

Home-Start Parenting Program: Supporting Maternal Emotional Functioning in Raising Young Children

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Abstract

This study aimed to examine the effectiveness of home-start parenting program to improve maternal emotional functioning in raising their young children. As a support program, home-start intervention focused on supporting mothers to improve their parenting capacities in a natural setting rather than coaching or teaching them. Although the focus of the study was the mothers, but the improvement of maternal emotional functioning was assumed to be in line with the improvement of children social-emotional functioning as well as other related developmental capacities. The study used the A/B single subject design toward three mothers of young children who had low quality of emotional functioning. The instrument used to measure maternal emotional functioning was Functional Emotional Assessment Scale (FEAS) which was previously modified. The effectiveness of home-start parenting program was analyzed by visual analysis technique which compared single score of mean of three subjects' performances occurring during baseline and intervention conditions. The graphic showed that home-start parenting program was effective in improving maternal emotional functioning. Based on these findings, the home-start parenting program can be recommended as an alternative intervention in early childhood parenting.

Keywords: emotional functioning, home-start parenting, maternal.

1 INTRODUCTION

Mother had an important role to social-emotional development of infants and young children because the mother was the first social environment known by children and a source of reference for infants and young children in interpreting the new or confusing situation. The study of Jones's et. al. (2002) indicated that parents' reactions toward children's negative emotions correlated with children's social and emotional functioning at school. Other study showed that maternal sensitivity and positive response to children's positive or negative emotions had an important role to children's social-emotional development (Leerkes, Blankson, & O'Brien, 2009), and the effects of lack of maternal sensitivity and positive control related to difficult temperament of young children with (van Aken, et al., 2007).

The mothers who have low emotional functioning in children-rearing tend to be too much stimulation, withdraw, give less pleasure, show less enthusiasm, overly rigid and controlling, concrete

and illogically reading and responding communication with children, avoid certain emotions, or unstable in handling intense emotion. Those characteristics will be less supportive in the optimization of social-emotional functioning of children (Greenspan, DeGangi, & Wieder, 2001).

Conduct disorders and psychopathology experienced by mothers during their adolescence, and lack of sensitivity and control of mothers lead to difficulties in parenting which then lead to behavior problems in children (Jaffee, et.al., 2006; Verhoeven, et al. 2007).

"Maltreated children demonstrated low adaptive emotion regulation skills and maltreating mothers provided less validation and emotion coaching in response to children's disclosures of negative emotion." (Shipman, et.al., 2007).

Referring to the research results mentioned earlier, it can be concluded how important the maternal role in facilitating children's social-emotional development, positive behaviors, and other related development. However, it was still found that most children abuse conducted by parents (including

mothers). Setyawan (2015) reported that *Komisi Perlindungan Anak Indonesi (KPAI)* stated that child abuse had increased from 2011 to 2015; the second highest case of five highest cases was parenting case which amounted about 3160 cases. Amongst three environments, family environment showed highest percentage (91%) of the settings of child abuse conducted.

Support program for parents required to be conducted to prevent and decrease children abuse cases. In addition to improve parenting capacities, it is expected that the program is able to prevent children behavior problems. The increase in effective parenting will be followed by changes in the children's behavior in a positive direction (Degarmo, Patterson, & Forgatch, 2004; Jones & Prinz, 2005).

Mothers who just have their first children are mostly confused and do not know what to do in caring their children because they do not have parenting experience previously. K.S., Bang (2001) in his study conducted maternal education program which focused on mother-infant interaction, breast feeding, and infant care. Programs delivered by telephone counseling and home visiting was effective in promoting the mother-infant interaction, organizing the child-rearing environment, and fostering the infant development. It can be concluded that maternal role education can make a great contribution in promoting the health of infants and mothers.

Other study showed that parenting programs given to the mother demonstrated effectiveness in improving maternal knowledge and competencies in nurturing which also contributed to improve mother-child interaction and children's behaviors, and decrease negative behaviors (Landya & Menna, 2006).

The interaction between mother and child is an important principle for developing children's emotional functioning. It is very important to improve maternal emotional functioning because of its capacity to facilitate and regulate children's social-emotional functioning as well as the functioning of sensorimotor, communication and language, and cognitive. Emotional functioning can be observed through the interaction between mother-child during playing interaction or natural setting. (Greenspan, Degangi, & Wieder, 2001).

