

Religious Approaches and Practices in Malaysia to Supplement Handling of Sexuality Issues of Adolescents with Autism

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Abstract

Adolescents with autism (AWA) suffer limitations in communication, social interaction and behaviour as well as inability to manage their sexuality in a normal way. A more efficacious approach needs to be introduced to deal with their sexuality problems. Hence, the purpose of this research is to analyse a religious approach in dealing with sexuality of adolescents with autism. This research used interview method as the research instrument. Research data was obtained from interviewing 13 participants comprising of parents of AWA, teachers of AWA, and students of institutes of higher learning in Malaysia. Research analysis used NVivo software to thematically analyse the data obtained. In the religious approach, three methods were used in dealing with the sexuality issue of AWA, namely, performing congregational prayer and reading al-Quran, applying religious education from childhood and attending religious classes. The religious approach can help AWA to cope with their sexuality issue. The originality of this paper comes from the empirical studies to analyse a religious approach to deal with sexuality of AWA. Furthermore, this research is supported by literature review of publications in Arabic, English and Malay and sources from Islamic and conventional scholars.

Keywords: Religious approach; Sexuality; Adolescents with autism (AWA); Behaviour

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النهج الديني في ماليزيا لتكملة التعامل مع القضايا الجنسية للمراهقين المصابين بالتوحد

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ملخص البحث

أهداف البحث: يعاني المراهقون المصابون بالتوحد من قيود في التواصل والتفاعل الاجتماعي والسلوك، بالإضافة إلى عدم القدرة على إدارة حياتهم الجنسية بطريقة طبيعية. يجب إدخال نهج أكثر فعالية لمعالجة مشاكلهم الجنسية؛ لذلك، كان الغرض من هذا البحث هو تحليل المناهج الدينية في معالجة الجنسانية للمراهقين المصابين بالتوحد.

منهج الدراسة: يستخدم هذا البحث أسلوب المقابلة كأداة بحث. تم الحصول على بيانات الدراسة من المقابلات التي أجريت مع ١٣ مشاركاً؛ يتألفون من أولياء الأمور والمعلمين وطلاب مؤسسات التعليم العالي في ماليزيا. استخدم تحليل الدراسة برنامج NVivo لتحليل البيانات التي تم الحصول عليها بشكل موضوعي.

النتائج: في المنهج الديني، هناك ثلاث طرق تستخدم في التعامل مع الحياة الجنسية للمراهقين المصابين بالتوحد، وهي أداء صلاة الجماعة وقراءة القرآن، وتطبيق التربية الدينية منذ الصغر، وحضور فصول الدراسات الدينية. يمكن للنهج الديني أن يساعد المراهقين المصابين بالتوحد في التعامل مع حياتهم الجنسية.

أصالة البحث: تأتي مصداقية هذه الورقة من دراسة تجريبية لتحليل المناهج الدينية في معالجة الجنسانية للمراهقين المصابين بالتوحد. وقد تم دعم هذا البحث من خلال مراجعة الأدبيات التي قدمها علماء ودعاة مسلمون، تضمنت مقالات باللغات العربية والإنجليزية والماليزية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: نهج ديني، الجنس، توحد المراهقين، سلوك

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Introduction

Adolescents with autism (AWA) is considered as having atypical character to some people who seldom or have never before socialized with them. Different behaviour such as having no eye contact when talking with others, being in their own world, throwing tantrums when they do not get what they want and repeating the same words repeatedly are some of the behavioural traits of AWA in comparison to typical children¹. This situation causes society the difficulty to approach AWA in everyday life. Parents, especially those who have no prior experience with AWA, become uncomfortable with every behaviour exhibited².

The sexuality issue gives rise to a negative perception of autism by society³. The society considers them as exhibiting indecent behaviour, which induces fear in others that their parents cannot effectively control them. At the same time, parents also do not have the knowledge or expertise to understand their children with autism, especially regarding sexuality. The sexuality issue of AWA frequently attracts attention, particularly, in finding the best method of helping these adolescents to take control of their lives. Therefore, the purpose of this article is to analyse the sexuality issue of AWA by focusing on the methods of dealing with the issue using a religious approach as practised in Malaysia, a Muslim majority country in South East Asia.

Literature Review

The Department of Social Welfare of Malaysia (*Jabatan Kebajikan Malaysia*) has categorized autism as a learning problem, as it is associated with mental development. Tilton⁴ explained that autism is a disability in mental development. It affects language usage and communication, social interaction and interest, and causes extreme behavioural inclinations and focus⁵. In medical terms, it is known as a neurological disorder involving brain neuronal function⁶. This brain disorder of autism causes difficulty in mastering understanding, emotion and communication, directly or indirectly⁷. It causes imbalance and imperfection in mental development regardless of race, lineage and family social background⁸. This is proven by the fact that autism does not affect only particular groups but happens to anyone of any colour or racial background.

The situation of autism makes it difficult for society to approach AWA in everyday life. This causes AWA to be

1 Norfishah Mat Rabi. *The Secrets and Uniqueness of the Personality of Autistic Children in Malaysia*. (Pulau Pinang: Penerbit Universiti Sains Malaysia, 2015). Pp, 101.

2 Mohd Zuri Ghani & Aznan Che Ahmad. *Introduction to Special Education*. (Pulau Pinang: Penerbit Universiti Sains Malaysia, 2011). Pp, 41.

3 Khalim Zainal. *Understanding Problem Adolescent Behavior from the Perspective of Behavioral Theory, Humanistic, Psychoanalysis & Personality Traits*. *Jurnal Pengajian Umum Bil. 9*. (2008). Cited from <http://www.ukm.my/jmalim>. ISSN 1511-8393. Pp, 43–56.

4 Adelle Jameson Tilton. *A Complete Guide for Parents of Children with Autism*. (Translate.) Zamaliah Mohd Marjan. Kuala Lumpur: Straits Digital Sdn. Bhd. (2014). ISBN: 9789674302597. Pp, 8-25).

5 Caronna, E. B., Milunsky J. M., & H., Tager-Flusberg. Autism Spectrum Disorder: Clinical and Research Frontiers. *Archives of Disease in Childhood* 93(6). Jun; 93(6): (2006). Pp, 518-523. doi: 10.1136/adc.2006.115337.

6 Wendy G Silver & Isabelle Rapin. Neurobiological Basis of Autism. *Pediatric Clinics of North America*. (2012). Feb; 59(1). doi: 10.1016/j.pcl.2011.10.010. Pp, 45-61.

