

Directions of Fathering Research in the Last Ten Years among Fathers of Children with ASD; a Literature Review

Achmad Mujab Masykur¹, Wiwin Hendriani², Nur Ainy Fardana Nawangsari³

{akungpsiundip@yahoo.com¹, wiwin.hendriani@psikologi.unair.ac.id²,
nurainy.fardana@psikologi.unair.ac.id³}

Faculty of Psychology Airlangga University Surabaya^{1,2,3}

Abstract. The global prevalence of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is increasing to 1 in 100 children. Autistic children are children with special needs who have a syndrome of deviations in social development, language skills, and adaptive behavior, so they really need special roles and care from parents. Research that specifically examines the parenting of fathers with ASD children has begun to show an increasing trend, although it is still relatively limited. This study is a literature review that aims to assess the direction of fathering research on fathers with ASD children in the last 10 years (2014-2023). Two databases, Scopus and Springerlink, were used to search for literature with the keywords "Father" and "Autism". A total of 1128 articles were found in the data search and 28 articles met the criteria for review. The results of the review showed that fathering research with ASD children used several terminologies, including fathering, father experience, father involvement, father engagement, fathering style, nurturing fathering, paternal role, father orientation, and father communication. Meanwhile, the methodology used was dominated by qualitative research at 57% (16 titles) and quantitative research at 32% (9 titles). Mixed method research was found in 0.07% (2 titles) and survey in 0.035% (1 title). The review also shows that the majority of studies are still conducted in western cultures (America, Europe, and Australia). The rest are from Asia 4 studies and finally Africa only one study. Fathering research on fathers of children with ASD still needs to be increased in various cultural settings, to get a more global and comprehensive picture of parenting.

Keywords: Fathering, Review, Autism Spectrum Disorders

1. Introduction

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a form of special needs, where there is a neurodevelopmental disorder characterized by difficulty in interacting and communicating socially, as well as having limited and repetitive behavior, interests and activities [1]. Disorders in people with autism include cognitive, emotional, behavioral and social areas, including the

inability to interact with the people around them. Children with autism will grow and develop in different ways compared to other normal children. This is due to a gradual decline in cognition [2]

The prevalence of people with ASD in the world as per the study of [3] dari McGill University Montreal, has increased to 1 in 100 children. The World Health Organization (WHO) in its publication at the end of March 2023 used this study as a reference for the prevalence of autism of 1:100 on average globally. Meanwhile, previous research [4] showed an increase in the number of people with autism in the USA to 18.5 per thousand children in 8-year-old children.

The above series of data indicates that the prevalence of autism is increasing. Autism is a form of children with special needs whose presence cannot be rejected by any parent [5]. However, regardless of the condition, the Convention on the Right of the Child, explains that every child with a disability has the right to education, training and special protection in order to live a full life (<https://www.unicef.org>).

Parental cooperation in raising children with ASD can affect the good growth and development of children [2], [6] because it is part of the main responsibility that must be lived naturally as a consequence of marriage and the birth of children. Parents are expected to be able to train children's independence in carrying out their daily activities with discipline and obedience and by paying attention to children's nutrition [7].

A father who holds the status of a parent and the head of the family is responsible for meeting the needs of the family. Not only financially, a father is required to carry out the function of fathering optimally for all his children, including if his child has a disability [8] [9], [10]. Fatherhood involved in taking on the responsibility of raising children and contributing to the next generation is an important stage of life development for men [11].

Some dictions related to the concept of fatherhood that are also commonly used in fathering research other than fathering, include the role of father, fatherhood, father involvement, paternal involvement, fathering self-efficacy, father's experience, quality of fathering, father child relationship. Although the definitions are different, a number of these concepts try to explain the extent to which a father is directly or indirectly involved in childcare [12]

A more in-depth study indicates that there is a conceptual difference and the use of terms about parenting by fathers with the diction of father involvement, father role, fathering, fathering self efficacy [13][14][15] mention that each concept of fatherhood goes through different theoretical components and dimensions. There is no general grand theory that can be agreed upon to study parenting by fathers [16], [17].

Unfortunately, the literature and research related to fatherhood in parenting that exists today is mostly focused on fathers rather than children who develop normally (typical). The literature in developmental psychology shows that mothers and fathers play a unique and important role in being important in the development of their children. However, research investigating the unique contribution and psychological function of fathers' roles in effective interventions for children with disabilities is still limited.