Home is one of the most natural setting for mother-young child interaction; thus, the right program to improve maternal emotional functioning is home-start parenting program. Home-start parenting support program is a program to prevent development of children's behavior problems that focuses on women with difficulties in raising children (Dekovi, et. al., 2010). By conducting home-start parenting program, volunteers visit mothers with young children once a week to provide support to mothers rather than give a concrete

teaching to mother's work with children. Provision of social support is geared to increase parenting behavior, which in turn ought to lead to the reduction of behavior problems in children (Asscher, Hermanns, & Dekovi, 2008).

Research results conducted by Asscher, Hermanns, & Dekovi, (2008) and Dekovi, et. al. (2010) showed that home-start parenting support program was effective in improving the parenting competencies of mothers and decreasing negative behaviors and increasing cooperative and prosocial behavior in children.

Other study on the long-term effectiveness of home-start parenting program showed that home-start enhanced growth in maternal sense of competence; the mothers displayed positive changes regarding how they felt about themselves as parent which in turn there was also a positive impact on maternal behavior: The mothers showed significantly stronger increase in supportive parenting and decrease in the use of inept discipline. (Dekovi, et. al., 2010).

Home-start intervention also found to provide long-term changes in family functioning (maternal competencies and children's behaviors) so that home-start support program promised to be studied and developed. (Hermanns, et. al., 2013; van Aar., et. al., 2015).

Explanation of the results of previous studies show that the purpose of home-start parenting programs is to provide support for family and restore the function of the house as one of natural setting for parents-children interaction. The main focus of the program is the improvement maternal mothers's parenting competencies and measurement is performed to see how the mother's response in supporting their children development. The long-term goal of this intervention is the prevention of children behavior problems in further development period. (Asscher, Hermanns, & Dekovi, 2008; Dekovi, et. al., 2010; & Hermanns, et. al., 2013).

The purpose of home-start parenting program referred in this study was to provide support for young mothers related to the emotional functioning as one of capacities required in parenting to provide good quality care for their young children. The researcher provided support by visit mothers once a week and determined playing activities to be followed by mothers in interacting with their young children. The emotional functioning referred in this study included six organizational levels of experience, those are: (1) regulation and interest in the world, (2) forming relationship (attachment), (3) intentional two-way communication, (4) complex sense of self, (5) emotional ideas, and (6) emotional thinking. (Greenspan, Degangi, & Wieder, 2001).

2 RESEARCH METHOD

This study used a quasi-experiment to examine the effectiveness home-start parenting programs to improve the quality of maternal emotional functioning in early childhood parenting.

The study design used is A/B single subject design. This design was delivered by observing and recording the behavior of the mother during playing interaction in baseline and intervention condition. The home-start parenting program was administered by visiting participants' houses.

The participants were three mothers with low level of emotional functioning which were selected from ten mothers. The participants were young mothers who had 3 or 4 year-old child.

Instruments used to obtain the data in this study was Functional Emotional Assessment Scale (FEAS) which prior adaptation for normal children because FEAS is designed for children with social-emotional problems than normal children. "FEAS is an observation tool to provide information about the child and caregiver's social and emotional capacities using a developmental framework. It also provide information about interactive component that form the basis for attachment, mood regulation, emotional functioning, and social communication." (Greenspan, Degangi, & Wieder, 2001). The inter-rater agreement for adapted items indicated that the items had high intercorrelation and the reliability of the instrument was adequate ($r_{xy}=0.751$).

Conducting home-start program, the researchers provided support to young mothers improve their maternal emotional functioning in raising their young children. During baseline conditions (3 sessions), mothers were directed to interact with children for 15-45 minutes in natural playing setting.

During intervention conditions (3 sessions), mothers were explained about parenting skills and how important maternal emotional functioning and its advantage for child development. Mothers were directed to follow activities determined by researcher in a play setting and interacton. The researchers did not join the activities so that all activities were videotaped by researchers to be assesed using FEAS which were combined with interview to mothers to obtain reliable and more appropriate assessment result of the mothers.

The plays implemented in baseline 1 and intervention 1 were blocks, puzzles, and numbers arrangements; the play implemented in baseline 2 and intervention 2 were paper folding, stringing, and hand puppets; and the play implemented in baseline 3 and intervention 3 was playing toys that children owned at home.