7 Wan Salwinan Wi, S. Tan, Nik Ruzyanei Nj, T. Iryani, S. Syamsul, A. Aniza & S. Zasmani. School Bullying Amongst Standard Six Students Attending Primary National School in the Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur: The Prevalence and Associated Socio Demographic Factors. *Malaysian Journal of Psychiatry*, Vol. 18, No. 1. (2009). Pp, 5-12.

8 Mohd Zuri Ghani, Aznan Che Ahmad & Zainuddin Mohd Isa. *Learning Problem*. (Perak: Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris Press, 2013). Pp, 25.

frequently isolated and face difficulty in forming social relationships¹. At the same time, they need attention, moral support, assistance, affection and guidance in various aspects from people around them. However, society's lack of understanding, which they need and desire, makes their situation more difficult. As a result of limited abilities, those with autism go through quite a difficult adolescence, especially when they have reached puberty age². The age of puberty is one of the most worrying times for parents of AWA as they do not have the skills to manage affairs for their autistic adolescents.

Islamic Shariah has laid down that their legal age of puberty is the same as that of normal adolescents. The indication of puberty for females is their first menstruation. For males, it is their first wet dream (ejaculation). However, AWA are included in the group given some leniency. Scholars have agreed to divide legal accountability or responsibility on AWA after puberty into two rules, based on their ability to control themselves. First, if an AWA has reached puberty and at the same time can control himself as normal people, he/she is legally accountable as a normal *mukalaf*. He/She is obliged to pray, fast and perform all prescribed acts of worship (*ibadah*). The second category, an AWA with chronic or severe autism and unable to control himself/herself, is not considered a *mukalaf* to perform obligatory acts of worship³.

When a person reaches puberty, he/she has entered adolescence, the AWA go through adolescence just as typical adolescents do in terms of physical, mental and biological development. Adolescence is said to be a challenging phase in the developmental process of a person. It is a phase when changes take place, testing levels of limits, especially changes in the process of maturing and developing sexuality. The AWA also go through a challenging adolescence phase, not only involving physical changes but emotional and mental changes as well⁴. These AWA are thus faced with a difficult situation in managing themselves, not to mention managing their emotions and sexuality.

Sexuality is frequently discussed, especially among researchers of AWA. A study by Fyson⁵ found that 50% of adolescents aged 13 years exhibited sexually inappropriate behaviours. This matter was also discussed by other researchers who stated that this sexuality problem often involved students with learning problems including autism, as found in a study by Zuria and Norshidah⁶. In the context of Malaysian society, discussing this matter is always avoided, with parents passing the task fully to teachers⁷. Some of the inappropriate behaviours exhibited by AWA are mentioning and showing obscene symbols, sitting too closely to friends of the opposite sex, observing them and joking about obscenities. They do so not knowing whether their actions are right or wrong.

This situation, if left unchecked early, will give rise to harm. No matter the circumstances, Islam is firm on

1 Jaycee Dawn Pownall, Andrew Jahoda & Richard Patrick Hastings. Sexuality and Education of Adolescents with Intellectual Disability: Mother's Attitudes Experiences and Support Needs. *Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities*. (2012) Apr; 50 (2):140-154. doi: 10.1352/1934-9556-50.2.140.

2 Hasnah Toran. *Autism Parenting Guide*. (Kedah: Ryadh Press, 2017). Pp, 62.

3 Anon. *Al-Mawsu'ah al-Fiqhiyyah*. Wizarat al-Awqaf wa al-Shu'un al-Islamiyyah. Kuwait. (1996). Pp, 162.

4 Fariza Md Sham. *Autistic Adolescents: Religious Teaching Needed or Neglected?* Paperwork Hadhari Discourse 1/2016, UKM. (Malaysia, Bangi, 2016).

5 Fyson, R. Sexually Inappropriate or Abusive Behavior among Pupils in Special Schools. *British Journal of Special Education*. 36(2), (2009). DOI: 10.1111/j.1467-8578.2008.00397.x. Pp, 86-94.

6 Zuria Mahmud & Norshidah Mohamad Salleh. *The Aspirations of Parents, Teachers and Professionals for the Development of Children with Special Needs*. National Seminar on Special Education. (Faculty of Education UKM: Bangi, 2004). Pp, 523-544.

7 Shariza Said, Loh Sau Cheong, Mohd Ridhuan Mohd Jamil, Yusni Mohamad Yusop, Mohd Ibrahim K. Azeez & Ng Poi Ni. Analysis of Problems and Needs of Integration Special Education Teachers (Learning Problems) at the Primary School Level on Sexuality Education. *JPBU* Vol. 7 (2014). ISSN 1394-7176. Pp, 77-85.

closing its doors to harm, corruption and depravity¹. AWA, who behave inappropriately need to be reprovved and corrected by their guardians. They should not be left to do forbidden things and harm others. Hence, educators of AWA need to monitor them to ensure that they do not commit crime and cause harm to others. This matter, if not curbed, will negatively reflect the Islamic religion².

Sexuality issues among AWA occur regardless of age and they are more inclined towards desire for a relationship. This is because sexuality is an expression of gender identity involving a male and a female. It is a personal feeling involving self-understanding concerning emotions and response to sexual desire. This feeling involves personal values and beliefs interacting with the general concepts of sexuality such as love and sexual orientation. Sexuality involves a person's thoughts, feelings, behaviour, relationship, identity and personality³. Sexuality indeed affects every adolescent, both typical and AWA.

A study by Biser⁴ in Macedonia found that the sexuality issue frequently exhibited by AWA is masturbation. Hellemans et. al (2007)⁵ explained in his study that masturbation is the first choice of AWA who exhibited sexual behaviour. Sexuality issue may also begin with the holding of hands, embracing one another, kissing, making out and sexually arousing one another, which can lead to harm and major problems later on⁶. Similar studies by Zuraini and Zuliza (2014)⁷ and Fariza et. al (2017)⁸ found that among the sexual behaviour exhibited were masturbation, indecent exposure (flashing) and inappropriate touching of others.

Additionally, some AWA have a fetish for soiled underwear, girls' clothing and latex gloves. The behaviour exhibited by them shows it is not something typical adolescents would usually do. Typical adolescents would conceal their behaviour in expressing their sexuality compared to AWA. An AWA is unable to hold in his urges and would show and touch his private parts even in public places. When he has reached his sexual desire, the teacher who faces difficulty in controlling his behaviour would take him to the toilet or bathroom to bathe. Ultimately, in order to relieve sexual arousals of AWA, they would be allowed to separate themselves away from a public environment to allow them to masturbate. This is based on the assumption that masturbation is something normal to be encouraged⁹. Most Western researchers suggest masturbation as a method of solving the problem when the sexual arousals of an AWA increasingly cannot be controlled.

1 al-Qaradhwai, Yusof. *Al-Halal wa al-Haram fi al-Islam*. (Kaherah: Dar al-Bashair, 1999). Pp, 77-81.

