

# **Self regulation of single mother having child with autism in Banda Aceh**

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**ABSTRACT.** Self-regulation is needed in every individual, especially the single mothers who have child with autism. Good self-regulation of the single mother who have child with autism will have an important impact in helping children with autism to growing well. The research objective is obtaining the dynamics of self-regulation in the single mothers who have child with autism in Banda Aceh, by used qualitative research methods to the two respondents of research. Collect data by interviewing the respondents for ± 1.5 months. Analyze the data using the analysis case of per-respondent in narrative description. The research showed each respondent had different self-regulation, it is caused by differences in the chronology of case that has happened, differences in feelings of each respondent to accept this case, and differences in interpretation by each respondent in this case.

**Key words:** self-regulation, single mother, autism.

## **Introduction**

Autism is a disorder commonly emerged since childhood before the age of three, characterized by significant impairment of social interaction and communication and restricted behavioral, interest and activity pattern (Durand, cited from Barlow & Durand, 2009). People with autism do not frequently make eye contact and are troubled to describe the emotion they feel in social situation (Goldstein, 2008). Many factors can influence autism, common factors are heavy metal poisoning during prenatal, genetic factor and complication during pregnancy.

Every year, the number of autism cases had significantly increased in Indonesia. The increasing cases could not be confirmed in certain number as the government had not conducted survey yet (Autisme Care Indonesia, 2009). Similar situation occurred in Aceh Province, the number of autistic children had inappropriately enlisted. It was due to many parents who knew less about symptoms their children showed, even though autism was not recent event. According to information from several children-care institutions, the number of autistic children had annually increased (DinasPendidikan, 2012), like the description in following table 1.

The increasing number of autistic children in Banda Aceh showed from table above, arouses various feelings in parents. Common parent feelings in welcoming autistic children attendance in their life were sadness, shock, confusion, fear, worry, anger, self-isolation and numbness (Kuhn & Carter, 2006). In addition, the parents frequently feel stressed (Cohen & Volkmar, cited from Lubis, 2009). Higher level of stress occurred in mother underlying on the reason of important mother role since postnatal stage until child-rearing in daily routines. Meanwhile, the father will feel stressed along with mother's stress. Father's level

of stress is aroused by his role in making a living resulted in occasional involvement to take care of the children (Cohen & Volkmar, cited from Lubis, 2009).

Table 1. List of Inclusion Schools and Autistic Children-Care Foundations in Banda Aceh.

<b>No</b>	<b>School Name</b>	<b>Number of Autistic children</b>
1.	SDN 25 Lamprit	3 children
2.	SDN 32 Beurawe	3 children
3.	SDN 53 Lueng Bata	4 children
4.	SDLB Labui	2 children
5.	SDLB Santan	3 children
6.	Taman Observasi dan Terapi Wicara	25-30 children
7.	Psikodinamika	5 children

*(Source: DinasPendidikan, 2012)*

High level of stress exacerbates single mothers' condition since they has multiple role to handle everything related with the household, and become a family head to make a living (Qaimi, 2003). It shows how the mothers can appropriately accept their autistic children and treat them like normal-being. Mothers' acceptance support the treatment for their autistic children to reach better life (Marijani cited from Lubis, 2009). Additionally, acceptance of the child's real self leads the parents to control their emotional reactions, as well as intrinsic or extrinsic emotions, greatly affecting parents' behavior (Lubis, 2009).

Single mothers' acceptance toward their autistic children can be supported by high self-regulation. High self-regulation appears when individual engages cognitive process manifested in behavior (Sundberg, Winebarger, & Taplin, 2007). Otherwise, individual failure at self-regulation resulted in drug use, even alcohol addict, to reduce stress. It will also stimulate onset of eating disorder, low social adjustment in community and ignorance toward their children (Raffaeli, Crockett, Shen, & Hoyle cited from Chairani&Subandi, 2010).

Furthermore, Kerig&Wenar (2006) emphasized that self-regulation consists of two components such as emotion and behavioral regulation. The components relate each other in a way individuals control emotions and behaviors which manifested from the emotions. Zimmerman (cited from Chairani&Subandi, 2010) stated that self-regulation refer to thoughts, affective process and planned actions by themselves that continuously occurred regarding effort of personal goal attainment. According to previous facts and problems, self-regulation of single mothers toward their autistic children is an important component to assist them controlling emotions probably emerged and manifested in their behaviors (Hall,

2008). Furthermore, Mahoney (cited from Kuhn & Carter, 2006) emphasized that high self-regulation of single mothers will assist their autistic children to develop well.

#### Materials and Methods

This research was qualitative research using intrinsic case study approach. Herdiansyah (2010) claimed that case study is a comprehensive, intensive, detail and depth model directed to explore contemporary problems. Number of respondents are two mothers who meet research characteristics, while data collecting used guided-interview, observation and field report methods.

