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The Relationship between Self-Efficacy and Parental Anxiety of Children with ASD: Literature Review

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Abstract: Parents who have children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) face complex parenting challenges and are at high risk of experiencing anxiety. However, the literature discussing how parenting self-efficacy influences parental anxiety especially within the Indonesian context remains limited. Therefore, this literature review aims to examine the relationship between self-efficacy and anxiety in parents of children with ASD and to provide updated insights from recent studies. This study used a literature review method with an analytical descriptive approach, analyzing three journal articles published between 2020 and 2024. These consisted of two correlational quantitative studies and one phenomenological qualitative study. The results showed a negative relationship between parenting self-efficacy and parental anxiety, indicating that higher self-efficacy is associated with lower anxiety levels. In addition, factors such as resilience, social support, and parents' perceptions of their parenting roles were found to influence parental psychological wellbeing. While the findings consistently highlight the importance of strengthening parenting self-efficacy, conclusions should be interpreted cautiously due to the limited number of studies reviewed. Further research is recommended to deepen understanding and broaden the evidence base.

Keywords: Self-efficacy; anxiety; parenting; autism.

INTRODUCTION

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a complex neurodevelopmental condition characterized by persistent difficulties in social communication and restricted, repetitive behaviors that may interfere with daily functioning. Globally, the prevalence of ASD continues to rise, including in developing countries such as Indonesia, placing significant emotional, social, and practical demands on families, especially parents as primary caregivers. These challenges often require parents to adopt specialized parenting skills, understand individualized behavioral strategies, and navigate various therapeutic and educational systems. Consequently, parents commonly experience heightened psychological distress, including anxiety related to their child's developmental trajectory, unmet caregiving expectations, and fear of social stigma.

Anxiety in parents of children with ASD can disrupt emotional, cognitive, and physiological functioning, potentially compromising parental well-being and caregiving quality. Calhoun & Acocella (in Solihati, 2021) explain that anxiety may impair decision-making, emotional regulation, and the parent-child bond. Meanwhile, self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997) as individuals' belief in their ability to effectively manage tasks and challenges, emerges as a psychological resource that can buffer stress and promote adaptive responses. Parents with higher self-efficacy tend to show greater resilience, emotional stability, and confidence when facing the complex demands of raising a child with ASD.

Empirical evidence supports this relationship. Studies have demonstrated that parenting self-efficacy is associated with reduced anxiety, improved coping, and more positive parenting strategies (Kuhn & Carter, 2006; Weiss et al., 2012). Locally, Solihati (2021) found a significant negative correlation between parenting self-efficacy and anxiety among Indonesian parents of children with ASD. However, parental emotional well-being is also shaped by broader contextual factors. Research by Hayati & Fikrie (2024) suggests

that parenting stress does not solely determine relationship quality, indicating the potential influence of additional variables such as social support, cultural expectations, or resilience. Complementing this, qualitative insights from Astria & Setyawan (2020) highlight how maternal resilience develops over time through social support and environmental resources, further reinforcing the intertwined nature of self-efficacy, coping, and family adaptation.

Despite these findings, a clear research gap persists. Existing studies in Indonesia tend to focus on either parental stress, coping, or resilience in isolation, with limited integration of how parenting self-efficacy specifically relates to parental anxiety within ASD caregiving contexts. Moreover, most available evidence is fragmented, context-specific, or based on small sample studies, making it difficult to generalize broader patterns. Internationally, frameworks from disability studies, such as the social model of disability and family empowerment theory, emphasize that parental distress is shaped not only by the child's condition but also by environmental demands, availability of support, and sociocultural perceptions of disability (Hastings & Brown, 2002). However, these perspectives remain underrepresented in local literature.