2 Muhammad Said Mursa. *Fan Tarbiat al-Awlad fi al-Islam*. (Beirut: Maktabat Ibn Kathir, 2000). Pp, 88.

3 Travers, Jason & Tincani, Matt. Sexuality Education for Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders: Critical Issues and Decision Making Guidelines. *Education and Training in Autism and Developmental Disabilities*, vol. 45(2). (2010). Pp, 284-293.

4 Biser, M. Opinions and Attitudes of Parents and Students for Sexual Development, Sexual Behavior and Gender Identity of Persons with Autism in the Republic of Macedonia. *A Journal of Special Education and Rehabilitation* 9(3), (2010). Pp, 7-24.

5 Hans Hellemans, Kathy Colson, Christine Verbraeken, Robert Vermeiren & Dirk Deboutte. Sexual Behaviour in High-Functioning Male Adolescents and Young Adults with Autism Spectrum Disorder. *Journal Autism Spectrum Disorder* (37). (2007) Feb., 37(2): Pp, 260-9. doi: 10.1007/s10803-006-0159-1.

6 Sukinah. Autistic Adolescent Sexual Impulse Distribution Handlers. *Jurnal Penelitian Ilmu Pendidikan*. Vol. 3, No. 2 (2010). Pp, 159-169.

7 Zuraini Yaacob & Zuliza Mohd Kusrin. *The Practice of Sexual Behavior Intervention in Adolescent Autistic Spectrum Disorders (ASD) in Malaysia and Its Requirement According to Sharia*. Proceeding Postgraduate Colloquium. Malaysia, Bangi. (2014). Pp, 11-13.

8 Fariza Md Sham, Manisah Mohd Ali, Zuliza Mohd Kusrin, Siti Norlina Muhamad, Rosmawati Mohd Rasit & Salmihah Che Mud. *Dealing with Autistic Adolescents*. (Kuala Lumpur: Telaga Biru Sdn.Bhd. 2017). Pp, 75.

9 Fariza Md Sham, Salmihah Che Mud, Manisah Mohd Ali, Zuliza Mohd Kusrin, Rosmawati Mohamad Rasit & Siti Norlina Muhamad. Shariah Guidelines for Parents Dealing with the Sexual Behavior of Autistic Adolescents. *Jurnal Hadhari Edisi Khas*, (2017) Pp, 169–182. ejournals.ukm.my/jhadhari ISSN 1985-6830, eISSN 2550-2271.

Masturbation is reported to be more common in male AWA than females¹. However, this does not mean that male AWA are more likely to exhibit sexual tendencies than females. A study by Laura (2020)² explains that understanding regarding sexuality is given less exposure because it is assumed that children with autism do not need it. Ideally, children with autism are more exposed to sexual orientation and gender differences than normal people because it can help them control their emotions and desires.

However, there are views, which show that masturbation is forbidden because it is harmful to health and contradicts Islamic teachings. Most scholars from the Hanafi, Maliki and Shafie Schools of Law forbid masturbation under any circumstances and categorise it as immoral behaviour³. Those who do it are included in the group of not guarding their chastity and honour as stated in al-Quran, Surah al-Mu'minun verses 5-6, translated by Muhammad Muhsin Khan, 1997:

“And those who guard their chastity (i.e. private parts from illegal sexual acts) except from their wives or (the slaves) that their right hands possess, for then, they are free from blame.”

However, the Hanbali School of Law differs from the other schools in its view on masturbation. The Hanbali view is that it is forbidden only if done purely for pleasure. In desperate circumstances such as to avoid fornication or sodomy, it becomes *makruh* (permissible but disliked, abstention will be rewarded). Thus, this rule of permissibility would apply to AWA who have a problem of controlling their sexual arousals during the few moments⁴. The Hanbali view is based on a narration by Ibn Abbas (RA) when he was asked by a young man concerning the rule on masturbation, to which he directly replied: “Marrying a slave-girl is better than fornication (*zina*). However, masturbation is better than fornication” (al-Bayhaki, 13084). This statement clearly shows that the act is permissible if a person is desperate to avoid fornication.

Yusof al-Qaradhawi (2010)⁵ allowed the act of masturbation but conditionally. He quoted from the view of Imam Ahmad who said that the act of masturbation is like the act of cupping which removes the excess in the body. This conditional requirement is also put forward by the Hanbali School, which imposes two conditions, namely fear of committing adultery and not being able to get married. This requirement is justified based on the factors of necessity. It is included in the category of rejecting the big evil, which is adultery, by committing a small evil that is masturbation⁶.

In general, for this issue, it is indeed safer to hold the view that masturbation is forbidden (haram). However, an exception needs to be made in the case of an AWA who has a problem with self-control causing him to scream and even hurt himself if his sexual urges are not relieved. Masturbation is a last resort for those who have a high need of sexuality, whereby if prohibited can cause anger in him that is difficult to control and can cause sexual attack as well as trauma to those around him⁷.

1 Jeroen Dewinter, Robert Vermeiren, Ine Vanwesenbeeck & Chijs Van Nieuwenhuizen. Autism and Normative Sexual Development: A Narrative Review. *Journal of Clinical Nursing* 22(23-24). (2013). Pp, 3467–3483.

2 Laura Dattaro. *Gender and Sexuality in Autism, Explained*. Autism Research News. (2020) Cited from <https://www.spectrumnews.org>. [27 Jun 2021].

3 Yusof al-Qaradhawi. *Halal dan Haram dalam Islam*. In Zulkifli Mohamad al-Bakri (Eds.). (Nilai: Pustaka Cahaya Kasturi, 2010). Pp, 58-62.

4 Anon. *Al-Mawsu'ah al-Fiqhiyyah*. Wizarat al-Awqaf wa al-Shu'un al-Islamiyyah. (Kuwait, 1996). Pp, 186-190.

5 Ibid (4).

6 al-Buti, Muhammad Sa'id Ramadan. *Dawabit alMaslahah fi al-Shari'ah al-Islamiyyah*. (Dimashq: Dar al-Fikr, 2005). Pp, 43.

7 Zuraini Yaakub & Zuliza Mohd Kusrin. The Intervention Practice towards Adolescent Sexual Behaviour of Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) by the Teachers of Special Integration Education Programme (PPKI) According to Syarak. (2015). *Islamiyyat* (2). Pp, 163-172.

