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SEXUALITY EDUCATION LEARNING STRATEGY FOR AUTISTIC CHILDREN FROM EARLY AGES

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ABSTRACT

Many people are embarrassed of the issues of sexuality, fear of disclosure about information of the sexuality of children and adolescents will stimulate curiosity and causes them to perform sexual activity prematurely. Children with special needs including autistic children will also develop to a teenager, experiencing puberty, and interested in things in relation with sexuality. That is why autistic children need to get sexuality education from the early ages. Sexuality education learning strategies for autistic children from an early age is necessary because the provision of education from an early age will become an important foundation for the pattern of their sexuality in the future in order to become complete and independent individuals. Sexuality education is needed for children to know the function of sex organs, the responsibility on them, and guidelines to avoid irregularities in their sexual behavior early on. Sexuality education if not given early, then later can be a problem either from external or internal side of the autistic child.

Keywords: *learning strategies, sexuality education, children with autism*

A. BACKGROUND

Sexuality education in Indonesia has not been given broadly neither among the schools nor in families. People are still embarrassed or reluctant to talk about sexuality neither to younger people nor with their peers, because they think that sexuality is a taboo. On the other hand, many discussions about sexuality have been

delivered through several information media. Although the information which delivered by those media often neither adequate nor well interpreted especially by teenagers (Faturochman, 1992).

Numerous study have shown only very few parents who have given sexuality education to their children (Gebhard ; Kirby, et. al. ; Kallen, et. al, on Masters et. al, 1992; Davis and

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Haris on Atwater, 1992; Allen on Perkins, et. al, 1999). The main reason which made the parents reluctant to talk about sexuality to their children was the fear that the information of sexuality will stimulate the curiosity and drive the children to perform sexual activity prematurely (Atwater, 1992; Allgeier and Allgeier, 1991; Network 1997).

Besides, there are two other factors which caused parents reluctance, i.e., the uncomfortable feelings because they were raised on such era which made the discussion of sexuality taboo; and the absence of adequate information about sexuality, or even if they owned the adequate one, they have no idea how to deliver it to their children (Atwater, 1992). Factually, family is still expected to be the source of information and moral shaping for understanding and development of children sexuality (Perkins, et. al, 1999). Various studies show that majority of respondents chose to obtain sexuality education from their parents (Bennett and Dickinson, on Allgeier and Allgeier, 1991; Mudijana, 1993).

Autistic children are one of the special needs children who owned a very complex development disorder on the aspects of social interaction, behavior, and language, therefore they require special services. The special needs children regardless the autistic one, will grow into a teenager, experiencing puberty, and attracted to sexuality things. Thus, the autistic children also need early sexuality education. Meanwhile, most of the parents are often avoiding the discussion of sexuality issues with autistic children. Whereas, autistic teenagers do not have adequate knowledge to understand about sex due to their limited motor and behavior ability. The characteristic of sexual restriction which appears on autistic person caused autistic teenagers cannot understand social rules through socialization processes like the other teenagers. Therefore, the proper time to begin sexual education may be different for every children and teenagers, but it's critical to be given before the children showed sexual deviation as public masturbation (Sullivan, 2008).

The study (Sukinah, 2010) shows activity which often emerges on the autistic children during their puberty, i.e., shameless feeling when walking naked, showing their penis or breasts, opening pants outside the room, and public masturbation. The observation is performed on several schools, some autistic teenagers always chasing their friends, either boys or girls fellow of autistic teenagers to fulfill their sexual drives. There are children who feel happy and calm when meeting their beloved friend by showing various expressions. Sexuality of autistic children is also not focused toward the other person. Their sexual drives are for them self.

A mother of 15 years old autistic child confessed that she did not give an early sexuality education. The consequences are the child so called "Y" often grasping his genitals in public, even often touching people's sensitive organs abruptly. "He often touches his therapist's breasts during his therapy". When he was forbid to do that, he will throw temper tantrum. That causes "Y" rarely taken to public places as malls, because of the fears of unexpected things to happen, including

his sexual activity. This showed that autistic children have problems on their sexuality, e.g., practice of grasping genitals in public and touch people's private organs.

Generally, people assume that sexuality education socialization is still taboo and closed among Indonesian arrangement. In order to avoid unexpected things, then sexuality education need to be performed from early ages of autistic teenagers with the appropriate strategies considering the issues of autistic children are very complex, thus affecting the treatment. Strategy of early sexuality education for autistic children is required because early education will give important foundation to their sexual pattern in the future to be complete and independent individuals.

B. DISCUSSION

The "Sex" term often regards by most people as sexual intercourse. The definition of sex is gender which differ man and woman biologically. Sexuality concerns on many dimensions, among them are biologically dimension, which related to reproduction organs, ways to preserve hygiene and health;

psychological dimension, in which sexuality is related to gender identity, feelings toward sexuality and how to perform its function as a sexual creature; social dimension which related to how sexuality emerges on human relations and how the environment affected the view of sexuality and sex behavior options; and cultural dimension, shows that sexual behavior is a part of culture among society. Sexuality education should be given to the children on their early ages, both formally and informally. This is important to avoid the ambiguity of sexuality education and reproduction health knowledge among teenagers.