Therefore, this literature review is necessary to synthesize current evidence on the relationship between parenting self-efficacy and parental anxiety among families of children with ASD, while situating the discussion within psychological and disability studies frameworks. By integrating findings from both qualitative and quantitative research, this review aims to deepen understanding of parental experiences and provide a foundation for developing empowerment-oriented psychosocial interventions. The insights from this study are expected to support mental health practitioners, educators, and policymakers in designing programs that strengthen parental self-efficacy and promote family well-being within ASD caregiving contexts.

METHOD

Literature Search Process

The literature search process was conducted using a narrative literature review approach, aiming to identify, evaluate, and synthesize research related to the relationship between parenting self-efficacy and parental anxiety among parents of children with ASD. Searches were conducted in June 2025 through several open-access national databases, including Garuda.ristekbrin.go.id, Google Scholar, Neliti.com, and Pubmedia.id. Additional full-text PDF articles already available in the researcher's collection were also screened for relevance.

Although the review drew inspiration from general steps used in structured literature reviews, it did not follow a full PRISMA systematic review format. Instead, articles were filtered through an iterative process of identification, relevance screening, and final selection for inclusion. This approach aligns more appropriately with a narrative or descriptive review due to the small number of eligible studies.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion criteria

a. Peer-reviewed scientific articles published within the last five years (2020–2024).
b. Studies involving parents (fathers or mothers) of children diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)
c. Articles examining self-efficacy and/or parental anxiety variables
d. Research using quantitative or qualitative methodologies
e. Full-text availability in Indonesian or English.

Exclusion criteria

a. Articles available only as abstracts or without full-text access
b. Studies not involving parents of children with ASD
c. Opinion pieces, editorials, or non–peer-reviewed literature
d. Studies focusing solely on the child without addressing parental psychological conditions.

Search Keywords

Keywords were adjusted to suit each database and combined using Boolean operators (AND, OR). These keywords were applied in both Indonesian and English to maximize article retrieval. The terms included:

a. "Self-efficacy of parenting" AND "anxiety" AND "parents" AND "children with autism"
b. "Self-efficacy" AND "parenting" AND "anxiety" AND "parents of children with ASD"
c. "Parents of ASD children" AND "self-efficacy" AND "anxiety"
d. "Parenting stress" OR "resilience" AND "autism spectrum disorder'

Data Collection Procedure

Following the search and relevance screening, three articles were selected as the final sources for analysis. For each article, the following data were extracted:

a. Title and publication year
b. Researcher names and institutional affiliations
c. Research objectives and study design
d. Participant characteristics and sample size
e. Instruments used (e.g., parenting self-efficacy scales, anxiety scales)
f. Key findings and conclusions
g. Relevance to the study focus on the relationship between self-efficacy and anxiety

Data extraction was conducted manually. The analysis used a thematic narrative approach, which involved multiple readings of the selected studies to identify recurring concepts. Themes were categorized based on:

a. relationship patterns between self-efficacy and anxiety,
b. supporting psychosocial factors, and
c. contextual influences on parenting experiences.

The findings from the three studies were then synthesized into a descriptive narrative, highlighting similarities, differences, and key insights relevant to parents of children with ASD.

Methodological Limitations

This review is limited by the small number of articles meeting inclusion criteria and the reliance on open-access databases, which may have excluded relevant studies available in subscription-based journals. As a narrative review, the findings provide interpretive insights rather than systematic generalizations.

Table 1. Characteristics of Analyzed Articles

Yes	Types of Research	Sample	Method	Key Results	Year
1	**Phenomenological Study of Resilience of Mothers Who Have Children with Autism** Nowity Astria & Imam Setyawan	3 mothers with children with autism aged 17–25 years	Qualitative, semi-structured interviews, Descriptive Analysis of Individual Phenomena (DFI)	Maternal resilience is formed from child acceptance, emotional control, positive expectations, and social support. Anxiety appears at the beginning of receiving a child's diagnosis	2020
2	**The Relationship between Parenting Stress and the Quality of Parent-Child Relationships in Parents with Children with Autism** Mardatilah Hayati & Fikrie	112 parents (majority of mothers) of children with autism aged 2–12 years in Banjarmasin	Quantitative correlation, Pearson analysis, using the Parenting Stress Scale and CPRS	There was no significant association between parenting stress and the quality of the parent-child relationship	2024
3	**The Relationship of Parenting Self-Efficacy to Children's Parents' Anxiety with Autism** Yasmin Meutia Solihati	41 parents (fathers and mothers) of children with autism aged 5–12 years	Quantitative correlation, Pearson Product Moment analysis, using the Self-Efficacy and Anxiety Scale	There was a significant negative association between parenting self-efficacy and parental anxiety ($r = -0.506$; $p = 0.000$)	2021