Islam has recommended dealing with the sexuality problem by filling time with more beneficial matters¹. Such matters include learning social skills² and at the same time create awareness that doing something forbidden by religion is sinful and will be recompensed. Uncontrollable sexual arousals may be overcome by support from parents, teachers, doctors and psychologists through early intervention. Guidance may be given through the Quranic approach and increasing explanations to make AWA under mild category to understand about sexuality, instinct, control and desire to marry³. At the same time, knowledge about sexuality should also be taught to parents so that they may understand and deal with the sexuality problem of their AWA. Sexual education should be taught in a structured and distinctive way by using concrete strategy in order to help AWA control their emotions and their minds when faced with the situation.

In reference to the need to deal with sexuality problems of AWA, a religious approach is an aspect, which should be considered in order that AWA may reduce their sexual arousals by focusing on religious activities. This issue may not be taken lightly because it involves emotional and social changes. Thus, AWA should be given proper religious instruction as much as possible in efforts to educate them to read and understand al-Quran, perform religious obligations, and so on. Applying religious obligations can reduce their sexual arousals. This is based on a study by Salmihah⁴ who interviewed 9 parents with autistic adolescents attending religious classes for special needs students at *Yayasan Pendidikan al-Quran Bagi Anak Istimewa* (Yayasan Faqeh) in Malaysia. Research results found that religious instruction to AWA was able to help them control their sexual problems and build a Muslim personality in community life. The five religious basic obligations important to AWA are dressing up decently, performing prayers, giving charity, attending religious classes and Quranic therapy. AWA who received religious education and guidance in life would not easily do something in contradiction to social etiquette and values, as well as the Islamic Shariah.

All parents who are respondents from that study stated that as a result of their AWA attending religious class at Yayasan Faqeh, many positive changes followed. Their AWA started to dress up decently, perform obligatory prayers, become helpful and were able to learn and read al-Quran properly. From the Islamic perspective, resolving the sexuality issue needs to be dealt with in the Islamic way by going back to religious guidance so that the best education can be given to them. Human beings with instincts and psychological inclinations may be guided toward goodness because the natural disposition (*fitra*) of creation is always good.

Research Methodology

The design used for this study is a case study. Case studies can only be used with a variety of appropriate methods either through qualitative or quantitative studies⁵. However, for this study, emphasis is placed on qualitative case studies because researchers want to deepen the understanding on the issue of sexuality among children with autism according to the Islamic perspective. The interview process is used as an important

1 Sayyid Qutb. *Tafsir FI Zilalil Quran di Bawah Bayangan al-Quran*. Jld 10. (Terj.) Yusoff Zaky Haji Yacob. (Kota Bharu: Pustaka Aman Press Sdn. Bhd. 2000). p. 11.

2 Isaacs, Jochebed. An Overview on Social Skills for Children with Autism. *International Seminar on Autism 2014*. (2014). 22-23 April.

3 °Abdullah Nasih °Ulwan. *Solving the Social Symptoms of Sex Education from an Islamic Perspective*. (Translate) Abu Muhammad Basyir. (Kuala Lumpur: Al-Hidayah Publishers, 2006). Pp, 24-34.

4 Salmihah Che Mud. *The Need for Religion in Educating the Sexual Behavior of Autistic Adolescents: A Study at the Faqeh Foundation*. Malaysia, UTHM: National Autism Conference. (2016). 1-3 April.

5 Stake, R.E. *Case Studies*. In N.K. Denzin & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds.). *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. (Sage: Thousand Oaks, CA. 2000)Pp, 11.

instrument to obtain information for qualitative research. The interviews conducted ensure that every piece of information obtained is clear and accurate. The interview process can be done directly through a two-way meeting or through tools such as the internet and telephone¹. Semi-structured interviews were used in this study because follow-up questions could be asked when requiring a clearer and in-depth explanation² compared to structured interviews and unstructured interviews, which did not allow the addition or subtraction of questions provided by the researcher.

Some important aspects in the preparation of interview items are determining the type of interview in the study, interview plan, style, content and arrangement of interview questions such as the characteristics of good interview questions, language adjustment in the interview, arrangement of interview questions and duration of interview sessions³. All of the above aspects need to be taken into account when preparing the interview items. The aim is to produce a set of items that can be used optimally to answer the research question to coincide with the desired research results.

These interview questions were carefully discussed and validated by experts before the researcher conducted direct interviews with parents and teachers. The experts involved in the validation of these interview questions comprised of members of the research team who have gone through a series of roundtable discussions and finally these interview questions were agreed upon together in the final roundtable discussions jointly with selected experts. Among the experts involved were university lecturers in the field of special education (autism), university lecturers in the field of Islamic studies, representatives from the Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (*Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia*), representatives of parents with children suffering from autism and teachers at autism schools. Confirmation of the interview questions was conducted in a roundtable conference held at Hotel Puri Pujangga, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) on 15 October 2015.

Among the questions that were prioritized in interviewing participants and that could meet the needs of the objectives of the study were the demographics of respondents, understanding of autism, society's perception of the need for religion in addressing the sexuality of AWA and problems and challenges of educating AWA in this era. What is meant by sexuality among autistic adolescents in this research is any form of impulse and reaction to arousal such as touching the private parts in public, groping and inappropriately touching others. Questions provided before the interview process could ensure that the researcher got the picture/idea of what they wanted to ask in order to answer the objectives of the study as well as possible. This was because, the interviews conducted could provide a clear description of the purpose of the study and the type of information desired by the researchers.

The participants selected for this research were parents, teachers and university students who attended the three days 2016 Malaysian National Conference on Autism at Tun Hussein Onn University of Malaysia (UTHM), Johore from 1st to 3rd April 2016. Interviews were conducted with five parents (Parent 1, Parent 2, Parent 3, Parent 4 and Parent 5), four teachers (Teacher 1, Teacher 2, Teacher 3 and Teacher 4) and four students (Student 1, Student 2, Student 3 and Student 4). The total number of respondents was 13. Respondents among these parents were those who have children with autism and teachers who were teaching in special education schools, especially autism. In contrast to students who were randomly selected, there were students studying at Tun

1 Mok Soon Sang. *Literature and Research Methods*. (Puchong: Multimedia Publisher, 2009). Pp, 54-58.

2 Gay, L.R. & Airasian, P. *Educational Research: Competencies for Analysis and Application*. 6th Edition. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2000). Pp, 34-35.

3 Chua Yan Piaw. *Research Methods and Statistics*. (Kuala Lumpur: McGraw Hill, 2012). Pp, 21.

Hussein Onn University of Malaysia (UTHM) attending this conference.

The data obtained from the respondents was collected and analysed in stages according to the objectives that had been set using descriptive methods. The data obtained were analysed through a descriptive approach with thematic techniques using NVIVO12 software. Its use aimed to simplify and speed up the process of managing, analysing and interpreting qualitative data. NVIVO12 software was very helpful in ensuring that every piece of information obtained could be analysed properly. Data analysis was done on all types of data obtained. All the data obtained should be screened in detail before producing the clean data desired by the researcher.