Another opinion of sexuality is an integration of feeling, needs, and desires which founded a unique personality of a person, disclose the tendency of a person to be a man or woman. Sex, otherwise, usually only defined as gender (man or woman); or the activity of sexual physical itself. Sexuality is limited as feeling, attitude, and behavior of a person toward himself (Schwier & Hingsburger, 2000). In this paper, instead of sexual relation, how to prepare autistic

children on their early ages to understand sexuality completely to become complete and independent individuals.

Children with special needs also need sexuality education, because either realized or not, they will also experience similar things with other normal children. Whereas, the special needs children including the autistic one often emotionally unsteady, so they will have to be learned step by step. Autistic children are children with complex development disorder, especially on communication, social interaction, and behavior, thus need special education services. Things experienced by autistic children made most of the parents focused on developing their children communication and other academics ability. Special needs individuals also experience similar development with normal person. They experience changes on their emotional, physical and social which basically are equal to normal children. They also feel hunger, thirst, need affection, and hormonally changes as their peers (Sukinah, 2010).

Autistic children still needed to be given sexuality education from their

early ages. Because sexuality education is not always discuss about sexual intercourse. Sex is a natural thing. In autistic children, puberty often emerges early or late. On this puberty time, hormonal changes emerge which affect to the respected children. Both girls and boys may experience physical changes during puberty. Sexual education indeed is rarely given to autistic children; one of the probable cause is parents' limited knowledge of what their children should know about sex.

If sexuality education was not been given early, then it can become a problem both externally and internally to the children, as the children may practice grasping his own genitals, touching people's private body parts, unready for menstruation, masturbating or experiencing sex dreams which may affect their emotion and also cannot maintain hygiene of their genitals.

Sexuality education is needed so that children aware of their sexual organs, *responsible for them, permitted and forbidden things related to sexual organs and guideline to avoid deviation on their sexual behavior on early ages.* Firstly, when autistic children grow as

teenagers, they are not aware of sexuality, because parents still consider that sexual talk is taboo. From the unawareness, the autistic children may become irresponsible of their sexuality and reproduction health. Secondly, from that unawareness above, the autistic children begin to find another information sources offered by some people through porn contented commodities, such as VCD, magazines, internet, up to television programs directed to it. The impact of teenager's unawareness of these sexuality things is driving them toward negative things, as premarital sexual intercourse, unexpected pregnancy, up to transmission of HIV.

According to Adams (1997) on Dyah Puspita (2007), sexuality education toward an autistic individual is to make the respected individual to be aware and respect his/her own sexual characteristic, to understand basic difference between man and woman anatomy, and the role of each gender on human reproduction, to *understand of physical and emotional changes he/she will face (issues like menstruation, appearance of body hairs, body odor changes),* to

understand that nobody have the rights to force sexual activity towards him/her, to understand the responsibility of reproduction, to understand how to prevent pregnancy (pregnancy planning method) which has to be performed, unless the child is wanted and can be taken care of well and responsibly, to understand the responsibility to maintain his/her own and other people health, and aware and capable to find help for certain issues if required (if were abused or disease transmitted), and to understand the significance of social standards regarding appropriate sexual behavior on his/her environment.

Sexuality education for autistic children from early ages need learning strategy which concerns on delivering strategy, i.e., learning media, interaction between the pupils and media, and instructional structure. Sexuality education for autistic children on early ages covers communication level, social ability, cognitive ability, conceptual ability, and other aspects of personal function. Sexuality education learning strategy for autistic children from early ages is a method of interaction between pupils

(autistic children) and instructor (teacher) in developing their ability regarding sexuality which is an integration of feelings, needs, and desires founded unique personality of a person and expressing tendency of a person to become a man or woman, optimally.

The development of autistic children faces several complex disorder, therefore, sexuality education generally includes: human reproduction system, man and woman relationship, including socialization ethics, religious and moral standards, gender role, gender choice, sexual activity including non-intercourse sexual activity, contraception, sexually transmitted diseases, pregnancy and related things (abortion, adoption, nursing of a baby or kid, caring pattern, etc), to refuse free sex, and sexual deviations.

Learning methods on sexuality education for autistic children from early ages are expected to be an understandable and easily accepted method. Methods can be used i.e., playing method, demonstration, socio-drama or role playing. There are many instructional media which can be used for sexuality education for autistic

children on school, such as illustrated cards, concrete objects, COMPIC (Computerized Pictures), family pictures, animal, telephone cards, VCD, tape recorder, and television which can be chose according to the condition of children and their environment.