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Finding(s)

Meta-analysis was carried out descriptively by comparing the results of the three journals based on the similarity of the main variables studied, namely self-efficacy and anxiety in parents of children with autism. The analysis was carried out by identifying relationship patterns, methodological approaches, and socio-psychological contexts that shape the perception of parents in parenting.

Patterns of Relationship between Self-Efficacy and Anxiety

The review shows that only one study Solihati (2021) directly examined the relationship between parenting self-efficacy and parental anxiety. The study found a significant negative relationship, indicating that higher levels of parenting self-efficacy are associated with lower levels of anxiety. Although the other two studies did not explicitly measure self-efficacy, their findings remain relevant. Astria & Setyawan (2020) identified resilience components such as emotional regulation, acceptance, and adaptive coping, which conceptually overlap with Bandura's dimensions of self-efficacy. Similarly, Hayati & Fikrie (2024) examined parenting stress and parent child relationship quality, suggesting that internal factors such as parental confidence may mediate emotional outcomes. Thus, even though the three studies differ in focus, they collectively indicate that parents' internal capacity and perceived competence influence their anxiety levels.

Consistency of Findings

Across the three studies, a consistent theme emerges: parents' psychological well being is closely related to how competent they feel in carrying out their parenting roles. While only one study provides statistical evidence of the self-efficacy anxiety relationship, the other two contribute supporting insights through related constructs, including resilience and parenting stress. However, consistency is moderated by variations in research designs, sample characteristics, and measurement instruments. Despite these methodological

differences, the studies collectively highlight that parental perceptions of capability play a meaningful role in shaping emotional outcomes, particularly anxiety.

Influencing Factors

The analysis identifies several factors influencing the relationship between self-efficacy and anxiety. Social support whether from partners, extended family, or community emerges as a key protective factor that strengthens resilience and enhances parental confidence. Experience in caregiving and the length of time since diagnosis also contribute to parents' emotional adjustment. Qualitative evidence shows that acceptance and positive expectations help parents manage stress more effectively, while quantitative findings indicate that a strong sense of capability enhances adaptation to ASD-related challenges. Together, these factors create a psychosocial environment in which self-efficacy plays a central role in regulating parental anxiety.

Practical Implications

The synthesis suggests that psychosocial interventions designed to enhance parental self-efficacy can play a significant role in reducing anxiety among parents of children with ASD. Parenting training programs, emotional regulation strategies, and peer support groups can help parents strengthen their caregiving skills and confidence. In the broader context of disability inclusion, stronger parental self-efficacy can improve engagement with therapeutic services, support participation in inclusive education, and empower families in decision-making. Therefore, enhancing self-efficacy not only benefits parents' mental health but also contributes positively to the child's social and educational participation.

Discussion

The findings of this literature review collectively demonstrate that parenting self-efficacy plays a central role in shaping how parents of children with ASD interpret caregiving challenges and manage anxiety. The quantitative evidence from Solihati (2021) clearly identifies a significant negative association between self-efficacy and parental anxiety, indicating that parents who feel more capable in addressing their child's needs are less likely to experience emotional distress. This is supported by qualitative findings from Astria and Setyawan (2020), which highlight resilience-related components such as emotional regulation, acceptance, and meaning-making. Although these constructs are not labeled explicitly as self-efficacy, they reflect core cognitive and emotional processes described by Bandura's social cognitive theory. The study by Hayati and Fikrie (2024) further reinforces this perspective by showing that parental perceptions of relationships and stress are influenced by internal psychological resources, suggesting that self-perception plays a central role in parental adjustment.