An early literature review aimed at parents of children and adolescents with ASD published between 2001 and 2010 by [18] shows a lack of father-focused empirical research. Of the 404 studies identified, 86.4% focused on the mother or both parents without making any difference,

86.4% focused on the mother or both parents without making any difference between the two, 12.1% considered the father and mother separately and only 1.5% focused specifically on the father.

Research shows that there are still relatively few substantive studies that examine research on the involvement of fathers with children with disabilities ([19]; [9]. Paternity research is still underrepresented in empirical investigations of child psychopathology [20]; [21]Phares et al. 2005), developmental disability disorders [22] language communication skills and symbolic play [23], and underrepresented in the literature on ASD in the investigation of child development and clinical psychology [18].

The literature on fathers raising children with ASD is still not robust because it lacks breadth and is less consistent in focus, samples, methods, and conclusions that can be drawn [24]. Existing research also does not consider the experience of father involvement of children with disabilities [25].

According to [9], research with the theme of fathers with children with disabilities, indeed experiences obstacles due to several things. First, at the methodological level, research designs are usually framed by the concept of mother-rearing, or the so-called maternal archetype [26]. Second, there is still a lot of progress needed to clarify and reach a consensus on how "fathers" and fathers' roles are defined in research. Third, and on a practical level, fathers are often considered "out of reach" by researchers [27], because they are unable to participate in studies that are usually scheduled during work hours or after busy days at work. Finally, the limited psychometric quality of father-adjusted instruments and questionnaires of children with developmental disabilities continues to be an obstacle in conducting research with fathers [16].

Fathers are often overlooked as good partners in parenting for children with ASD and their families [23], [24], even perceived only as a peripheral or even exterior member outside of the parenting system [28]. In discussions about children with disabilities, fathers are often portrayed as uninvolved figures [9]. Fathers of children with disabilities are seen as having a limited role only to support mothers, sometimes even forgotten [29].

Fathers, although labeled by some as 'peripheral parents', can determine the reaction of the whole family to children with disabilities [30], [31]. [32] emphasized the importance of fatherly parenting which has a significant impact on the satisfaction of fathers' roles as parents, their feelings of self-efficacy, which in turn can have a positive effect on parenting skills as well as fathers' psychological well-being, child development, and the quality of shared parenting.

The above explanation indicates that the involvement of fathers in raising children with ASD not only has a positive impact on the growth and development of children, but also benefits the partner, all other family members, and the father himself. Autism is currently considered the number one developmental disability that can have a significant impact on the general role of fathers and leave them hopeless, helpless, and at risk of many psychosocial problems [33].

Over the past few decades, there has indeed been an increase in research on fathers' involvement in parenting. The study of fatherhood continues to grow due to the increasing number of working mothers, marital disturbances, divorce and custody arrangements [28]. The multitude of social, political, and economic problems led to the 'era of paternal discovery' in which fathers were considered more caring and more actively involved in parenting and household responsibilities [31].

A decade (10 years) is a long enough period for a series of changes in society. These changes are interesting to observe and study because they will affect the development of scientific science in the field of socio-humanities. Especially in this decade we have passed the phase of the Covid-19 pandemic that occurred in the period 2019-2022.

2. Research Method

This study is a literature review that aims to assess the direction of fathering research on fathers with ASD children in the last 10 years (2014-2023). Two databases, Scopus and Springerlink, were used to search for literature with the keywords "Father" and "Autism". Data taken in February 2024 and a total 1128 articles were found in the data search and 28 articles met the criteria for review.

2.1 Criteria Eligibility

This review will focus on the study of fathering so it needs to be sorted out and selected articles that meet certain requirements to be included in the list of main studies. PCC (*population, concept, and context*) mnemonic used to guide the research question(s) and inclusion criteria.

PCC Mnemonic

<u>PCC</u>	<u>Criteria inclusion</u>
<u>Population</u>	<u>Father</u>
<u>Concept</u>	<u>Fathering</u>
<u>Context</u>	<u>Father with ASD Child</u>

Population, concept, and context will become a framework for determining the eligibility of research articles reviewed and will guide the way of this review.

The population that will be involved in this review are fathers who play a fathering role for their children with ASD. The concept that will be explored in this review further is the concept of fathering. Fathering can be defined as the act of procreation and all the child-rearing roles that a father can fulfill. Context fathering which was reviewed refers to fathering in the context of fathers with ASD children.

While the criteria for articles that will be included in this research are:

- a. Answer question study partly or in a manner whole
- b. Using English or Bahasa
- c. Can access full-text
- d. Year's publication from 2014-2023
- e. Review fathering of perspective science psychology
- f. Studies are done with settings subject Father with ASD child

2.2 Type Source Manuscripts

This scoping review accommodates all research methodologies, both qualitative, quantitative, survey, experimental, mixed methods and other methodologies to be studied.