The data was analyzed using visual analysis. "Visual analysis involves interpretation of the level, trend, and variability of performance occurring during baseline and intervention conditions. Level refers to the mean performance during a condition of

the study. Trend references the rate of increase or decrease of the best-fit straight line for the dependent variable within a condition. Variability refers to the degree to which performance fluctuates around a mean or slope during a phase (Horner, et. al., 2005). In this study, the performance of three participants was analyzed as single score of mean and presented in one graph.

3 RESEARCH FINDINGS

Research results present the chart of overall emotional functioning and per level.

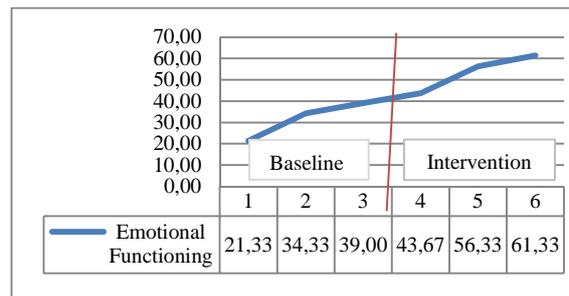


Figure 1. Mean score of maternal emotional functioning of three mothers'.

Figure 1 shows an increase in the mean score of maternal emotional functioning of the baseline conditions to intervention conditions. It is concluded home-start parenting program is effective for improvement of emotional functioning of the three mothers.

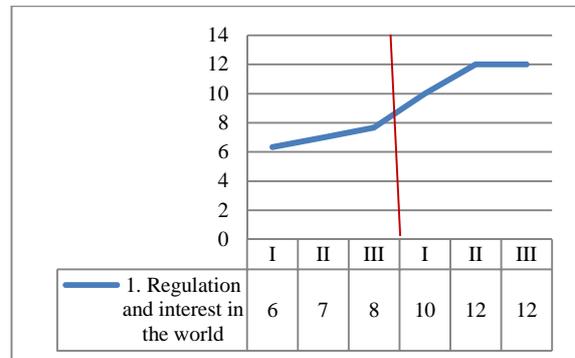


Figure 2. Mean score of first level of organizational level of experience

Figure 2 shows an increase in the mean score of level of regulation and interest in the world, eventhough not too sharp; the three mother had normal category at baseline conditions.