#### Results and Discussion

Self-regulation of two respondents toward effort aspect to attain the life goal appeared from expectation of their autistic children to become autonomous, be able to identify good or bad thing, and be worthwhile for community. Effort by each respondent was different. First respondent tried to revisit treatment provider for autistic children, although the management board rejected the enrollment because the child had grown up too old to re-initiate the therapy and just suggested her to home-schooling the child by herself. Otherwise, second respondent had more directed effort by enrolling her child to inclusion school which facilitated autism therapy after school routines. In addition, she also planned to enroll her child in additional tutorial lesson concerning subject matter the child had not mastered yet and soccer club to support her child hobby. The respondents' dynamics showed self-regulation as Carver and Scheier (2008) argued, that self-regulation is individual process of goal determination, making plan and doing necessary thing to ensure the plan manifested in action.

Second aspect, self-evaluation toward life goal, showed that each respondent had different appraisal toward their ability to self-regulate. First respondent could not reach the goal because her 12 years old child had been depending on her. This process was distinctive with process the second respondent, who had a job as a teacher caused much time passed outside, experienced. However, she was able to reach the goal by using short time in home to control her child activities such as discussion through questioning-answering activities, encouragement and support for child to learn and effort to understand well about everything more than the child did. Her treatment positively affected the child improvement observed from the child's social communication skill improvement, various knowledge mastery and higher level of autonomy followed by low level of mother assistance. The condition was similar with Hoyle (cited from Chairani&Subandi, 2010) statement, that self-regulated individual helps him/herself by determining goal, making plan, responding effectively toward extrinsic stimuli.

Self-efficacy belief as third aspect led the respondents to be optimistic about themselves. It was showed from first respondent who kept believing that one day she would find a way to train her child to become autonomous although her child had not yet fulfill her expectation while facing many obstacles. Similar with her, second respondent believed in God to provide solution for every problem even though having autistic child was not an easy

life. It was supported by the child improvement encouraging her to thank God and believe that she could overcome the problem and would teach the child as well as possible.

This research found other supporting factors. First factor was background difference of autism occurrence. On the first respondent, her child was diagnosed at two years old. She felt numb and relied on resignation to God because she already have sought information about specific symptoms the child showed before referring to doctor. Meanwhile, the second respondent felt shocked and disappointed when doctor diagnosed the child as having autism disorder at three years old. The respondents condition, as with Kuhn & Carter (2006) suggestion that parent feelings in accepting autistic child attendance in their lives were commonly sadness, shock, confusion, fear, worry, anger, self-isolation and numbness.

Following factor was each respondent feeling toward children's chronological autism event. First respondent felt sad when people could not accept and understand the children condition. People with less understanding about hyperactive child supposed the child as having mental disorder (insane), and the respondent's mother was not comfortable with the child presence. Second respondent felt worried when the child was sick and confused to handle the situation without husband presence. However, the respondents optimistically passed the day. Short and Toffel (2010) suggested that individual should maintain great intrinsic motivation to effectively self-regulate. The respondents had similar motivation to realize their children's autonomy.

Latest factor which also supported this result was different interpretation in responding autism occurrence. Second respondent was optimistic that her child would be what she expected and become a better child. Although first respondent experienced worse than second respondent did, she had never felt ashamed of having a child with special need. She was proud of telling about her child to everyone who asked. Beside of sadness, the respondents were happy having autism-born children.

In addition to the factors above, other factors were supposed to be relevant. They were age, the number of children, educational background and current job. These factors significantly affected the respondents' self-regulation to the extent of different amount of income likely affected the respondents' emotional reactions. Like Kogan, Blumberg, Schieve, Boyle, Perrin, Ghandour, et.al. (2007) explained, that emotional reactions the single mother experiences, one of them is due to the mother's role of family head to think seriously about increasing household budget of autistic child presence. Moreover, it will be exacerbated when the mother live in metropolitan city which need much expenses to survive (Kogan, Blumberg, Schieve, Boyle, Perrin, Ghandour, et.al., 2009). Additionally, the respondents' closeness to God, family support and surrounding community also separately contributed on self-regulation system of the respondents in this research.

## **Conclusion**

Result of this research concluded that the respondents described self-regulation as a goal and expectation attainment for their autistic children, and had certain reason to realize it. They had different self-regulation process. Factors that differed it were basically influenced

by three primary aspects, such as life goal attainment, life goal evaluation and self-efficacy belief.

The other factors that support this result were the children's different chronological autism occurrence, each respondent feeling in facing autism occurrence on children and different interpretation to respond it. Educational background, current job, income, number of child, closeness to God, family support and surrounding environment were probably influenced the quality of self-regulation process.

### **Suggestion**

According to this research, the researcher offers some suggestion, such as:

**1. For single mother of autistic child**

Single mother is expected to be able to control herself emotionally and behaviorally. It will greatly affect her mental health and emotional improvement to provide positive environment for her autistic children to gain better life.

**2. For family and community**

Family and community are encouraged to give support for single mothers of autistic children by acceptance of children condition, and be able to give positive view regarding the single mothers and their autistic children.

**3. For future researcher**

Following researcher who is interested in topic of parents with autistic children is expected to consider interview duration in order to reach representation of respondent dynamics. Future researcher can expand to choose other variables such as self-acceptance, happiness, self-regulation of emotion, life interpretations which were not explored in this research.

### **Acknowledgement**

This research is fully presented for extraordinary mothers who dedicate their lives to give the best for their children with special need.

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