According to Ghazali and Sufean (2018)¹, processes obtained either through interviews, observations or documents need to be analysed top-down. Hence, it started from looking at organizing, filtering, selecting, classifying and coding themes that coincided in accordance with the objectives of the study that had been outlined by the researchers. Then, data analysis was conducted by first classifying the data into selected themes. Data validation and theme categorization were performed together with the research team members upon completion of all transcribed and recorded interview data.

Analysis and Discussion of Research Results

Religious Approach in Dealing with Sexuality of Autistic Adolescents

Adolescence (*murahiq*) is a critical stage in the human lifespan development². Usually, ages 14 to 18 years is the middle phase of transition between childhood and early adulthood. *Al-Murahiq* in Islam is the time when adolescents are getting to know the external world, rife with trials and tribulations (*fitna*). Adolescents are full of curiosity and wish to experiment something new. Sometimes new things are good and at other times harmful.

Based on this, Islam recommends that parents and educators approach teenagers with a preaching method appropriate to their age. They will distance themselves if they are treated harshly, but if they are pampered, it will destroy their future³. During this phase, adolescents' emotions are not quite stable yet, and this can easily lead them towards purely satisfying their whims and fancies. It is a period of wanting to experiment various new things in daily life. The nature of the nuclear family is unable to give more attention to adolescents and monitoring them, thus they will without restraint entertain their wishes and inclinations of their burning adolescent psyche⁴.

In this phase, adolescents are easily influenced, especially in the matter of male-female relationship, which can lead to sexuality issues⁵. Sexuality issues will happen at all levels of society, both typical and disabled adolescents, including those with autism. Thus, AWA are not excluded from being involved in sexuality issues. However, sexuality among AWA is not something that leads to sexual relationships. Therefore, sexuality of AWA needs to be dealt with wisely, as they lack understanding about it. Using a religious approach, they can be taught to understand sexuality within the context of self-management, keeping good manners and observing a

1 Ghazali Darusalam & Sufean Hussin. *Research Methodology in Education*. (Kuala Lumpur: UM Press, 2018). Pp, 468-477.

2 °Abdullah Nasih °Ulwan. *Children's Education According to the Islamic View*. Jil. 2. (Kuala Lumpur: Department of Islamic Development Malaysia, 2000). Pp, 11-20.

3 Muhammad al-Said Muhammad al-Za'balawi. *Tarbiyyat al-Murahiq Bayn al-Islam wa 'Ilm al-Nafs*. (Beyrut Maktabat al-Tawbah, 2019). Pp, 25.

4 Fauwaz Hasbullah. *Adolescent Sexuality: Family Issues and Challenges in Malaysia. Paperwork. National Seminar on Sexuality Issues*. (Malaysia, UniSZA, Terengganu, 2016). Pp, 21.

5 Koenig, H.G. Maintaining Health and Well-Being by Putting Faith into Action during the COVID-19 Pandemic. *Journal of Religion and Health*, Vol.59. Pp, 2205-2214. (2020). Pp, 1-10). doi: [10.1007/s10943-020-01035-2](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-020-01035-2).

code of decent behaviour.

Even though it is said that masturbation is one way to deal with sexuality¹, it is not the best solution because sexuality issues may be overcome by early holistic intervention or treatment. It can be done through immediate reproof, distracting them with something they are interested in or getting advisory and counselling services. This is because masturbation is forbidden for health reasons. Masturbation, popularized by the West, is seen as an easy option to relieve the stress of sexual arousal, whereas it clearly goes against religious teachings, social norms and cultural values².

Islam has laid down guidance that in addressing every problem, one must go back to the basics of true religious values. Thus, in this issue, early education of children is the backbone in ensuring that they do not get involved in sexual problems. AWA are not exempted from this guideline, as the religious approach is needed for them to cope with their sexuality issues. Based on the interviews conducted in this research, there are three religious methods applicable in the sexuality issues of AWA, namely, (a) congregational prayer and reading al-Quran, (b) emphasis on religious education from childhood and (c) providing formal religious education at centres of religious studies.

Obligatory Prayer and Reading al-Quran

Religious approach is a form of circumstance applied in helping autistic adolescents handle their sexuality. In this circumstance, parents and offspring together perform obligatory prayers and read al-Quran. This is based on interview results in Table 1 as follows:

Table Congregational Prayer and Reading al-Quran.

Participants	Feedback
Parents (1)	Parents and other family members together help the autistic adolescent. After praying together at home, a proper session is conducted to learn al-Quran and memorize it before dispersing to their respective rooms. Session should be short as AWA get bored quickly.
Parents (4)	Let the AWA listen to recitation of al-Quran, recite <i>zikr</i> (Remembrance of Allah) and <i>salawat</i> (Invocations for Allah’s Blessings upon the Prophet PBUH); always maintain good morals (parents and siblings); involve siblings to educate the autistic adolescent; always praise and give support; gently reprove, speak of good things and consequences of bad things.
Teacher (4)	Always let recitation of al-Quran be heard; parents need to invite all offspring to perform acts of <i>ibadah</i> together.

In terms of resolving the issue of sexuality, the Islamic approach is different from the Western approach. It stresses on spiritual activities compared to physical, not to mention giving the best solutions to help AWA cope up with their sexuality problem. For example, praying **1**: together and learning about al-Quran help to prevent a person from committing heinous and evil acts, and establish a direct relationship with Allah.

Even if it is said that AWA are not accountable to perform religious obligations, it is still the responsibility of parents, teachers and society to give them the best education so that they can differentiate right from wrong behaviour³. They also need to be instructed and guided on religious principles and values, specifically prayer

1 Peterson, C. R. *Sexual Behavior and Young Adults with Autisme and Developmental Disabilities*. Dept. of School Psychology, University of Wisconsin-Stout. (2010). p, 7.
 2 Shafali Spurling Jeste. The Neurology of Autism Spectrum Disorders. *Current Opinion in Neurology*. 24(2). (2011). doi: [10.1097/WCO.0b013e3283446450](https://doi.org/10.1097/WCO.0b013e3283446450). Pp, 132-139.
 3 Salmihah Che Mud, Fariza Md Sham, Manisah Mohd Ali & Zuliza Mohd Kusrin. The Importance of Quranic Teaching for the Psychological Development of Autistic Children. *International Journal for Studies on Children, Women, Elderly and Disabled*, vol. 4. (2018). Pp, 24-31.

(*Salah*) performance. Muslims believe that performing prayer helps to calm the soul and prevents one from wrongdoing. Past research has proven that individuals who strongly practice religious principles are able to deal with negative emotions such as stress, anxiety and depression and are less at risk of involvement in social ills such as free sex, drinking alcohol and smoking¹.