2.3 Extraction data

Using The Rayyan (<https://www.rayyan.ai>) to extract data, select articles that can be involved in this research according to previously established criteria.

Data results extraction served on the following diagram:

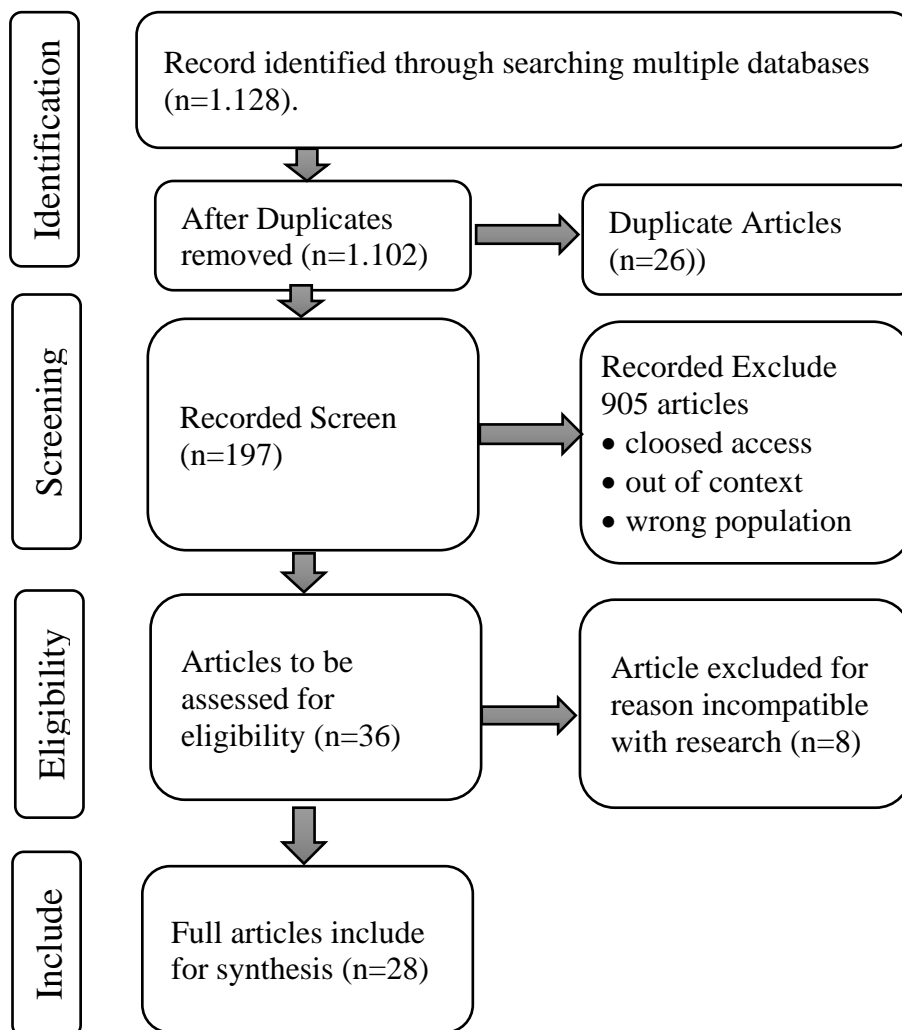


Fig 1. Diagram flow Prisma

3. Result and Discussions

Some of the conceptual variables found in this literature review related to fathering are father experience [35][36] [29][37][38], father involvement [39][25], father engagement [40], [41], fathering style [42], nurturing fathering [43], paternal role [44] dan father orientation [45], and father communication [46]. While other studies did not specifically mention variables in their studies. The methodology used was dominated by qualitative research of 57,1% (16 titles) and quantitative research of 32,1% (9 titles). Mixed method research was found to be 7,1% (2 titles) and 3,6% (1 title). While other studies did not specifically mention the variables in their research.

The data above shows that most fathering research uses the terminology of 'father experience' with the research methodology dominated by qualitative. The qualitative method obtained a total of 16 titles with details of 11 thematic qualitative, 4 narrative qualitative titles, and 1 grounded research title. Meanwhile, the quantitative method has 9 titles with 6 correlational-associative quantitative titles and 3 experimental qualitative titles. In addition, a quantitative survey methodology was also found in 1 research title. Meanwhile, the next methodology found is the mixed method with 2 research titles.