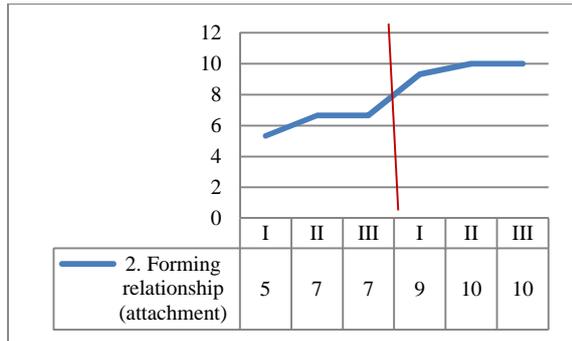


Figure 3. Mean score of second level of organizational levels of experience

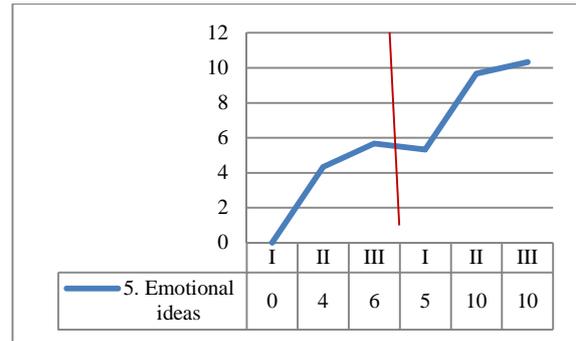


Figure 6. Mean score of fifth level of organizational levels of experience

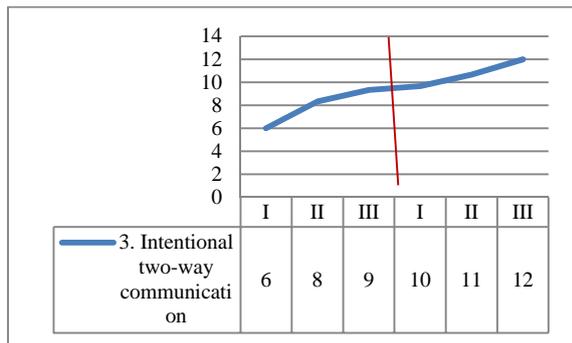


Figure 4. Mean score of third level of organizational levels of experience

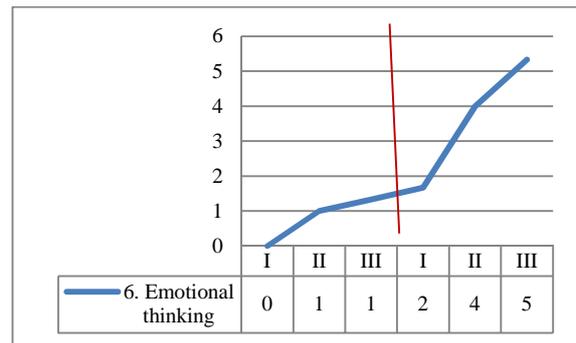


Figure 7. Mean score of sixth level of organizational levels of experience

Figures 3 and 4 show that in the baseline conditions, attachment and intentional two-way communication are below normal and increased to normal in the intervention conditions.

Figure 5, 6 and 7 show a sharp increase in the complex sense of self, emotional ideas, and emotional thinking. In the baseline conditions, the three mothers indicated far below normal of the three levels of experience, whereas in intervention conditions they increased to normal.

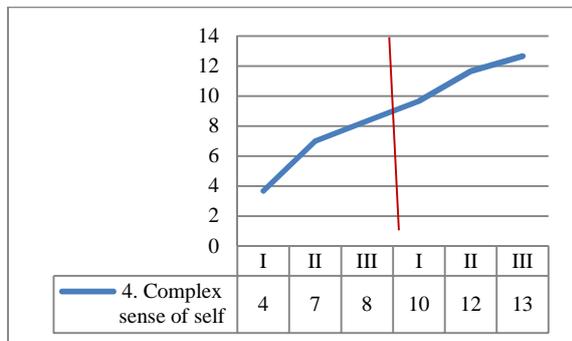


Figure 5. Mean score of fourth level of organizational level of experience

4 DISCUSSION

As already described in the previous section, home-start parenting program is effective to improve maternal emotional functioning.

In the baseline conditions, two of the three mothers' expression were flat, they did not express smile or happy face during playing interaction with their children. They also rarely asked and just followed what children wanted to do. The two-way communication and the use of words were limited, and they lacked of appreciation for the success shown by their children. They ignored children to do what they wanted to do without any instructions or challenge given; when the children got bored, they stopped the play and change the form of the play. Maternal distress reactions to children's negative emotions are predicted to cause emotion regulation difficulties in children, while the mother's minimizing reactions are predicted to cause a weakening of prosocial skills in children such as cooperation, assertion, responsibility, and self-control (Ambrose, 2013).

The mothers were also less sensitive, did not involve in playing interaction, and less stimulated children to develop logical ideas and emotional thinking. Mothers who are not sensitive will respond children cues in unappropriate time and manner, and not build clear contingency between children cues and their responses (Leerkes, Blankson, & O'Brien, 2009).

In the intervention conditions, the three mothers started to express smile and happy during playing with their children. They showed interest in children's play and asked some questions to explore the idea of children. They performed two-way communication, appreciated the success of the children shown by touching, caress, applause, and so forth, tried to encourage children to be interested in completing play, more sensitive and attempted to persuade the children to follow directions given in accordance with the developmental tasks, sought to build new things and give challenges over the children's development, and strived to build or bridge ideas and thoughts with the emotional complexity of mixed story during pretending play. Congruency in motherchild interaction is directly predicted to impact greater assertion skills in children rather than aggression and externalizing behaviours to get their needs met. (Ambrose, 2013).

Mothers who are sensitive will match their responses to cues indicated by the children, level of development of their children, and the demands of ongoing context (Leerkes, Blankson, & O'Brien, 2009).

Mothers who are considered "secure" will encourage the expression of negative emotions of children. Mothers who perceive themselves as having more relative control to children in handling difficult caregiving situations, are less likely to encourage children's expression of negative emotions in anticipating stressful events. This may be because mothers become more confident and skilled to tolerate and deal with negative emotions on their children, and tend to have good self-regulation in facing perceived power imbalance (Lundell, 2008).

5 CONCLUSIONS

Home-smart parenting program is effective in improving maternal emotional functioning and the six level of experience. Mothers showed warm connection to their children, showed interest and involvement in children playing activity, more sensitive and responsive to children's need, and build two-way communication.

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