In addition, those who are diligent in keeping up with their prayers can feel peace of mind due to the decrease of blood pressure, heart rate and respiratory rate. Each prayer movement, which begins with standing upright until the end of the prayer accompanied by specific recitations can play a role by supplying energy (blood) to the brain to carry out its function to the whole body². In addition, prayer performance can also induce the best body composition to those who devoutly keep up with their prayers. This is why the emphasis on prayer should be passed on to parents so that they can teach it to their children with autism.

Therefore, teaching religious matters such as prayers to autistic children and adolescents is a collective obligation (*fardu kifayah*) of society in order to avail to those with autism the same right of practising religious practises as others³. Islam emphasizes equitable rights without discrimination and barriers to socializing and practising Islam between normal and disabled people⁴. As Allah explained in al-Quran, surah al-Hujurat, verse 13, translated by Muhammad Muhsin Khan, 1997:

“O Mankind! We have created you from a man and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know one another. Verily, the most honourable of you with Allah is that (believer) who has at-Taqwa. Allah is All-Knowing, All-Aware.”

This verse explains the creation of man and woman of various races and lineages but Allah values only piety and devoutness to Him. This shows that all levels of society have equal rights opportunity, especially the right to comply with Allah’s commands. Therefore, AWA may not be marginalised from receiving religious instructions and applying them in daily life. Although the first priority is given to performing congregational prayers, reading al-Quran is also an important medium to help AWA cope with their sexuality issues⁵.

It was emphasised by Participant (1), Participant (4) and Participant (9) that reading al-Quran needs to be taught to AWA. Reading al-Quran not only calms the adolescent psyche from focusing on just sexuality but also can help with issues of mental health as well as improving speech, learning and interpersonal relationships⁶. Al-Quran acts as a sound therapy to form a positive influence on helping autistic adolescents to stabilize their

1 Pirutinsky, S., Cherniak, D., & Rosmarin, H. COVID 19: Mental Health and Religious Coping among American Orthodox Jews. *Journal of Religion and Health*, Vol. 59. (2020). Pp, 2288-2301.

2 Nor Azah Abdul Aziz. Dealing with Pornographic Websites: Between Filtering Software, Law Enforcement and Spiritual Practices. *Journal of Islamic and Arabic Education* 3(1). (2010). Pp, 29-46.

3 Zulkifli Mohamad al-Bakri. *The Rights of the Disabled in Obtaining Religious Education*. Paperwork. al-Quran Seminar for Special Children. (Malaysia, Bangi, 26 Mac 2016).

4 Khairulnazrin Nasir, Muhammad Arif Yahya & Abdul Rahim Kamarul Zaman. Contributions of Hadith Scholars from People with Disabilities (OKU): An Analysis. *Jurnal Islamiyyat* 41(2). (2019). <https://doi.org/10.17576/islamiyyat-2019-4001-12>. Pp, 107-115.

5 Siti Patonah Mohamad, Mohd Yusof Zulkifli Mohd Yusoff & Durriyyah Sharifah Hasan Adli. Sound Therapy through Quran Recitation for Emotional Problems and Speech Motor Skills of Autistic Children. *QURANIKA, International Journal of Quranic Research*. Vol. 5, Issue 2 (Dec 2013). Pp, 53-72.

6 Mohd Amzari Tumiran, Siti Patonah Mohamad, Rohaida Mohd Saat, Mohd Yusoff Yaacob Mohd Yusoff, Noor Naemah Abdul Rahman & Durriyyah Sharifah Hasan Adli. Addressing Sleep Disorder of Autistic Children with Qur’anic Sound Therapy. *Health*, vol. 5, No. 8A2. (2013). doi: [10.4236/health.2013.58A2011](https://doi.org/10.4236/health.2013.58A2011). Pp, 73-79.

emotions and increase their speaking skills¹.

Using Quranic verses has been proven as one of the methods of Islamic psychotherapy. It has been found to build a balanced personality between physiology, rationale, emotion and spirituality. Reading Quranic verses calms the psyche experiencing uncontrolled sexual arousals besides aiding emotional and psychological development². The responsibility to teach the reading of al-Quran should certainly not be shouldered by teachers only. Parents play an important role to ensure AWA get the best opportunity to be able to read and understand al-Quran just as typical adolescents can. Findings of the interview with parents showed that parents play their role by providing Quranic education and praying together with AWA to help them fulfil religious obligations according to their level of ability.

Application of Religious Education from Childhood

Besides praying together and reading al-Quran, getting Islamic education is one of the other components of essential medium in dealing with the sexuality issues of autistic adolescents. Islamic education includes teaching obligations of fasting, dressing up decently, observing limits of socializing, guarding chastity, maintaining decency and modesty, and keeping good manners in behaviour. As the Hadith of the Prophet states (translation of Bukhari, 1385):

“There is none born but is created to his true nature (Islam). It is his parents who make him a Jew or a Christian or a Magian quite as beasts produce their young with their limbs perfect. Do you see anything deficient in them? Then he quoted the Qur’an. The nature made by Allah in which He has created men there is no altering of Allah’s creation; that is the right religion.”

Children’s education begins at an early age with the institution of family informally by emphasizing the education of faith, worship and morals in the daily life. These matters are taught from a very young age so that they are internalised in the mind and psyche as habitual practice. Thus, it is necessary to teach AWA from childhood because they are structured people. Based on results of interview with the participants, implementation of religious education needs to begin from childhood such as in the following Table 2:

Table 2: Religious Education since Childhood.

Participants	Feedback
Parent (5)	Parents need to teach religious principles and moral values to AWA so that they are guided and do not get trapped in immoral activity; for example, teaching about decent dressing that covers properly to avoid temptation (<i>fitna</i>).
Teacher (1)	Parents need to be sensitive and provide the best religious education at home to children together with early intervention programs
Teacher (3)	Always tell a social story to adolescents; parents need to show good examples to them such as prayer, fasting and so on.
Student (4)	Suggested improvement to religious obligation approach, through parents giving more attention to AWA and religious education from childhood.

Interview findings from Parent (5), Teacher (1), Teacher (3) and Student (4) show that religious education begins at home. This is because socialization of children usually comes from involvement of parents who

1 Siti Patonah Mohamad, Mohd Yusof Zulkifli Mohd Yusoff & Durriyyah Sharifah Hasan Adli. Sound Therapy through Quran Recitation for Emotional Problems and Speech Motor Skills of Autistic Children. *QURANIKA, International Journal of Quranic Research*. Vol. 5, Issue 2. (Dec 2013). Pp, 53-72.