Study developed a grounded theory to explain how fathers came to understand their children's autism diagnosis [45]. The findings indicate that the process of understanding autism occurs in two distinct phases: self-orientation and orienting others. The self-orientation phase involves fathers suspecting developmental differences, engaging in educational activities, seeking formal evaluations for their children, inquiring about their children's prognosis, and exploring the causes of autism. The orienting others phase focuses on fathers informing family members and sharing information with broader community members. The study provides recommendations for improving service delivery, supporting fathers, and guiding future research.

In general, fathers with children with ASD do experience several problems related to labeling [47], getting stigma, and blame, from the surrounding environment [40]. The stigma includes 1- stigma toward the autistic child, 2- fathers feeling blamed, and 3 – experiences of courtesy stigma including ethnic subgroup navigation of stigma and blame. Fathers resist stigma and blame through personal growth and openness. [48]. Fathers also often experience microaggressions, both related to fathering stereotypes and microaggressions related to autism stereotypes [49] and experience sleep problems in the form of sleep resistance disorders, sleep onset, and night awakenings due to the habits and behaviors of their ASD children, causing physical conditions that are also disturbed [38].

Studies by [49][38][40] identified several themes related to barriers to fatherhood involvement, including economic challenges, double stigmatization, issues of ownership, obstacles related to COVID-19, and gender role norms. Additionally, the research highlighted factors that motivate fathers' involvement, such as the number of children, maternal mental health issues, maternal health problems, lack of social support, and the spirituality power trust in God (Allah) [40]. The study found that fathers exhibited a moderate to low level of interactional behaviors when engaging with their children diagnosed with ASD [50]. Additionally, the educational level and age of the fathers were found to influence certain interactional behavior [50]. [46] in his research "Father Communication Coaching for Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder: A Single-Subject Study", found that fathers who participated in improving children's communication

skills. Dad can use three of the four responsive strategy strategies (i.e., following comments, following directions, and responsive physical play). The use of single words by children increases from the basic level and the initial use of multi-word speech. After the intervention, there was a decrease in stress ratings for fathers who were participants.

In the study on father involvement in the care, play, and education of children with autism, it was found that among the 306 fathers who participated in the survey, half reported being primarily responsible for their children's daily care routines, regardless of the child's age or diagnosis. Fathers also dedicated more time to playing with their children than to other activities, although nearly half of them did not receive relevant training. Many fathers actively support their children's education, particularly in assisting with homework. The most significant barrier to further involvement was the demands of their job [51]. Research on fathering experience is also very diverse. [35] found that fathers viewed their experiences as a journey toward acceptance, with a focus on achieving independence and integration for their children. Fathers considered themselves advocates, often fighting against inadequate services to secure the appropriate care for their children. The importance of both formal and informal support systems was acknowledged, although personalized support was highlighted as particularly crucial. Encouraging fathers to perceive their experiences as a process, while engaging them in discussions about independence and integration, could enhance their overall experience.

Identified four themes, namely: a. ubiquitous impact which consists of impact on the Self Impact on the Family Practical Implications. b. different support (divergent support), namely from professional Support, Support from Family, and Support from People Who Understand. c. impeding factors derived from Internal Characteristics and External World and supporting factors. (facilitating factors) in the form of Internal Characteristics, Resources Available, and Father-Child Relationships [36].

In their phenomenological study [47], the researchers explored the relationships between seven fathers and their sons diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Seven primary themes emerged from the study: Shared Activities, Developmental Sensitivity, Emotional Understanding, Fighting the Label, Fatherhood Expectations, Parent Responsibility, and Fatherhood Isolation. The fathers demonstrated a heightened awareness of their sons' emotional needs and developmental progress. Additionally, the study identified three significant themes: 1) "You Have a Certain Vision... Adjusting Expectations," 2) "It Takes a Pile of Work... I Couldn't Have a More Active Role: Working Hard to Teach Through Leisure," and 3) "I Want My House to Be Messy and Full of Toys: Simple Joy." These themes highlight the fathers' experiences and the challenges they face while navigating their roles and expectations in relation to their children with ASD.

The study titled "What I Want to Do as a Father Is Be There": Constructions of School Involvement for Fathers of Children with Complex Disabilities (25) examines how fathers navigate their involvement in their children's schooling, taking into account their work and co-parenting roles. Fathers perceived their employment as a form of indirect involvement in their children's education, though it was also seen as a barrier to more direct engagement with the school. In another study by [37], titled "Experiences of Father Carers of Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder: An Exploratory Study," four key themes emerged: 1) Reframing the Future, 2) Relationship Issues, 3) Carer Resource Demands and Needs, and 4) Carer Compassion and

Satisfaction. These themes highlight the emotional and practical challenges that fathers face in caring for children with ASD.

