASD, the level of severity of ASD in children, and how to handle it, then continued with how to conduct early detection using the CHAT (Checklist for Autism in Toddlers) instrument. After the material presentation, the activity continued with a question-and-answer session. Most participants were enthusiastic about sharing stories about their experiences teaching children with ASD and asking how to deal with them as educators. The last event involved assigning tasks to all participants to practice early detection using the CHAT instrument, as previously explained and simulated.

Assistance was carried out starting on Saturday, December 17, 2022, with the community service team and Dr. Reni Pawestuti Ambari Sumanto, M.K.M. The assistance was conducted via a WhatsApp group for seven days from December 17 to 23, 2022. During the mentoring, an opportunity was provided to ask the mentors questions related to workshop assignments, problems encountered while serving as educators in schools, and child development. The mentors also visited several schools directly to ensure that early detection practices for ASD in children were carried out correctly. The

final activity of this training was the submission of early detection assignments from participants, which were uploaded via a link provided by the community service team. The results of the pre-test and post-test on knowledge and skills related to the early detection of ASD among early childhood educators in Central Java are presented in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1. Pre-test of Knowledge and Skills on Early Detection of ASD

Category of Knowledge and Skills	Score	Total	Percentage
Very high	81-100	7	5 %
High	61-80	18	12.86 %
Moderate	41-60	71	50.71 %
Low	21-40	35	25 %
Very low	0-20	9	6.43 %
		140	100 %

Based on Table 1, 50.71% of early childhood educators have knowledge and skills in the early detection of ASD in the moderate category. The average score in the pre-test was 53.39, falling within the moderate category. By participating in workshops and mentoring, it is hoped that early childhood educators will enhance their knowledge and skills in the early detection of ASD and apply them effectively in the learning process. This is important because accurately knowing the child's condition can provide proper treatment, allowing the child to develop as expected. The low category is 25%, and the very low category is 6.43%. Before the training, several early childhood educators possessed knowledge and skills related to the early detection of ASD, categorized as high (12.86%) and very high (5%). This is because their school is inclusive and has learned from other media.

Table 2. Post-test of Knowledge and Skills on Early Detection of ASD

Category of Knowledge and Skills	Score	Total	Percentage
Very high	81-100	64	45.71 %
High	61-80	52	37.14 %
Moderate	41-60	21	15 %
Low	21-40	3	2.14 %
Very low	0-20	-	-
		140	100 %

Following the early detection training for ASD, early childhood educators were administered a post-test to assess the success of the training implementation. Early childhood educators generally have knowledge and skills in the very high category, averaging 82.24. The very high category is 45.71%, followed by the high category of 37.14%. Meanwhile, educators are still categorized as moderate (15%) and low (2.14%).

Tables 1 and 2 demonstrate the increase in knowledge and skills of early childhood educators regarding the early detection of ASD following training in workshops and mentoring over eight days. There was an increase in knowledge and skills in early detection of ASD by 28.85% from the moderate category (53.39) to the very high category (82.24). It is hoped that early childhood educators continue to learn and develop themselves to accompany children professionally. Fazry and Supriyadi (2022) emphasized that a significant challenge for educators of children with special needs is selecting methods and materials that cater to children's abilities and needs. A less relevant educational background, age-related limitations in understanding technology, limited length of service, and a minimal willingness to continually update knowledge can reduce the professionalism of teachers or educators in carrying out their roles (Kodak & Bergmann, 2020; Cardon & Marshall, 2021). These

challenges and obstacles can be overcome through self-development, achieved through training and education.

Interviews with the mother were conducted again after the training program was completed. RD revealed that she began to recognize her child's condition. It took time to accept it, but she had started to prioritize her child's needs. RD began to look for a community that could accept and support her. No different from RD, SY began to seek support that was not available in her immediate environment. SY did not want to go through a difficult time alone. Continuing to learn and make life more meaningful became SY's motivation. SY wanted to live it with gratitude and do whatever was best for her child. M could not accept other people's treatment of her child. The most painful thing was when her child was hurt. Apart from that, M was happy when she learned the ins and outs of autism and how to handle it. M wanted to fight for her child's progress. M will continue to learn how to raise children properly.

Based on the interview results, mothers who have children with ASD are starting to move towards prosperity, although not completely. This can also be influenced by the short time in conducting re-interviews after the training program is completed. Mothers begin to show positive feelings, become involved in their children's interests, build relationships, and make their lives more meaningful. Well-being is comprised of five dimensions: positive affection, involvement, positive relationships, meaningfulness, and achievement (Seligman, 2018). Mother's well-being begins to be achieved along with the knowledge that mothers have about ASD and how to handle it (Rais et al., 2023; Sinha & Rajan, 2024; Sorrenti et al., 2021). A mother's well-being is an essential factor in ensuring that parenting goes well. A mother who prioritizes her well-being will position herself appropriately with effective parenting methods, without resorting to violence or helplessness.

This community service activity differs from previous ones. By targeting teachers and mothers, Children with ASD can receive the proper treatment for their development more quickly. Teachers have the knowledge and skills to detect ASD early in children so that they can accompany and achieve learning goals. Meanwhile, mothers who are involved in this community service activity gain knowledge and skills in caring for children with ASD. This enables mothers to open up and start to reset their mindset and feelings. Mothers move towards well-being. The contribution of this community service activity will enrich the scientific literature, particularly in the areas of early detection of ASD and maternal well-being and serve as a valuable reference for teachers and parents in educating and caring for children with ASD. Cooperation between teachers and parents is necessary to assist children with ASD. In addition to educators with good knowledge and skills, parents also need to be involved so that the handling of children with ASD at school aligns with the treatment provided at home (Anwar, 2021; Lamba et al., 2022; Asmare et al., 2023; Alibekova et al., 2022). This can accelerate children's adaptation to independence and their potential for optimal development.

CONCLUSION

This community service activity was carried out effectively in line with the objectives. There was an increase in the knowledge and skills of early childhood educators about the early detection of ASD in children after being given training and achieving mothers' well-being. The sooner developmental disorders are identified, the sooner they can be addressed, allowing children to achieve independence according to their condition. ASD children are educated through cooperation between educators and parents. Children will develop optimally according to their condition.

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