2 Ibid (5).

always spend time with their children¹. Imam al-Ghazali explained that the education process begins in the earliest stage. He outlined them in 5 stages, namely, the fetal stage, childhood, *tamyiz* (age of discernment), *al-aqil* (the Knower) and *al-auliya* (the Custodian)². The fetal stage does not focus on the child but places priority on the parents' role such as parents need to always devote themselves to acts of worship (*ibadah*) and supplicate to God as well as seek lawful (*halal*) sustenance for their child.

The Prophet divided the child's education into four levels: (a) first stage is 1 to 7 years, (b) second stage is 7 to 14 years, (c) third stage is 14 to 21 years and (d) fourth stage is 21 years and above. The first stage is for the parents to give their full love to the child and the second stage is for the parents to discipline the children by inviting them to fulfil their duties together such as prayer, fasting, doing good and others. Meanwhile, for the third stage, parents need to treat their children as friends and give them confidence in doing something good. The age of 21 years and above is the time for children to be exposed to the realities of real life and parents need to ensure and encourage so that children can follow it as best as possible¹. These are the stages that can be a benchmark for parents in providing the best education for their children.

Since a good child is shaped by the parents themselves. A child will easily follow the behaviour of their parents². Hence, early education at home is the pivotal point for children, especially those with autism to prepare them for a challenging life in the future. It is also to ensure that they are educated so as to develop good personality traits, become firmly faithful in religion so that they can manage their lives as best as possible.

Findings of interview with Teacher (1) and Student (4) clearly coincide with the view that religious education begins at home. It encompasses involvement of parents of AWA in performing religious obligations together to avoid them from sitting isolated or being in their own world. It also builds communication and good interaction skills as well as makes them feel accepted and appreciated by family and society around them. Norakhyairee (2015)³ explained that AWA require more attention not only from their parents but from society around them as well. Parents play a crucial role in shaping the personality of their offspring. Early education by parents beginning at home ensures the future success of their children and prevents them from falling into social ills, which can ruin them, such as uncontrollable sexual arousals or urges.

The findings of this study show the importance of parents providing education on prayer at an early age. In fact, parents also need to accustom their children to perform congregational prayers in the mosque, so that it can become a habit in their lives⁶. For children with autism, initially teaching them to pray needs to be done together with parents, so that they can feel at ease and learn more clearly from the parents. This is because, children with autism are structured and always need constant guidance from parents.

1 Azizi Yahaya, Jaafar Sidek Latif, Shahrin Hashim & Yusof Boon. *The Natural Social Psychology of Adolescence*. (Pahang: PTS Publications and Distributors Sdn. Bhd., 2005). Pp, 23-25.

2 al-Ghazali. *Summary of Ihya' Ulum al-Din*. (Translate.) Zaid Hussien al-Hamid. (Selangor: Darul Nu'man Sdn.Bhd., 2009). p. 101.

1 Muhamad Zahiri Awang Mat, Zariah Zakaria Zabariah Ahmad & Siti Salwa Md Sawari. Methods to Raise the Awareness of Covering the Aurah among Primary School Pupils. *Malaysia Journal for Islamic Studies*. (2017). eISSN 2550-2042. Pp, 1-8.

2 Nurfadilah Abdul Basit, Nurul Akhma Yahya, Harun Baharudin & Maimun Aqsha Lubis. *Early Childhood Education According to Islamic Perspective*. Proceedings of the 7th International Workshop and Conference of Asean Studies on Islamic and Arabic Education and Civilization (POLTAN-UKM POLIMED). (Bangi, 3 Jun 2015). Cited from <https://www.researchgate.net/publication>.

3 Norakhyairee Mohd Raus. *Introduction and History of the Malaysian Autism Society*. Roundtable Discussion. (23 Mac 2015).

6 Abdullah Nasih Ulwan. *Tarbiyatul Aulad Fil Islam*. In Mohd Ikhwan Abdullah (Eds.). (Selangor: Publishing House Sendirian Berhad, 2015). Pp, 235.

Further, Parent (5) explained that early home education needs to be about teaching to wear decent clothes that cover properly as required by the Islamic code of dressing. This is because some of the AWA find it difficult to understand and accept instructions, so they need matters to be put into proper practice for them to follow. AWA need to be guided to ensure they dress up decently and to feel ashamed if their body parts, which should be covered up is exposed in public. For every Muslim who has reached puberty, covering up with decent dressing is a religious demand to comply with unreservedly/undoubtedly¹. It is not to be treated as a seasonal fashion that can be varied according to time and place. It is a serious obligation to be earnestly fulfilled. As Allah says in Surah al-Nur, 31.

This verse explains about the obligation to cover the *aurah* (body parts that should not be exposed) and Islam has outlined guidelines to be followed. For men the *aurah* is from the navel down to the knee. Meanwhile, for women it covers the whole body except the face and both palms. The awareness of covering the *aurah* must be inculcated from an early age in order to be integrated into the true Islamic fold. Parents need to guide theoretically and practice it themselves so that AWA may understand it well and be prevented from exhibiting their private parts in public or trying to touch body of others inappropriately.

In addition, parents need to help AWA to use various ways and strategies to control their tantrums. One of the ways is using social story technique². This is also a finding from the interview with Teacher (3). This technique was developed by Carol Gray as a treatment method in the year 1991 in order to increase the interactive ability of AWA³.

The social story technique is suitable to be applied to AWA because its narrative relates to their awareness in viewing something from the perspective of others (theory of mind). It also acts as a social indicator (tunnel vision, stimulus over selectivity and social interaction deficits)⁴. This technique also acts as cognitive therapy to change negative effect to a more positive effect in them, that is, to help them think, imagine and respond properly⁵. In the context of religious education, social story may be practised to change their focus and imagination about sexuality to influence their behaviour through telling stories of prophets, reading and studying al-Quran, reciting easy and short *zikr*, playing sports, gardening and other beneficial activities so that they do not think about or entertain their sexual arousals.

Religious Classes for AWA

Although interview findings show that religious education needs to begin at home, it is also important to provide religious classes for AWA. The reason is that they also need to be involved with friends in building cognitive emotion, communication, social interaction and form good behaviour. Thus, religious classes need to be provided for them in order to help them handle sexual arousals.

1 Jaafar Salleh. *The Limits of Aurat in Islamic Perspective*. (Johor: Pustaka Azhar, 2006). Pp, 8-12.

2 Noriah Sha'arani & Mohd Mokhtar Tahar. Tantrum Behaviour Modification for Autistic Student at Secondary School Using Social Stories Technique. *Journal of ICSAR* 1(2): (July 2017). DOI: [10.17977/um005v1i22017p140](https://doi.org/10.17977/um005v1i22017p140). Pp, 140-144.