These findings align with broader theoretical and empirical evidence in the international literature. Bandura's (1997) social cognitive theory posits that self-efficacy influences stress appraisal, emotional responses, and coping strategies, helping parents perceive difficult child behaviors as manageable rather than threatening. Study by Jones & Prinz (2005), Kuhn & Carter (2006), and Weiss et al. (2012) similarly demonstrate that higher parental self-efficacy predicts reduced stress, greater emotional adjustment, and more effective engagement with ASD interventions. The concept of resilience identified in the qualitative study also resonates with family stress and coping models, such as the ABCX framework and family empowerment theory, which emphasize cognitive appraisal as a

mediator between stressors and adaptation. In this context, self-efficacy becomes a fundamental component of parental empowerment.

Beyond psychological mechanisms, sociocultural and environmental contexts also shape how parents navigate the challenges of raising a child with ASD. The reviewed studies underscore the importance of social support, particularly within the Indonesian cultural context, where extended family involvement and collectivist norms are prominent. Such support systems play a protective role by strengthening self-efficacy and reducing anxiety. From a disability-inclusion perspective, strong parental self-efficacy is also associated with better advocacy for the child's participation in therapy, inclusive education, and community activities. This aligns with the principles of the social model of disability, which emphasizes that disability is influenced not only by individual characteristics but also by access to supportive and inclusive environments. By enhancing parental self-efficacy, families become more empowered to engage in decision-making processes and to secure better educational and social outcomes for their children.

The practical implications of these findings emphasize the need for intervention programs that go beyond technical caregiving skills and incorporate psychological empowerment. Parent training initiatives that build mastery experiences, counseling that supports emotional regulation and cognitive reframing, peer support groups that offer shared experiences, and community-based efforts to improve ASD awareness are all strategies that can enhance parental self-efficacy. Such interventions align with global recommendations for family-centered ASD support and are likely to improve both parental mental health and child development outcomes.

Despite the strengths of the reviewed evidence, several limitations must be acknowledged. The small and localized sample in Solihati's (2021) study limits the generalizability of its findings, while the study by Hayati and Fikrie (2024) does not directly assess self-efficacy, requiring conceptual interpretation. The qualitative richness of the study by Astria and Setyawan (2020) offers valuable insights but lacks quantitative support. Additionally, this review relied solely on open-access databases, which may have excluded relevant international research with stronger methodological rigor.

Given these limitations, future research should incorporate larger and more diverse samples, employ standardized measurement instruments, and integrate mixed-method approaches to capture both the breadth and depth of parental experiences. Further studies are also needed to examine how sociocultural values, disability-related policies, and inclusive education systems shape parental self-efficacy in the Indonesian context. Comparative research across regions or cultures would provide deeper insight into how social norms, gender roles, and community resources interact with parental resilience and caregiving confidence.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of a literature review of three research journals, it can be concluded that the self-efficacy of parenting has a significant relationship with the level of anxiety of parents who have children with autism. Parents with high levels of self-efficacy tend to have better ability to manage stress and anxiety, and are able to adapt to the challenges of parenting children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD).

Self-efficacy plays a role as a psychological protector that helps parents deal with emotional distress that arises due to the demands of parenting children with special needs. These findings are reinforced by quantitative and qualitative approaches that show that confidence in one's own ability to carry out the role of a parent can reduce feelings of fear, worry, and depression.

Although not all studies directly measure the relationship between self-efficacy and anxiety, they all three highlight the importance of parental psychological empowerment through improved coping skills and social support. Therefore, psychosocial-based interventions that focus on improving self-efficacy are highly recommended to support the mental well-being of parents of children with autism.

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