Conducted research titled "From Presence to Participation: Engagement with an SMS Program for Fathers of Children on the Autism Spectrum," the study revealed high levels of connection and participation among fathers, particularly in comparison to other father-focused interventions [41]. Evidence from responses, comments, and surveys indicated that fathers were not only actively engaged in the program but also applied the insights gained from the Text2dads intervention to their parenting practices. In further research by May [53], titled "Fathers Raising Children on the Autism Spectrum: Lower Stress and Higher Self-Efficacy Following SMS (Text2dads) Intervention," it was found that the intervention led to a significant reduction in parenting stress and an increase in autism-specific parenting self-efficacy. These findings suggest that the SMS program effectively helped fathers manage the challenges associated with raising children with autism.

Themes that tend to be negative such as stress, parenting stress, psychological stress, and burden also still appear, but are followed by positive variables such as self-efficacy [32], quality of life, and psychological health [44], [54], [55]. A theme that tends to have positive psychology nuances also appears in the study of [48] when fathers face the stigma experienced by their family with openness and use it as a medium for personal growth. Positive themes of also fatherhood for individuals with autism can lead to greater patience [42], or enjoying the parenting process to be full of simple happiness, as [52] "I Want My House to Be Messy and Full of Toys": Simple Joy, or by drawing closer to God as a source of strength to face parenting challenges [40].

Despite having a child with ASD, ASD is often interpreted by parents as a crisis or trauma of life [56], [57], [58], however, parenting children with ASD actually give some parents a new perspective on the value of life, ethics, spirituality, and interaction with others [58]. Fathers describe experiences of love, pride, hope, joy, empathy, gratitude, and personal growth and maturity [48], [56], [59], [60]. Another Research found that parental distress, characteristics of children's difficulties, father's education level, and gender affect the quality of life of fathers with children with ASD [24]. Meanwhile, family income, child age, and parent-child interaction dysfunction are not significant predictors of a father's quality of life (QoL). Research by [31] The study found that none of the coping strategies examined were able to mediate or moderate the relationship between stress and quality of life (QoL) among the 101 fathers who participated. This research offers valuable insights into how the stress-coping-QoL relationship for fathers of children with autism can be influenced by the nature of the stressors they face, their personal characteristics, the surrounding environment, and its demands and resources, as well as the way fathers perceive and implement their coping strategies.

Research has shown that despite having a child with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), many parents initially perceive ASD as a crisis or trauma in their lives [56], [57], [58]. However, for some parents, raising a child with ASD offers a new perspective on life, ethics, spirituality, and social interactions [58]. Fathers, in particular, report experiencing a range of emotions such as love, pride, hope, joy, empathy, gratitude, and significant personal growth and maturity in their parenting journey [48], [56], [59], [60].

Factors such as parental distress, the characteristics of the child's difficulties, the father's education level, and gender influence the quality of life (QoL) for fathers of children with ASD [24]. However, factors like family income, child age, and parent-child interaction dysfunction did not significantly predict the father's QoL. Fathers of children with ASD may require additional support, not only addressing their psychological well-being but also their physical health [61]. The findings emphasize the importance of health services proactively reaching out to fathers, as they may also need further assistance. In a subsequent study, [62] found that factors such as experiencing depression in the past year, job quality (including autonomy and access to parental leave), and social support were significant predictors for fathers of children with ASD.

As a final note, it is related to the cultural issue of fatherhood with children with ASD. The research found in this review mostly came from the Americas (12 titles), Europe (7 titles), and Australia (5 titles). Meanwhile, research from the Asian region recorded only 3 titles, and from Africa (1 title). Cultural influence is indeed quite important in the practice of fathering and families, including families with ASD [42]. Cultural factors are also an important determinant in parenting practices such as the Responsible Fathering Model, [63], the process model [64], and the theory of fathering resources [17]. Thus, research on fathering children with ASD still needs to be carried out in various cultural settings, to get a more distinctive and comprehensive picture of parenting.

4. Conclusion

This research only involves 2 databases, namely Scopus and Springer link, so the articles obtained are relatively limited. It is recommended for future researchers to increase the reference retrieval database, so that the article data obtained will be more and varied. The time lag from data collection and management to publication is relatively long, so the data obtained is less up to date considering the increasingly rapid development of research.

Acknowledgments.

The author would like to thank the entire research team who have collaborated in completing this research.

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