3 Edelson, M.G. *Social stories*. Cited from <http://www.autisme.com/families/therapy/stories.htm>. (2008). p, 1. [24.02.2021].

4 Heffner, G. J. *Social Stories: An Introduction*. Cited from <http://www.bbbautism.com>. (2002). p, 1. [24.02.2021].

5 Maria R. Urbano, Kathrin Hartmann, Stephen I. Deutsch, Gina M. Bondi Polychronopoulos & Vanessa Dorbin. *Relationships, Sexuality and Intimacy in Autism Spectrum Disorders*. Edited by Michael Fitzgerald. Recent Advances in Autism Spectrum Disorders. Vol. 1. (United Kingdom: Headquarters, 2013). p. 2. DOI: [10.5772/53954](https://doi.org/10.5772/53954).

Table 3: Religious Classes for Autistic Adolescents.

Participants	Feedback
Parent (2)	Establish a religious (secondary) school for AWA to attend religious approach education in the afternoons. In this way, their afternoons after formal school would remain occupied instead of allowing them to sit at home without gaining any knowledge.
Parent (3)	Religious classes should be conducted in small groups for autism students.
Teacher (2)	Increase the number of Quran education centres for such adolescents.
Student (1)	Religious education in formal schools should be taught intensively.
Student (2)	Religious education for AWA should also be taught in formal schools, so that they will have friends to communicate and interact with.
Student 3	Learning religion at school level should be more or re-emphasized.

Table 3 shows that Parents (2) and (3), Teacher (2), Students (1), (2) and (3) have almost similar views-that religious education should be taught in special schools or centres of religious study for students with autism. This shows that Quranic education and religious practice need to be instilled in every child or adolescent even if physically or mentally disabled. This is to ensure that AWA get to learn and practise religious obligations like typical adolescents.

Thus, besides education at home initiated by parents, religious education should be taught in school itself by providing a religious class for AWA. The views of these participants have dismissed allegations that parents are afraid to send their children to get education outside the home for fear of provoking negative feeling¹. This can help in building good communication and interaction with teachers and friends. It is important to help AWA build a good network besides interpersonal communication needed in their lives. They need suitable techniques and methods for their level of ability in learning religion.

Learning methods are important, similarly so for AWA. The use of the latest teaching aids (*Bahan Bantu Mengajar - BBM*) can help convey information in an easy-to-understand form. AWA are visual learners and enjoy each presentation presented in an interesting way such as videos, pictures, colours and learning activities while playing². In fact, learning methods that are in line with current technological developments can improve students' cognitive skills and help provide easy comprehension for them.

Parents need to give AWA the opportunity to make friends to help them adapt themselves in socializing. If the AWA is active, they need to find him/her a similarly active or a more active companion so that they will be closer³. Peers play an important role in forming a person's personality. Hence, AWA always need to be exposed and brought to open places so that they can communicate and interact with others around them. In addition, an education system that emphasizes on religious studies may attract parents' interest to send AWA to attend religious classes. Thus, religious studies classes are able to provide educational needs to AWA in an organized manner besides being able to help build communication, interaction and train self-skills so that these AWA can be independent⁴.

In Malaysia, religious education has gained attention and significance as reflected in it being enshrined in

1 Samadi, Sayyed Ali & Roy McConkey. The Utility of the Gilliam Autism Rating Scale for Identifying Iranian Children with Autism. (2013). *Disability & Rehabilitation* 0, 1 -5.

2 Sulaiman Saat. A Guide to be an Excellent Parent. (Selangor: PTS Millenia Sdn. Bhd. 2006) Pp, 53.

3 Wan Nasyrudin Wan Abdullah & Hisham Ahmad. *I'm Grateful for My Autistic Child: A Guide to Educating Him in a Way That Pleases Allah SWT*. (Kuala Lumpur: Telaga Biru Sdn. Bhd., 2013). Pp, 13-20.

4 Nurulfatiha Muah. Don't Deny the Right of Children with Autism to Learn the Knowledge of God. Sinar Harian. (2019). Cited from <https://www.sinarharian.com.my/> [27 Jun 2021].

the National Philosophy¹. This emphasis is because of reference to dimensions of the new millennium that display negative elements leading to issues in education, not merely for typical adolescents but AWA as well. In the past, there were noticeably no religious classes provided for the disabled, including those with autism. However, awareness began to rise among parents who wish to fulfil their responsibility in providing religious education². Parents hope that their autistic offspring can at least perform the obligations of prayer, fasting in Ramadan and read al-Quran properly besides studying academic subjects and learning self-management. Thus, more religious classes are required for AWA. The classes need not be full with students, as children with autism require space and a comfortable environment.

Having dedicated teachers is a requirement in providing religious classes. If a teacher has no interest, affection and care for teaching AWA, then the process of imparting knowledge will not succeed or be effective³.

Conclusion

Even if AWA are mentally disabled, limited emotionally and poor in social interaction skills, they should still learn aspects of religious teachings and good manners. Parents play a role in educating their AWA, so do teachers and the society around them. There is need to be more focussed on living in compliance with religious obligations by the AWA so that they do not only prepare for a better direction in life but, at the same time learn to handle their sexuality. The sexuality issue can happen to anyone because of the natural disposition of humans as creation. However, it is especially difficult for AWA to cope with it because they have no emotional control and no understanding of the phenomenon happening.

From the Western point of view, the sexuality of AWA needs to be resolved by means of masturbation. Islam, on the other hand, has a different view on the issue of the sexuality of AWA; there are views that allow it and views that do not. Even so, the view allowing it is only conditional and the view, which prohibits it is based on adherence of the view that the act of masturbation is illegal. Islam sees that the issue of sexuality among AWA can be controlled by emphasizing a religious approach that covers various aspects of things. Among them is by emphasizing Quranic education and congregational prayer together, starting education at an early age and providing religious classes so that AWA have the same opportunities and rights as other children. This approach is one of the ways parents can help control sexuality related behaviour among AWA.

The approach in addressing the sexuality of AWA according to the Islamic way has received good attention in Malaysia. This is one of the reasons there are many al-Quran study centres for special children in the country such as the Yayasan Faqeh, Permata Kurnia and others. These centres were established to help children with disabilities, especially autism, in learning about the Quran, prayer, fasting, self-skills and more. Even so, the best education starts at home with parents being the main source of helping AWA. The best love and support from parents can add value and in turn develop AWA who put Islam as the real moulding force in their lives.

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1 Suzalie Mohamad. *Understanding Islamic Education Issues in Malaysia*. (Kuala Lumpur: Institut Kemahiran Islam Malaysia, 2003). p. 53.

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