Dyah Puspita (2007) stated that parents and teacher need to prepare the girls to face menstruation using these following manners: begin teaching the girls of how to use tampons, make the girls to use tampons regularly before D-day, put some safe food coloring agents on their underwear and/or tampons to show what will happen when menstruation begins. Both teacher and parents can typify how to use and replace tampons, if possible it can also involve their peer, marked clearly the surface of underwear facing toward the genitals, also the position of tampons which facing genitals, try several different size, softness, *thickness, brand, and with or without wings* type of tampons. Make a visual inspection schedule of tampons replacement frequency, with taking their school schedule into concern (regulate the replacement hours on the

subjects exchanging time and break time. As much as possible, this schedule should be similar between in school and home; the similarity will make it easier for the children). If necessary, provide children with illustrated books which explaining about everything related to menstruation. Parents need to recognize their children, because excessive information can disturb them. A simple celebration when the D-day begins may give positive effect.

Meanwhile, in preparing autistic boys, (Dyah Puspita, 2007) stated parents and teachers can performed these following: describe clearly that sex dreaming is not the same as bedwetting, because there is no boy wants to disappoint his parents as he has grown up so it'd be inappropriate if he is bedwetting. Parents should neither give exaggerated reaction nor not reacted toward it, because the boy may has not understand what has happened *during sex dreaming, replace the bed sheets or help the boy to replace his bed sheets.* Describe calmly about anything in relation to puberty, including sex dream. Provide him with

appropriate books, illustrated books are more preferable.

Several things that must be taken into account on instructional strategy of sexuality education of autistic children on early ages, i.e.:

1. If you have taught "this is nose", or "this is mouth", then it is also the time of you taught "this is penis" or "this is vulva". Do not use inappropriate terms (such as "duck" to replace vagina or other words), because using that way, we have made dichotomy between common organs and "dirty" organs or taboo or negative. Because wrong perception of the organs, will affect the children in the future negatively.
2. Before teaching more complicated thing to autistic children, as hormonal changes, the first thing we should have is the children compliance. Such as, teaching of toilet usage, body hygiene, and shame.
3. Understand about physical and hormonal development of a child *and also understanding various social boundaries existed in society.*
4. Calmly confronting masturbating child, as it is human basic instinct. The critical thing is teach child not to do it on random places and teach them to clean it right away.
5. Teach the children to understand privacy and their own body parts, so certain incident often performed by the children as peeping and touching other people's sensitive organs can be avoided.
6. The children also need to understand what permitted to see when talking to other people, also contact permitted and prohibited.
7. Teach the children about social circle, in which the children are taught whoever deserves hugs and kisses.
8. Do not give too much verbal advices to autistic children, due the advices are not processed on their brains. Generally autistic children are easier to absorb things visually.
9. Train the children because it is not easy to teach sexuality to special needs children as autistic children. But if it is taught according to *children level of understanding and being performed repeatedly*, then the children will understand.

10. Teach children about hygiene during menstruation
11. *Good sexuality education* can help to prepare autistic children to be mature and independent individuals.
12. In giving *sexuality education* on autistic children, the children should have aware of their own body and never explored other people's body.
13. The understanding of hormonal changes can be delivered through easily understood story, because hormones are invisible.
14. Parents roles more than therapist in giving sexuality education according to children level understanding with positive words, conditioning the children before they are exposed out, having their own regulations, using the power of reward instead the power of punishment.
15. Use religious approach. We shall believe that all the problems in this world must be settled with religious values, due to religious values will stay the same. Autistic children also should be invited to practice religious values in their daily lives.
16. Utilize the Golden Moments, such as while watching television in which kissing scene is shown, or while performing two person *activities* (*cooking, making the bed*), etc.
17. o. Give the children to have socialization experiences with their peers (the opposite sex or not) so they will realize that many different activities with various friends need to be concluded with sexual relation. Peers respond is also an appropriate media to teach 'restrictions' of physical behavior while socializing.
18. Teach the definition of 'values' and 'morals' is both rights and obligations of the parents. These concepts will help the children to establish restrictions especially when they were confused or when the condition was not settled so they do not know how to respond. These values and morals are also can be parents' based to develop positive self respect and self esteem.

C. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the above discussions, the author can draw several conclusions as following:

1. Regarding sexuality education for autistic children on early ages, parents, teachers, society and government need to collaborate in the implementation so that when the children have grown up, they can interact with their environment and also own self respect of sexuality, and understand the values in society regarding appropriate sexual behavior in their environment, and also develop into complete individuals.
2. Sexuality education for autistic children from early ages need learning strategy which concern on utilization of delivering strategy, i.e., learning media, interaction between pupils and media, and instructional structure.

D. SUGGESTIONS

Based on the above conclusions, the author delivers these suggestions, as following:

1. For the parents and teachers to always observe changing pattern, and both physical and emotional development of autistic children on early ages, especially when the children begin their puberty.
2. For the parents and teachers to customize ethical values valid in their environment.
3. The society as the autistic children socially developing environment shall be giving care when the autistic children are facing problems, and look after them, in the sense of ready when the autistic children needed help.
4. The government as the policy maker is expected to provide services and facilities and also clear regulation and legality toward sexuality education, and protection of sexual criminality towards autistic children.

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